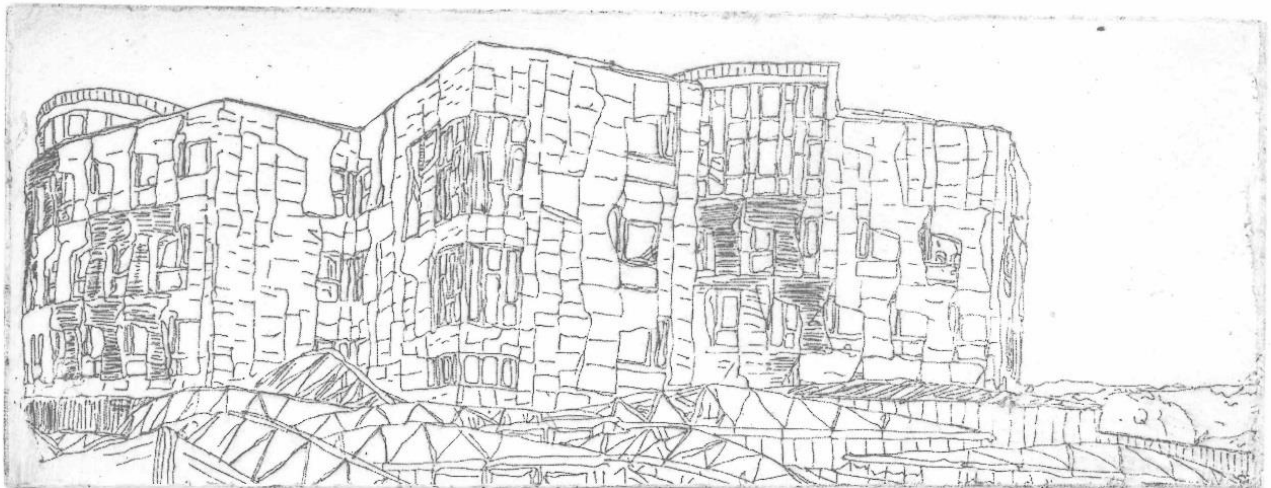


The Scottish Parliament Internship Placement Pilot for Disabled Graduates

2014 – 2015



11/16

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Our voices ■ Our choices

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- Tricia Marwick, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament
- Scottish Parliament Corporate Body.

We are also grateful to all of the host MSPs and their staff members for hosting the interns and working with Inclusion Scotland to ensure the success of each placement.

Finally we are thankful to the interns themselves.

Executive Summary

We are pleased to report that the pilot project was successful in achieving all four of its main objectives:

1. All seven of the pilot interns recorded a significant increase in their understanding of parliamentary and political processes and their understanding of the role of an MSP. Some contributed to material used in debates or to motions. Following the conclusion of the placements the pilot interns have all agreed to remain in contact with us and where possible participate in dissemination events to make more disabled people aware of the opportunities to influence the political process.
2. All pilot interns recorded an increased confidence in employability, and increased confidence with a wide range of useful work skills. All seven had recorded experiencing difficulty in securing graduate level employment prior to their participation, and all seven have confirmed positive onward employment journeys following the project. Two continued in politics, four moved onto further work in their areas of interest and one moved returned to further studies. These outcomes show that creating such internships is a valuable exercise in helping disabled people access graduate level employment and continue to build their careers.

3. The MSPs and staff involved in hosting the internships have generally recorded very positive results in terms of their increased understanding and confidence around disability issues and making reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. All have said that they feel more confident and better informed about employing disabled people in future, and have increased their understanding of the barriers facing disabled people. This has the potential to influence the accessibility of politics more widely and increased awareness of disability may reflect in policy decisions.

4. Based on feedback from this pilot we have developed a series of recommendations for the delivery of similar programs in future. Many of the learning points gained during the pilot are more widely applicable and have already been successfully applied to another internship project that Inclusion Scotland is a partner in with SCVO and the Scottish Disability Equality Forum. We believe that the successes outlined in the above points amply demonstrate the value of a longer-term programme of parliamentary internships for disabled graduates, and the scope for roll-out of the model in other areas of public services such as local authorities. Some of the learning around support provision has also been incorporated by the Scottish Parliament Equalities Manager into an upcoming apprenticeship program.

This project has also had a longer term legacy for involving disabled people in the disability community. Inclusion Scotland encouraged interns to write blogs and articles and some have gone on to deliver talks about their experiences. Interns have spread information and insights to a variety of stakeholders including other disabled people, politicians and employers. One intern went on to become a board member of Inclusion Scotland. These outcomes are reflective of our belief that disabled people themselves are key to shaping the changes that society needs to become more inclusive.

1. Introduction

The Scottish Parliamentary Internship Pilot for Disabled People was set up by Inclusion Scotland to address the linked issues of the underrepresentation of disabled people in politics, the extensive barriers to employment faced by many disabled people, and the need to develop leadership and role models within the disabled community.

This end of project report is intended for disabled people interested in hearing about the outcomes of the project, politicians and civil servants who are keen on widening access to politics for disabled people and potential funders and partners of future work to take forward the model we developed during this pilot project.

The aim was to provide a group of enthusiastic and capable disabled people with the chance to gain valuable work experience in a political setting, while simultaneously providing MSPs, their staff and the Parliament as a whole a chance to learn more about making reasonable adjustments and ensuring equal access, and the benefits of doing so. The project also allowed them to add capacity to their team while offering this opportunity.

1.1 Project intended outcomes:

The initial project proposal gave the following four key outcomes:

Project Outcome 1: Interns increase and disseminate their understanding of parliamentary and political processes, enhancing the scope to redress the under-representation of disabled people working in the political environment

Project Outcome 2: Interns develop a range of transferable skills and knowledge that increase their employability more widely

Project Outcome 3: Politicians increase their understanding of disabled people's needs and aspirations, the barriers they face and action to remove them, and are better equipped to ensure these are reflected in policy and practice.

Project Outcome 4: Learning derived through the pilot enables the co-production and promotion of an internship model, demonstrates the value of a longer-term programme of parliamentary internships for disabled graduates and potential for wider rollout of the model.



1.2 Recommendations for future work

Our pilot clearly identified potential areas for future work in tackling barriers to the participation of disabled people within politics and the party political environment. Further investigation is required to

- identify the range of barriers that exist
- capture any good practice currently being carried out by political parties or political groups
- learn from the experience of existing disabled politicians or activists and to develop a series of recommendations for improved practice
- develop support systems and programs that would encourage participation by disabled people.

