

Access to Politics Charter: Questionnaire

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

1. *We shall produce and publish a statement outlining how we will support disabled people's participation in every aspect of our activities.*
 - (a) *If your statement has been published, please provide a link and/or other details of publication.*
 - (b) *If your statement has been published, has it been made in accessible formats? (Large Print, Audio, Easy Read, etcetera.)*
 - (c) *If your statement has not been published please provide an update on your progress with this, including (if available) the intended publication date.*

We are currently developing a standalone statement and this is likely to be published as part of a wider refresh of our online materials and access statements. This is dependent on a wider project but is likely to be in the next year. All external materials currently have a shorter statement stressing that we are an equal opportunities employer and encouraging applications from all backgrounds.

2. *We shall support and resource a disabled members' group within our party.*
 - (a) *Does your party have a disabled members' group? If so:*
 - i. *When was it established?*
 - ii. *How is it resourced?*
 - iii. *How is it represented in the party's governance?*
 - iv. *How does the disabled members' group inform party policy on issues affecting disabled people?*
 - (b) *If your party does not yet have a disabled members' group, please outline the steps you are taking to establish this.*

There is a well-established Conservative party disability group, which holds an annual colloquium, a major fringe at party conference, and champions disability issues within the party. It is funded by the central party. It has a Scottish branch, which meets 2-3 times a year. Senior staff from Scottish Conservative Central Office attend to act as a link between the group and the Scottish party.

Policy-making is led by our MSPs, and there are various structures for all members to inform policy. Jeremy Balfour MSP covers disability and related policy issues, and is involved in all discussions about long-term policy on disability. Party conferences, regional conferences and conventions usually have open forums for party members to directly influence policy making and discuss major issues with MSPs. We always try and hold these in accessible formats, with step-free access, participation for the visually and hearing impaired, and responsible staff briefed to include as wide a range of people as possible.

3. *We shall commit to positive and proactive provision of disability equality training to elected officers, staff and party members.*

(a) *Please outline your provision of disability equality training (DET) for elected officers, including any changes or updates you have made since signing the Charter.*

(b) *Please outline your provision of DET for party staff, including any changes or updates you have made since signing the Charter.*

(c) *Please outline your provision of DET for branches and party members, including any changes or updates you have made since signing the Charter.*

Senior staff at Scottish Conservative Central Office undertook training in order to support a colleague with severe visual impairment and memory issues.

Since signing the charter, several of our MSPs have signed up to the Disability Confident employer scheme, and are currently moving through the process for accreditation and training. This may involve their local party, depending on the exact location of employment.

This followed our first disabled placement earlier this year, where a visually impaired student joined one of our MSPs for work experience.

4. *We shall ensure that the language we use about ‘disability’ recognises it as a societal issue with societal solutions.*

(a) *Does the language your party uses incorporate the social model of disability?*

Yes. This is mostly in policy situations – for example, written briefings for our MSPs, correspondence from our MSPs, or party policy positions on equality, employment or disability. We have choices in these formats on what language, concepts and framing we use, and party staff ensure that the social model of disability is incorporated.

5. *We shall investigate alternative means of participation such as remote presence and internal digital voting.*

(a) *Has your party introduced remote presence, digital and/or proxy voting for internal party meetings?*

(b) *Have you undertaken research into further alternative means of participation, including but not limited to methods to expand the disabled people’s accessibility to voting during internal elections?*

Election procedures vary by position. Some, such as the Young Conservatives, are currently done by email, partly for reasons of practicality but also because this is more likely to be accessible to students of all backgrounds.

The election format for further positions, such as association posts, is being explored.

6. *We shall voluntarily publish data on protected characteristics of our candidates in line with section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 for all elections, including Scottish local authority elections.*

(a) *Does your party currently publish statistics on the protected characteristics of its candidates? If not, has it set a date and method for doing so?*

The Conservatives website publishes protected characteristics of all of our candidates. At the next Scottish local authority elections, we will publish this data.

7. *We shall investigate job-sharing for internal elected roles and for elected public office.*

(a) *Are there any internal elected roles where your party permits and/or practices job sharing?*

(b) *Are there any plans to expand the option of job sharing within your party?*

(c) *Have you undertaken research into job sharing for internal elected roles and for elected public office?*

Job-sharing has been used by a number of our MSPs for researchers and constituency staff, and in general, MSPs are encouraged to adopt flexible working practices. Job-sharing is under active consideration in the central pool of party staff that work in the Scottish Parliament.

Electoral law, in our understanding, does not permit job-sharing for councilors, MSPs or MPs – only an individual can stand for a single elected office.

8. *We shall actively support and encourage disabled people to stand for elected office and explore mechanisms that ensure the election of a representative number of disabled candidates.*

(a) *Does your party have an internal process and/or campaign to encourage disabled members to put themselves forward for selection?*

(b) *Does your party provide candidate training and mentorship, either for disabled members specifically, or in an accessible format for all members?*

(c) *Does your party promote the Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) in your party materials, including in accessible formats, and in communications with members and staff?*

We provide a range of support, training and mentoring. All application forms are accessible, and there have been recent publicity drives to expand the pool of disabled candidates, amongst other protected characteristics. Application forms and selection procedures are all accessible, and the Access to Elected Office Fund is promoted to candidates.