Our forthcoming Access to Elected Office Project, commissioned by Scottish Government, will address this work through carrying out a research project. This work will be informed by five further internships within each of the five main political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament. These interns will meet with disabled party members to gain feedback on the experience each party offers disabled people. This will include members, candidates and people who hold elected office.

As part of this work we will investigate the case for extending the Access to Elected Office Fund (a UK government scheme that provided financial support to address additional costs faced by disabled candidates for selection and election) to cover Scottish elections, or the creation of a similar program using an improved methodology to better address the support requirements that will lead to greater participation by disabled people in politics.

2. Introduction to pilot project

For a number of years Inclusion Scotland had within its business plan the ambition to engage with parliament to involve disabled people within its work, through paid internships, as a means of encouraging more disabled people to seek elected office and work within the political arena. In 2013, the Independent Living in Scotland (ILIS) project which is hosted by Inclusion Scotland held a “Pop-up Think Tank” on the subject of disabled people in politics. The idea of paid internships in Parliament for disabled people was raised there once again, and received widespread support – including from James Dornan MSP who was attending the event. This led to Mr Dornan holding a Parliamentary debate on the subject, support for the idea from the Presiding Officer, and eventually to a successful funding bid to Scottish Government for a pilot project.

The initial form of the pilot project was established after consultation between Inclusion Scotland, James Dornan MSP, and the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body, with input from the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). Work began to implement the pilot in the early months of 2014, with some initial information about the planned project distributed at the SCVO Gathering event. The project was to be primarily delivered through the creation of a new post within Inclusion Scotland. This worker was recruited and started at the end of March 2014. During the same time period the first parliamentary intern was recruited to work with James Dornan MSP.

2.2 Intern hosts, locations and timescales

The seven pilot placements took place in three “waves”, intended to consist of one initial placement, a further two in the second wave and then the remaining five in a third wave. One of the placements in the second wave failed to appoint a candidate, and was replaced by an additional placement in the third wave. The final internship in the third wave was delayed in starting due to scheduling difficulties for the interviews with the two host MSPs sharing the placement. Intern hosts were signed up from four of the five parties represented within the Scottish Parliament. The Conservative and Unionist Party was unable to accommodate an intern due to a lack of available office space. The cross-party nature of the scheme was considered to be a priority to secure wide-spread support for the work and resulting recommendations.

Internship hosts, locations and dates

Host	Location	Start date	End date	Hours
James Dornan	Parliament	12/05/14	17/10/14*	Full-time*
Rhoda Grant	Parliament	11/08/14	25/02/15	Part-time flexible
Linda Fabiani	Constituency	24/10/14	25/03/15	Part-time
Graeme Dey + Linda Fabiani	Parliament	24/10/14	23/01/15	Full-time
Alison McInnes	Parliament	24/10/14	26/02/15	Part time
Jamie Hepburn	Parliament	24/10/14	04/02/15	Part-time
Alison Johnstone + Patrick Harvie	Parliament	24/11/14	24/04/15	Part-time

* This intern had a large gap in her placement due to an impairment related medical issue, and her internship duration was extended to make up for the loss of time in placement

2.3 Demographics of intern group:

Gender: 3 male, 4 female

Age at start: 23, 27, 27, 29, 31, 37, 38 (average 30.3)

Geographical distribution:

Edinburgh: 3

Grangemouth: 1

Glasgow: 1

Paisley: 1

East Kilbride: 1

Ethnic diversity: All White British/Scottish

3. Key learning points

3.1 Recruitment process

MSP hosts were engaged with the project via a combination of direct communications via Parliamentary emails and offices. Inclusion Scotland also held an event in the Parliament to showcase the pilot project for MSPs who may be interested in taking part. This event was attended by a selection of MSPs from all parties and resulted in several submitting a note of interest in being a host employer. These were followed up by meetings with Inclusion Scotland to discuss what would be involved, and the practicalities required. In some cases capacity within offices was unavailable within the timescale of the pilot, or the demands of ongoing work led some MSPs to say they would not be able to participate until later. This work was carried out prior to the referendum on Scottish Independence and this significant factor for some MSPs deciding not to participate at that time.

Interns were selected via an open recruitment process including competitive shortlisting and interviews. The opportunities were advertised via the Goodmoves job search website as well as being promoted via Inclusion Scotland's own networks including a mailing list of disabled people's organisations and disability organisations.

The application pack included a full person specification and role profile, and a standard application form to be completed. An accessible version was made available and the advertising made clear that alternative formats could be provided on request. CVs were not accepted, and applicants were explicitly encouraged to respond directly to the person specification in a supporting statement.

Across the three rounds of recruitment a total of 35 applications were received for the seven roles. Applications were shortlisted by Inclusion Scotland based on the person specification and how well the applicant had responded to it. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustment was considered for specific items on the specification for which there might be a particular impairment barrier impacting on the applicants response.

Shortlisted applicants were then invited to a first stage interview with Inclusion Scotland. The purpose of the first interview was to determine general suitability for the role and participation in the wider objectives of

the pilot project in particular. Inclusion Scotland then presented the host MSP with a reduced shortlist for the final decision. In total 24 applicants were interviewed at the first stage.

For each role, between two and four applicants were put through to a second stage interview with their potential MSP employer. All applicants to reach the second stage were deemed by Inclusion Scotland to be “employable” for the role. In the second interview the host MSP conducted the interview or delegated a member of their staff team to do so on their behalf. They took the lead on questioning candidates, with Inclusion Scotland staff acting in a support and supplementary capacity.

In total 17 candidates were interviewed at the final stage, including two candidates who were interviewed twice for separate opportunities (in general standards were high, and a “pool” of potentially appointable candidates was generated – attempts were made by Inclusion Scotland to retain these for future consideration and also to refer them to other opportunities). Two of the final stage interviews were conducted jointly between two MSPs, in one case for the Green Group who generally operate their staff as a pool, and in the other for two SNP MSPs who planned to share an intern between them with some days worked in each office. In the latter case one of the MSPs was so impressed by two of the candidates that they asked to host an additional intern themselves based primarily at the constituency office. One of the two candidates lived in their constituency so this was very practical, particularly given the impairment of the candidate would make regular travel to the Parliament very challenging.

MSPs, staff and Inclusion Scotland were consistently impressed by the standard of candidates and applicants. In particular some candidates were extremely highly qualified in academic terms, and the fact that they had still struggled to secure paid work experience demonstrated the barriers that they faced as disabled people.

3.1.1 Learning from recruitment process:

- Interns consistently recorded their appreciation of the fact that it was made clear upfront that the opportunities were specifically only open to disabled people, and as a result they felt (generally for the first time) that their impairment would not be counted against them. Rather, their status as a disabled person was positioned as an asset.

- Interns were very appreciative of the level of support offered throughout the application process. For the second and third waves of recruitment, this included being provided with links to articles offering guidance on writing a good application form and preparing to give a good interview. Applicants were asked if they required reasonable adjustments during the application and interview process. Examples of reasonable adjustments implemented during the interview process included:
 - rearranging interview times to accommodate adjustments
 - additional time for those with communication impairments
 - communication support provided for deaf/hard of hearing candidates
- Both stages of interview involved a number of challenging questions. Interns generally recorded the impression that it was one of the most challenging interviews they had faced, however they also recorded that they felt they had been made to feel comfortable, supported and encouraged. As a result the interns who were successful all subsequently agreed that despite being most challenging interview they had faced, it had also been most “enjoyable”. For all first stage interviews after the first intern was appointed candidates were asked to prepare a response in advance for the first question in the interview. The intention being to allow candidates to start off the interview on more confident footing, acknowledging that disabled candidates may be more likely to be lacking in confidence in an interview setting. Being able to present a short prepared speech/presentation at the beginning was cited by all successful candidates as having been very helpful, with one participant stating that it helped to cement their ideas, adding to their interview preparation and further thinking on the role of disabled people in politics.
- All of the above demonstrate that overcoming one of the greatest barriers to disabled people succeeding at application and interview stage (a common lack of confidence, and an expectation that their impairment will put them at a disadvantage) is simply a matter of ensuring the good provision of information, access options, reasonable adjustments and creating a supportive and inclusive atmosphere for candidates.



Intern Maurice Laneres in the Debating Chamber

3.2 Induction process

The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body offered to provide an induction to all interns covering basic facets of working within the building and introducing them to a number of departments that serve the functioning of the Parliament. This also included setting them up with security passes and computer logins. These induction sessions were very useful because they allowed for the interns to be known to staff, and this helped to set up further, more in-depth induction sessions for interns who were keen to know more and shadow the work of various departments. Interns all found this induction process very useful, although in two cases it was not carried out until sometime into the placement due to delays in setting it up - both interns expressed the view that it would have been more useful right at the start.

For the purposes of the pilot an assumption was made that the MSP offices would provide their own induction process for the office environment and the role. We learned from the pilot that in fact a formalised, structured induction such as this is not commonly available within MSP offices and that staff tend more commonly to operate on

“pick up as you go” basis. This appears to be down to limited time resources within a busy and high-pressure environment. Although interns all recorded positive experiences with the level of support they received “on-the-job”, primarily from delegated MSP staff as the people they tended to have the most day-to-day contact with, there was universal agreement that a more structured introduction to the role and environment of the MSP office, and some of the common tasks likely to be involved in the work would have been very useful. Some MSP staff were in agreement with this.

3.2.1 Learning from the induction process

- Feedback on the Parliamentary induction received demonstrates its value, and in future we should ensure that this is organised to take place either before or at the very beginning of the internship.
- There is universal agreement that developing and externally facilitating the delivery of a role focused induction which should be developed in consultation with MSP staff, particularly those involved in hosting one of the pilot internships, would be extremely useful as part of the future model.
- The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body has been working on producing a structured induction process for a new apprenticeship scheme it is developing. Some of the learning gained through participation in our pilot has been incorporated. They have offered to share this material with us and work with us to develop a version suitable for future Parliamentary internships for disabled people. This demonstrates wider applicability of the learning developed through this pilot.

3.3 Reasonable adjustments made in role

The barriers faced by the intern group included:

- Significant fatigue issues and intermittent and frequently altering physical impairment, pain and the possibility of occasional sensory impairment) – two interns
- Communication support requirements due to severe hearing impairment (deafness requiring heavy reliance on hearing aids and lip reading, with communication support required in many settings

for full access) and additional time needed for some tasks as a result of this and of some mobility impairment

- A milder requirement for “Deaf Awareness” due to minor/moderate hearing loss (generally manageable in most settings with hearing aid use and some basic hearing impairment aware behaviour changes such as ensuring clear speech and eye-contact)
- Allowance for additional time for communication tasks due to significant speech impairment, and some physical tasks (a result of Cerebral Palsy, including some mobility impairment and some impairment to manual dexterity)
- Allowance for a higher level of absence for hospital appointments, as well as some fatigue management issues, and need for convenient access to bathroom facilities (Crohn’s Disease), and related confidence management/development support.
- Understanding of fatigue and other lingering effects from an acquired brain injury (having recovered from a major car accident)

In most of the pilot placements the only reasonable adjustments required were a degree of flexibility to account for increased fatigue levels, higher levels of medical appointments and sickness absence, and occasionally consideration around travel times and frequency. These adjustments were facilitated by initial discussion with Inclusion Scotland and through encouraging the intern and the MSP/staff to discuss what was required proactively. Both interns and MSPs/staff groups had recorded some degree of nervousness about raising these issues initially. However in all cases both sides found that once they had discussed the issue it was dealt with without problem. Both groups subsequently recorded feedback that they would be less nervous about discussing such issues in the future. In one case the staff within an office were so proactive about making helpful adjustments that they actually exceeded the requirement of the intern, who then had to tell them that it was unnecessary. This demonstrates the principle that the development of any support and adjustment provision should always be led by the input of the disabled person, who knows their own requirements best. Ensuring there was an opportunity to disclose and openly discuss support and requirements was important in encouraging a dialogue.

Some interns required further specific adjustments, including one internship requiring an Access to Work¹ application in order to cover the cost of communication support. In order to provide the intern with adequate support for making the application we brought in Action on Hearing Loss as an external support agency. Action on Hearing Loss provide this employment support service as a regular part of their activities for deaf and hard of hearing people. With their help the process of applying for Access to Work went smoothly and relatively quickly, and funding for adequate communication support provision was granted. However, the funding was not secured until some way into the internship. Inclusion Scotland paid for the support provision using project funds in the meantime, and later reclaimed these costs from Access to Work.

A small number of physical adjustments were required within the workplace. These related to altering a soap dispenser in one of the bathrooms at the Parliament to make it more accessible for an intern with some mobility impairment, and making some alterations to the phone set up in order to facilitate the use of text services. These adjustments were made promptly once the need had been identified.

3.3.1 Learning points on making reasonable adjustments:

- Several of the interns were uncertain precisely what adjustments they would require when they started placement, due to their lack of previous work experience or experience in that particular physical setting. As the placements proceeded interns learned a lot about their own limitations and adjustment requirements. In some cases this led to some mid-placement changes, but in other cases it was not until the end of the placement that interns were able to reflect on their experience and realise what they might do differently in terms of asking for adjustments in future. A clear example of this is that one intern requested communication support in the form of BSL interpreters, but has now realised that in many of the contexts within the work environment of the internship he would perhaps have benefited more from electronic

¹ Access to Work is a source of funding for the costs of making adjustments and/or provision of support to enable disabled people to fully access their employment role, provided by Government via the Department of Work and Pensions

note takers, and/or the use of an electronic listener device to boost the effectiveness of his hearing aids.

- Several of the interns requested minimal adjustments, or in some cases none at all. The following reasons behind this were stated:
 - “I shied away from asking for any adjustments”
 - “I didn’t want to be a bother”
 - “I didn’t want to admit that I needed help”

Some interns simply did not think they needed any, or they did not realise the full range of the support that could be made available and how that might assist them. None of the interns had previously made use of Access to Work, or were familiar with it before their placements.

- During post placement discussions, several of the interns when encouraged to think again about if they could benefit from Access to Work acknowledged that there were ways in which they might benefit, and that they would give this further thought for the future. One intern said, “I had never really heard about that, and had no idea that sort of support was available.”
- The feedback of MSPs and staff clearly demonstrated that they had gained a significantly increased confidence and awareness in the subject of making reasonable adjustments, and all made supportive statements on the need and benefits of doing so. One respondent stated that, “It’s about realising that every staff member needs different ways of supporting them and communicating, and has different strengths and abilities, and this is just a wider part of that”
- One intern with a speech impairment had previously avoided using speech synthesis devices. They had felt embarrassed by doing so, referring to “jokes about Stephen Hawking”. By the end of the internship experience they had used speech synthesis to make a very well received speech at our parliamentary event, and had also begun to use speech synthesis software in everyday meetings. When asked if there are still embarrassed by doing so they shrugged it off saying “Well I need it so I’ll just get on with it really”. In common with all of the interns they seemed less concerned about negative opinions of others. Their own self-esteem had improved to the point where they were more confident about asserting their own way of doing things to best overcome barriers and take account of their impairment.

3.4 During placement

Throughout the placement interns were primarily supported within the roles by MSP staff, with it having been made very clear that they could contact Inclusion Scotland at any time. Inclusion Scotland made periodic contact with interns during the placements to see if the internship was going well, and to check if they needed support or advice. If issues were raised, interns were encouraged to raise the matter themselves with their employer if they had not already done so. Only if this failed was the matter taken up with the employer by Inclusion Scotland. The aim was to encourage the development of confidence to independently raise issues with an employer for the future, but to ensure support provision if needed.

In addition, interns were encouraged to support each other via an informal peer support network. While this was not possible during a large part of the placement for the first intern and the last intern, the middle group were all in placement during an overlapping period of time and were encouraged to get to know each other and support each other during their placements. Some of these friendships have continued after the end of the internships.

3.4.1 Learning points from during placement:

- Interns 2,3,4,5 and 6 all benefited from peer support provided to them by earlier interns and each other. All of these interns, to varying degrees, reported finding the peer support to be helpful.
- Interns were far more likely to be open and speak out about issues they were facing when talking to fellow interns than they were with their employers or Inclusion Scotland staff. In more than one case when Inclusion Scotland became aware of an issue it had already been discussed with one or more of the other interns who had been helpful in encouraging and advising the intern as peers.
- Interns reported finding it greatly reassuring and encouraging to be able to share the experience with other disabled interns. Several also reported feeling that they had made firm friends, and all reported that they felt they had gained a lot of insight into impairments other than their own because of the experience.
- There were occasional issues in terms of prompt communication of issues – e.g. one intern went off sick for what turned out to be a relapse and although they informed their employer Inclusion

Scotland did not hear about it for nearly three weeks. This may flag up a development need for stronger and/or more regular communication procedures in future. Future programmes should also look at sickness absence procedures including sick pay.

3.5 End of Placements

As placements came to an end, each intern and the relevant MSPs and/or staff were given a post-placement evaluation and reflection interview. During this they received the same questionnaire as at the start of the placement, and were generally asked about how things had gone, what they had learned and gained from the placement.

3.5.1 Intern personal development

In every case interns recorded a wide range of personal development, self-discovery and growth. These included:

- Gaining a greater understanding of adjustment needs for their own impairment.
- A more realistic understanding of their capabilities and also of the limits their impairments impose.
- Gaining a wider awareness of impairment types other than their own as a result of working with other interns.
- General experience of being in an office environment, working with colleagues and maintaining a regular working routine.
- A better idea of which career they wanted to pursue.
- An increased appreciation for the importance of engaging in politics.
- A greater degree of confidence and a reduced degree of embarrassment in openly discussing their impairment.
- In one case, learning that their chosen form of communication support was not the best option for the work environment (electronic notetakers more appropriate than BSL interpreters).
- One intern had asserted their ability to communicate to a greater extent by adopting the use of assistive technology.

3.5.2 Awareness of impairment related barriers and adjustment requirements

Without exception all MSPs reported that they felt that they had become more aware of impairments and the implications of these, and the need for adjustments. They reported increased confidence in dealing with this

issue and identifying the need for reasonable adjustments. They also had awareness of their own limitations regarding the diversity of impairments that exist in society and the adjustments needed to remove barriers for disabled people. However they reported increased confidence in communicating with disabled people to ask them what adjustments would suit them best.

3.5.3 Awareness of Access to Work and other sources of support

Only one of the interns on the project made an Access to Work application. The intern in question requires communications support due to their severe hearing loss. As a result not all MSPs and staff verbally reported an increase in awareness of Access to Work as for most of them hosting the internship did not involve contact with Access to Work. However some staff did report increased awareness of Access to Work because their involvement with the program had caused them to seek out further information as they appreciated the potential benefit that this would have. Interestingly, the results from the questionnaires nevertheless suggested an increase in awareness across the board. This may be due to MSPs seeking more information on the subject in the intervening time or it may just be a perceptual bias. They may have felt like they should know more now because they took part and so answered accordingly. This does potentially cast some doubt on the other results, however they are backed up by the anecdotal evidence and qualitative verbal feedback.

An issue identified at the end of the pilot is that in one or two cases an Access to Work application may have been of benefit but was not pursued due to the intern feeling it unnecessary. An important point to recognise is that many of those with impairments do not necessarily know what support is available or may be of benefit. They may also be embarrassed about the idea of accessing such support, feeling that it is unnecessary, “making a fuss”, or that it draws more attention to their impairment.

Additionally, out of a desire to provide full support to the MSP and their staff, Inclusion Scotland dealt with making arrangements for the one Access to Work application. While this undoubtedly helped the process to run smoothly with minimal disruption to the MSP office this did mean that they lost the opportunity to learn about the process first-hand. In future it would be more appropriate for the application to be made from

the MSPs office but with support at each stage provided by Inclusion Scotland or impairment specific support organisation.

3.5.4 Attitudinal shift towards practicalities of employing disabled people

Before placements began some of the MSP hosts admitted to feeling nervous about employing a disabled person as they were unsure what to do in terms of reasonable adjustments and the correct language to use. They acknowledged having some fear about what would happen if “things went wrong”. In post placement interviews all MSPs indicated they felt more assured now about employing disabled people, and their confidence in discussing support needs and reasonable adjustments with a disabled employee. There was general acknowledgement that disabled people have a lot to offer and that more needs to be done to address barriers to their employment.

There appeared to be a clear link between how successful the placement was and the degree to which MSPs confidence and attitudes towards the employment of disabled people had improved. In some cases, MSPs had been extremely impressed with the quality of work delivered by the interns and as a result expressed very positive thinking about the potential of disabled people to carry out the same roles as non-disabled people.

The interns themselves also expressed an increased awareness in this area, not just for their own impairment type but also more generally through hearing about the experiences of the other interns and this prompting a much broader perspective on the subject. Some interns even admitted that they realised they themselves had held some prejudicial views on what “other disabled people” could do. They now felt they themselves had become more inclusive, knowledgeable and positive -not just for themselves but for all disabled people.



Dr Sally Witcher, Inclusion Scotland CEO, with James Dornan MSP

3.6 Creation of leaders, mentors and role models

By the end of the placements most interns, to some extent, felt they now had an obligation to share their learning and inspire others. All expressed willingness to be involved in dissemination events where Inclusion Scotland would go out to disabled persons organisations or groups and tell them about the project and about other opportunities for internship.

At the feedback event held in Parliament, external guests heard from the interns about their experiences and witness first-hand the confidence and enthusiasm. There were comments made on the floor by external guests encouraging the interns to get out there and talk to other disabled people because of the great need for role models such as them. One external guest, the CEO of a national internship organising network, commented that based on what she had heard she had realised there was more work to be done in making her opportunities accessible to

disabled people and place to do so, asking if the interns would be willing to help do this. A subsequent comment pointed out that:

“There are many policy officers out there who would give their eye teeth to have the experience first-hand right here in the Parliament that you all have had”

and continued:

“You have already heard here today from the CEO of one of the largest internship organisations in Scotland that she is going to go and change things as a result of hearing from you. You have gone beyond changing yourselves, you have started to change the world. That’s what policy work is all about.”

At the conclusion of the program all seven of the interns involved made clear that they were more than willing to participate in future events or talks in order to disseminate the value of their experience and learning. To date, there have been two written articles, two talks to disabled school leavers and one speech at a conference on Welfare and Work organised by Holyrood Communications.

4. Learning outcomes for the Scottish Parliament

4.1 Increased experience of making practical adjustments

Given the relatively accessible nature of the Scottish Parliament and the particular mixture of barriers and impairment types represented in the intern pool, there were only two examples of practical adjustments that the Scottish Parliament had to make within the building in order to provide an accessible workplace for the interns.

One of the interns found it difficult to operate the standard soap dispensers in the bathrooms and so requested that one of the dispensers be replaced by a more accessible version, which was done. This resolved the issue completely.

An intern who was unable to use a standard telephone due to hearing impairment required the ability to use text for functionality. Due to technical restrictions of the Parliament’s phone network it was not possible to simply install a textphone, as this would have required fitting a special line. Given the short term nature of the internship an alternative

solution was devised. This involved installing a special software package and setting up a special phone number in order to route incoming calls via the Next-Generation Text Service. Making this adjustment required discussion between the Equalities Manager, Inclusion Scotland, the intern and the building's IT services department. The solution was successfully deployed, although unfortunately by the time this was done it was late in the internship and the opportunity to embed its use had been missed. Having now implemented the solution once, the Parliament should be in a position to implement it swiftly if required in future. The intern themselves is also now more aware of the option and would be requesting it at an earlier date in any future employment. This is an example of the ongoing legacy the pilot will have in terms of improved practice within the Parliament itself.

The Scottish Parliament Equalities Manager has fed back that participation in the project has certainly helped them to learn more about various adjustment needs, and that this has added to thinking for future projects which may involve disabled people – the wider application of learning from this project should now go on to serve as a lasting benefit for apprenticeship schemes, future internships and future staff employment.

[4.2 Learning around support provision for internships / apprenticeships](#)

During the pilot a number of different support mechanisms were tested. These included one-to-one periodic meetings, occasional phone calls and/or emails, occasional group meetings and encouraging the development of a peer support network between the interns through both physical meetings (e.g. lunches or coffee meetings in Parliament) and through the provision of an online discussion forum.

All of these methods were useful to some extent with the exception of the online peer support discussion forum which after an initial few posts never really became active. It is likely that the small number of interns involved in the discussion forum meant that it did not achieve “critical mass” in the sense of having enough interns involved to provide sufficient content to keep interns interested in returning to it. We feel that it would be worth continuing to try this method with a greater number of interns involved.

The general feedback on the support provision was positive, however there is general agreement that support would benefit from a clear structure and schedule. Intern support needs varied widely however all felt that it would have been good to have more regular structured contact, even if most of these were just a brief “everything is fine”. In some cases interns would clearly have benefited from greater frequency of support contact because of difficulties they faced due to either impairment specific reasons or generally low self-confidence.

The Scottish Parliament Equalities Manager used some of the learning around this area specifically in developing a structured support scheme for an upcoming parliamentary apprenticeship project. They have offered to share this with Inclusion Scotland and it is felt that it would be beneficial for us to collaborate on a structured support system which would apply across all similar projects.

5. Financial considerations

5.1 Living Wage salary for interns

Inclusion Scotland identified at an early stage in the development of this pilot the importance of providing not only a wage to interns but to make it the Living Wage. The argument for this is that disabled people are far more likely to experience additional living costs and barriers which receiving a Living Wage would help to address, compared to minimum wage.

Without exception interns and indeed unsuccessful applicants expressed that the offer of Living Wage made their participation in the project much more likely. Some applicants indicated that they would have pursued the opportunity even if it was unpaid because of the value they placed on the experience they would gain. However, they also said that this would have been a struggle and would have been worried about potential effects on benefits they were receiving (e.g. taking on a full-time unpaid placement might be taken to mean they are no longer available for work and could lead to the withdrawal of job-seeking benefit, or could be

taken as evidence of capability to work and lead to withdrawal of other benefits, etc.) In many cases interns said they would not have been able to undertake the opportunity without it being paid.

In addition, there was general agreement amongst interns that the fact the opportunity was paid, and paid at a Living Wage not just minimum wage, demonstrated that their contribution was valued and would have greater weight with potential future employers.

5.2 Cost implications of hosting internships for Parliament offices

Thanks to Scottish Government funding the full costs of salary payments for interns including pension payments was met by Inclusion Scotland. It is clear that without this resource being available MSP offices would not have been able to afford to take on paid interns as there is simply no room in the budgets available through the Members Allowance Scheme.

During the setup phase of the pilot it had been assumed that any travel expenses of the interns or subsistence costs, etc, would be covered by Members Allowances. This was therefore not built into the project budget. Unfortunately it became apparent that the wording of the members allowance scheme (which is laid down in Parliamentary legislation) did not recognise the potential for paid interns within MSP offices. Provision is made for unpaid volunteers and for staff paid for by the members allowance scheme, but as these interns were both paid staff and not paid through the members allowance scheme they were not covered by the legislation at all. Scottish Parliament lawyers therefore advised that interns would not be eligible to claim expenses through the scheme. Fortunately a contingency had been built into the budget, and Inclusion Scotland was therefore able to commit to covering any such expenses through the project funding.

The effect of this was that there was no financial impact to MSPs and their offices from taking on an intern. Under Parliamentary rules MSPs who hosted an intern were required to declare the funding of the intern placement on the register of members interests and to declare an interest when taking part in debates or committee hearings on matters to which Inclusion Scotland had made representation.

Given the tight restrictions on funding for staff and the amount of work needing to be done by that staff, it seems clear that MSPs would be unlikely to choose to fund such placements themselves in future – purely

because of the pressure to spend their budget as efficiently as possible to achieve maximum staff support throughout the year. By nature the internships were somewhat speculative in terms of how much output the MSP employers might expect to get from the interns as staff – if they were meeting the salary costs from their own budgets they would be likely to feel they couldn't justify it within the limited budget capacity available given the pressures of work required within their offices. One of the interns was retained as a short-term contract employee by the Parliamentary Team they had been placed with, but this was only possible due to the end of their placement coinciding with a staff member leaving, and there therefore being a small budget surplus available at the end of the Parliamentary year. Given that the intern in question had performed at an outstanding level and already fitted well into the team it made a great deal of sense to ask her to stay to help out. However one of the MSPs involved later said "This isn't something we'd normally be able to do, really. As great as the internship has been for us we'd always have to recruit experienced staff on longer term contracts because it is the most efficient use of the limited budget we have."

Learning points:

- There is perhaps a case for the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (the committee that governs internal working arrangements and rules) to look at reviewing the anomaly in legislation for the Members Allowance scheme which prevents including paid interns (where the salary costs are provided elsewhere) in travel expenses cover, whereas unpaid interns (or volunteers) can be covered. This is particularly relevant given the increasingly held view in politics that unpaid internships contribute to inequality, and that not paying interns can be exploitative.
- An unpaid internship is not considered employment, and as such an unpaid intern would not be eligible to apply for Access to Work. This would mean that making such an internship accessible to a disabled person for whom there would be costly adjustments required would not be possible unless these costs could be met by some other means.
- Future parliamentary paid internships will continue to require funding from an external source, as it is unlikely that MSPs will be willing (or able to justify) use of their own staff budgets to cover the salary costs.



Dr Gillian Cowell, one of the project interns, in Committee Room 1

6. Results of Monitoring and Evaluation Questionnaires

All seven interns completed a pre-placement and post-placement monitoring and evaluation form which asked them a series of questions aimed at assessing their confidence levels and skill levels in various areas. Asking the same series of questions before and after placement allowed us to assess the impacts of the placement on the interns' personal development.

Wherever possible, MSP hosts and the staff directly involved in working with the interns were also asked to complete a pre-placement and post-placement form. The main questions covered in this version were aimed at assessing the MSP or staff members' confidence levels in dealing with employment issues around disability, making reasonable adjustments, etc.

In each case questions asked for a response on a scale from 1 (not very confident/skilled) to 10 (very confident/skilled), with encouragement to be as honest as possible and not think about the answer too carefully as it should be a natural response in order to accurately capture confidence/feelings.

6.1 Headline results

Results were generally positive across the board, particularly for key questions. Some of the questions asked gave mixed results which are difficult to interpret collectively. This is due to the fact that when asked to rate yourself on a scale before an experience you may have a different idea of what the scale itself is by the time you get to the end of the experience, and therefore giving a more realistic answer at the end of the placement than at the start may not necessarily mean a loss of confidence or skill level but rather a greater appreciation of where they were truly at and where they are now, and what is possible to achieve. In this context, a result which might appear negative could actually be interpreted in a positive way in the form of increased awareness.

Interns' questions generally revolved around self-assessment in various employment skill areas, familiarity with the political and Parliamentary environment and a series of questions around the extent to which they feel being a disabled person impacts on their employability and how

confident they feel about engaging with an employer around reasonable adjustments they might need.

Key results for interns (average of all responses, out of 10):

“How would you rate your overall employability?”

Before: 5 After: 7.5

“How well-informed do you consider yourself to be about Parliamentary processes?”

Before: 6 After: 8.57

“How confident are you in identifying specific support needs or reasonable adjustments that might help you in the workplace?”

Before: 6.33 After: 7.86

“To what extent do you feel being a disabled person present barriers to your employment?”

Before: 8 After: 6.86



Our showcase event in Parliament feeding back on the pilot results

Key results for MSPs and staff (average of all responses, out of 10):

“Do you consider yourself to be experienced about disability and interacting with disabled people?”

Before: 5.47 After: 6.73

“How informed would you say you are generally about the obligations of employers to disabled people?”

Before: 5.73 After: 7.2

“How confident are you that you will be able to meet the needs of a disabled staff member?”

Before: 7.13 After: 7.87

Outcomes for the disability community and wider society

In addition, the pilot internship group has produced an inspiring series of stories including a number of blogs, speeches and even a video which can be disseminated within the wider disabled community to demonstrate the potential for pursuing involvement in politics and paid employment more generally. Several of the interns have already taken part in events aimed at gathering the views of disabled people since their participation in the internship project. Two of the interns so far have been invited to speak at events organised by other organisations who are keen to learn from their experiences. One intern was asked to write a short piece in the accompanying programme for the Adopt an Intern awards ceremony on 30th April 2015. This piece discussed why it is important for employers to take on disabled people, and the request to write it was as a direct result of the internship event we held in Parliament.

Blog entries, articles and copies of speeches have been gathered on our specialist website www.wecanwork.org.uk, which we plan to continue to develop into a national resource and network for disabled people's employment and peer-support.

7. Appendices:

7.1 Case Study: Catriona Johnson

Catriona was the first intern recruited by the pilot. Chosen particularly for her determination and enthusiasm for the project, Catriona was placed with James Dornan MSP – who as the pilot's champion in the Parliament was keen to host the first intern. Cat, as she usually prefers to be known, is a university graduate, having briefly studied politics before moving on to a degree in design, a move that may have been partially encouraged by the emergence of her impairment.

Cat was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) while at university. The onset, while somewhat gradual, had a large impact on her studies. She saw the internship as a way of perhaps getting back to her original academic interest in politics, and was very excited by the prospect of

working in Parliament. Once her placement began she threw herself with particular enthusiasm into shadowing Parliamentary departments such as the Clerks's Office and the workings of some of the Committees. An early "win" for the project given one of its stated goals of "raising the profile of disabled people within politics" was a photograph of Cat sitting right at the front of the Debating Chamber assisting the Clerk during a high profile debate on Scotland's future, in the final run up to the independence referendum.

The referendum taking place during Cat's internship was in some ways an opportunity, in others an obstacle. While it certainly made the Parliament an exciting place to be, it did mean that it was extremely busy and this sometimes made it challenging to include Cat in the work that was going on, as James and his staff were understandably preoccupied. However Cat had opportunities to contribute in various ways to the work of the parliamentary office, as well as opportunities to get involved with constituency case work, which she very much enjoyed. Meanwhile she was also working on her project, for which she and James had agreed she would conduct research into the availability of modern drugs for MS within the various areas of the Scottish NHS.

Cat's MS flared up several weeks into her placement, resulting in a relapse which kept her off work for over a month. The nature of MS is that a relapse can occur very suddenly and their severity can vary widely. In order to make reasonable adjustment for this, it was agreed to extend Cat's sickness pay beyond the standard Parliament conditions, and then with mutual agreement to temporarily suspend her internship to give her time to recover without losing too much of her internship time. Once Cat returned to work, arrangements for her to work flexibly and often from home when fatigue required it were extended, and this proved helpful in managing her condition.

Alongside her work for her host MSP, we began to involve Cat to a significant extent in helping us to welcome and support the second intern, and then later on most of the remaining interns – using her experience to give them a better induction and arm them with a better idea of what to try and get involved with during their placement. The other interns found this extremely helpful, backing up our placing importance on establishing a peer-support network. Cat has continued to play a strong advisory role in developing the model for the project. For this reason and in order to make up for the time she lost from her

placement during her long period of sick leave we made the decision to use some of a contingency fund built into our budget to extend her placement by four further weeks. This also allowed her to be in post until after the Referendum, and to contribute further to the induction process of the third wave of interns.

Cat's placement ended in October 2014. She enjoyed her time in Parliament immensely and was left with a strong desire to work within the civil service, perhaps with the Scottish Parliament Corporate body, and began job seeking with that eventual goal in mind. Having struggled greatly with job seeking before the project she was afraid of "just going back to where I was" – especially since the way the benefit system works, Cat had now lost her previous entitlements and would face having to start from scratch. Fortunately the wait was not too long – in December 2014 Cat was offered a permanent position with the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (a department of the Scottish civil service) as a Case Officer, assessing more complex student support claims. Cat is very clear – she does not believe that she would have been successful in getting the job offer without the experience of the internship on her CV and helping her make a strong application and interview. The placement made the difference, proving what she was capable of.

7.2 Case Study: Maurice Laneres

Maurice is a History graduate from Glasgow, who has since graduating been volunteering in several roles with a focus on housing issues. When he applied to the programme he had as yet been unable to secure paid work experience. Maurice is severely hard of hearing, and also has moderate hemiparesis (weakness on one side of the body). He uses hearing aids which give him hearing in good conditions, but also uses BSL, mainly due to having deaf parents who are BSL users. During university Maurice used BSL interpreters and electronic notetakers to support him during lectures and did well academically, but had found it hard to make the next step towards a career.

His enthusiasm and evident wish to provide a contribution to society and make things better for others shone through at interview and secured him a placement shared between two MSPs, working full time split between the two offices.

As part of his induction we linked with Action on Hearing Loss to conduct a pre-employment assessment and support Maurice with an Access to

Work application to ensure we could provide interpreter support where needed. His employers were also provided with an Action on Hearing Loss “Employers Pack” with information about employing a deaf person. The provision of BSL interpreters, plus flexibility on the part of staff at the Parliament to accommodate additional sessions one-to-one for Maurice, ensured that he was able to access the induction fully.

During his time in post, further access and adjustment challenges arose. Technical reasons made installing a textphone more complicated than expected, and even if this had been possible there was uncertainty over the best way to use it to allow Maurice to answer incoming calls – because these would usually be answered by a hearing colleague it did not make sense to publish a textphone-prefixed number. After some discussion between Maurice and Inclusion Scotland and some research, an innovative solution was devised. We set up a special textnumber associated with Maurice’s mobile phone, as well as a computer application on his Parliament computer which would associate itself with the textnumber via the internet and the Next-Generation Text Service (NGTS). The Parliament IT dept then set up a dummy extension on the phone system to forward all calls routed to it out to that Textnumber, effectively adding the needed prefix to patch in a TextRelay operator. Maurice, when staffing the office, could then set the regular office phone to forward incoming calls to this, meaning that any incoming call would be routed through the Text Relay service automatically and could then be answered by Maurice using his mobile phone and the text app on his computer. The Relay Assistant would then type to Maurice via the app and relay voice to and from the caller. Although by the time this solution was put in place there did not end up being much use for it during Maurice’s placement, now that the solution has been devised it can be quickly put in place in future for any other deaf intern or staff member working within the Parliament and needing to be able to pick up calls to a general number also used by hearing staff.

Maurice also encountered situations where his limited hearing presented challenges, such as the difficulty in hearing during some types of meetings, and it therefore being difficult for him to take notes for his employer should they not be able to attend the meeting themselves, and where the short notice meant arranging communication support in time was not possible. With the help of Parliament and Action on Hearing Loss we arranged for him to try using a “listener” – a digital focussed

microphone based device which can be used to pick up sound from speakers in meetings while reducing background noise.

At the end of his placement, Maurice feel that he has gained a lot, and learned a lot about the challenges of the workplace as a result of his impairment and some different ways he can address these or ask for adjustments to be made to accommodate his communication needs. He feels greatly increased confidence in his own employability, and much more positive about the ability of and willingness of employers to make adjustments. He also however is very concerned about simply returning to unemployment long term, and the possibility that despite all he has gained from this experience it will still not be enough to make a difference. Only time will tell.

Maurice also reflected on what he had learned about himself as a disabled person. He has realised that despite having used BSL almost all his life, he still considers English his first language in the context of work – and “thinks in English” in a work setting and in most others, and does not identify as strongly with the Deaf community, and perhaps feels he has more in common with a “deafened” person, despite having been born deaf. For that reason he has realised that BSL interpreters using the normal form of BSL are not necessarily the best form of communication support for him in a work environment, and that electronic note takers may be more suitable. This is because he has to translate BSL into English in a work setting, and this slows down his following of a meeting or event.

7.3 Case Study: Dr Gillian Cowell

For Gillian, even making the decision to apply to the pilot scheme at all was a big step. Despite having been diagnosed with Crohn’s Disease over ten years previously and having spent a great deal of time since then receiving treatment, surgery and encountering barriers to participation in employment and many other aspects of life, Gillian had never quite accepted the label “disabled person” for herself. Certainly it was something she had been doing her best to keep hidden away, in large part due to the nature of her impairment, the trauma of multiple surgeries, and the embarrassing subjects that come with an illness such as Crohn’s. When she told family and friends she had applied to an

internship programme for “disabled people”, they reacted with surprise. Her parents and husband saw it as a big step forward in acknowledging her illness and in moving forward. Gillian joined our pilot with big concerns about how practical taking on the role would be given that it would involve a lengthy commute from her home in Paisley to the Scottish Parliament. Fortunately that particular barrier proved to be less than she had imagined, and she learned that with planning and preparation – and extra prescriptions - a big commute was entirely doable.

Arguably the most qualified of our pilot interns, Gillian came to us with a PhD and relatively strong work experience, but still demonstrating a clear need for the opportunity and potential benefit from taking part. She impressed at interview and left us in no doubt she had plenty to offer both a parliamentary office and the project more widely.

Gillian’s placement turned out to be with the MSP representing a town and area that she had spent rather a lot of time in conducting research – in fact her PhD thesis had been on the subject of town redevelopment in the area. This made her well suited to assisting with case work for the constituency and she hoped to get a chance to carry out some further research work and really show what she was capable of. However in the end her skills were perhaps utilised differently to what she had imagined, with the prioritisation of casework and the promotion of her MSP to the additional role of Minister reducing some of the potential for parliamentary experiences she might have gained otherwise.

Gillian’s host MSP’s office was a very busy place which already had a strong focus on constituency work, but as discussed previously, Gillian’s placement was altered when her employer was promoted to a ministerial post. This had some unintended side-effects on the internship: as a Minister much of the host MSPs work become somewhat off-limits to Gillian due to strict boundaries drawn between Parliamentary and Government functions, and again as a Minister the level of “normal” parliamentary activities is much reduced. For example, Ministers do not normally propose members debates or motions, cannot ask questions of other Ministers, and most of their contributions to speeches or debates in Parliament are based around their role as a Minister. This meant that the already very Constituency-focussed work Gillian was being given became even more exclusively so. There was much less opportunity for Gillian to get involved with work around Parliament activity such as

preparing briefings for the MSP for debates or committees, researching for speeches, etc. These are all activities that were intended to feature at least in some way as part of the internships, as designed. However, Gillian did have the opportunity to provide detailed research for written responses to an extensive number of questions from young people studying Advanced Higher Modern Studies in the MSP's constituency. These questions, based around 50 or so emails to the MSP, were numerous and on a wide variety of subjects, from Scottish Independence to healthy eating to prison overcrowding, drugs in prisons, plastic surgery and the NHS, and suchlike. The responses involved the Scottish Government's and SNP's position on these various subjects, how and where further information might be obtained, as well as facts and figures to help in their final reports.

Despite some resulting feeling of having missed out on some opportunities, and some chances to make a higher profile contribution, Gillian still found her placement interesting and a very valuable learning experience. In particular she felt that casework was a significant responsibility and a crucial part of the way MSPs and their staff engage with their constituents. She reached the end of her placement feeling greatly more aware of parliamentary processes and the role of an MSP, with additional experience of casework, and most importantly a far greater confidence in her ability to cope with and make adjustments for impairment related issues in a pressured work environment, a commute, meetings, and so on. She has recognised the need to be "a bit more pushy" and ask proactively for the support and adjustments she needs rather than waiting and hoping for them to be provided, and made progress in being more comfortable discussing her impairment with an employer – although she would certainly say there is still a way to go!

In terms of her reflections on politics more generally, she left her placement feeling better informed and with a definite wish to "get more involved" in politics, albeit with a feeling that "Politics is not a pleasant thing some of the time!" When asked if she could ever imagine herself becoming an elected politician she had a very prompt initial response of that not being possible – and it seemed that barriers from impairment might have a lot to do with that reaction. We discussed reasonable adjustments and the possibilities of Access to Work. When pressed again on this point and asked to consider more generally if having done this placement and learned more about what was possible in terms of adjustments and ways of working around impairment barriers she now

could see it being possible for “a politician with Crohn’s disease to become an MSP and participate fully as one” – Gillian considered the idea for some time before agreeing that yes, that did now seem possible to her.

Although Gillian had not posted any blogs during her placement, she had been keeping her own journal of sorts. With her newly found confidence to speak publicly about her impairment and her experiences she resolved to retrospectively post a series of blogs about her placement. She has since posted several blog entries about her time in the Parliament and the work shadowing she gained.