

Administration Committee

Oral evidence: [Election Planning and Services](#), HC 588

Monday 31 October 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 31 October 2016.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Paul Beresford (Chair); John Cryer; Martyn Day; Michael Fabricant; Nigel Mills; Ms Gisela Stuart; Mark Tami.

Questions 1 - 50

Witnesses

I: John Benger, Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees, House of Commons, Kate Emms, Parliamentary Adviser to the Leader of the House of Commons, Cabinet Office, Thomas Doherty, former Member of Parliament for Dunfermline and West Fife, and Luke Skipper, former Chief of Staff to the SNP Westminster Group.

II: Jess Phillips MP, Member of Parliament for Birmingham Yardley, Martyn Day MP, Member of Parliament for Linlithgow and East Falkirk, Myfanwy Barrett, Managing Director, Corporate Services, House of Commons, and Donald Grant, Deputy Director, Parliamentary Estates Directorate

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Luke Skipper](#)
- [General Election Planning Group](#)

Examination of witnesses

John Benger, Kate Emms, Thomas Doherty and Luke Skipper.

Q1 **Chair:** Rather than going through a whole questionnaire to start with, would you like to introduce yourselves and say anything specific?

Thomas Doherty: I am Thomas Doherty. I used to be a member of this Committee and was on the General Election Planning Group before my involuntary early retirement.

John Benger: I am John Benger. I am the Clerk Assistant and I chaired the General Election Planning Group for the 2015 General Election.

Kate Emms: I am Kate Emms. I am a House of Commons Clerk on secondment to the Cabinet Office, and at the time when the general election was under way or pending, I was working for John on the General Election Planning Group.

Luke Skipper: I am Luke Skipper. I was chief of staff of the SNP Westminster Group for the 2010 and 2015 general elections.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. To start us off, the report on 2010 recommended that Members be involved. Was the direct involvement of Members any use? What differences did it make from the 2010 review? What would you suggest as a different pattern—more Members, less Members, or people like Luke?

John Benger: I will kick off, if I may. In my view, the dialogue and the engagement with Members made a profound difference. We talked to individual members of this Committee, indeed we had a direct relationship with three members nominated by the Committee to work with us. We held focus groups with other Members. We used the results of our first Members and Members' staff interview project. And we had formal meetings with staff groups.

It completely shifted our thinking. We thought we knew what Members wanted. It is just the kind of natural assumption you make that you think you know what people will want, but when it came from the horse's mouth it had so much more power. I remember a conversation with Mr Doherty when he explained what it was like arriving in those first few days, tired, broke, exhausted, nowhere to stay, not knowing how to get here or what to do when you got here. That was why we created the contact centre and the buddy system. Numerous things flowed from that contact.

Thomas Doherty: I suppose the starting point, from my point of view, wasn't even the Members—of course, Mr Tami was also a member through the Whips partnerships as well. It wasn't even the relationship with the General Election Planning Group. It was the Administration Committee that did a report, I think in 2013, which looked back at the



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2010 process and came up with a series of recommendations for 2015, which I think helped to shape it.

For me, there were three things that I wanted the planning group to try to achieve, which I think they did achieve, although Mr Day might have a different perspective on all that. One was to make the first days as informative as possible. I think that is absolutely crucial. The right information at the right time needs to be there—frankly, as Mr Bengier says, how to get here, where you are going to sleep, when you are going to get paid; those are terribly important things. But also, when I will get my IPSA card, how the Chamber works and so on, and not overloading Members, so that you did not get too much on those first days. We almost had, I think it is right to say, a first-day, a 15-day and a 29-day approach.

The second thing was to make it a pleasant experience—because I don't think 2010, apart from being terribly exciting, was that pleasant, for the reason that Mr Bengier has already covered and I will not repeat—and informative and enjoyable. To be honest, I have forgotten what my third thing was now, I'm terribly sorry. It will come back to me.

Kate Emms: Can I answer the question about having more Members or fewer Members? From those I dealt with, I think it is quite interesting. John and Thomas have said a couple of things about that, but for me it was very much horses for courses. I was dealing with every single party and the parties preferred different approaches. The Conservative Party had a very different approach from the Labour Party, or indeed the Scottish National Party. I dealt extensively with Luke, as it happened, but his Whips were very available to me as well. It was just a question of basically tailoring the approach to the party concerned, and I think that worked very well.

Q3 **Chair:** When did you discover that difference? In time to put it into the programme as you came through?

Kate Emms: I remember being asked to take on this work strand in the programme and thinking I had had the advantage of clerking a committee made up of Whips of the parties, so I was familiar to those Members of Parliament already. I was able to approach them and say, "With whom should I be dealing on this matter?" and they were very helpful in pointing me in the right direction. Then I had an amazing amount of consistency throughout the process, and I had the ability to deal with a very limited number of people, whether they were Members of Parliament or party staff, and it worked very well.

Luke Skipper: For me, the difference between 2010 and 2015 was obviously driven by the electoral result, which was quite a bit different in Scotland. I never complain about electoral success, but the organisational challenge faced by my small staff in 2015 was quite immense. From that perspective, the House authorities were incredibly helpful. What I found particularly useful was that there were regular meetings with senior party



staff, in which they were updated, but also, I think crucially, they were asked their opinions on how the next few weeks should go. It was a depoliticised environment. We were all in the same boat at that stage.

Q4 Martyn Day: I suppose this is more aimed towards Kate, because obviously you led on the liaison with the party representatives for 2015. Could you tell us what sort of information was particularly useful for both the House and the parties to have in advance, and what do you think worked well in that?

Kate Emms: One thing that we found very useful in the House service was that obviously the House service is politically impartial, and during the 2010 general election or around that time we had provided induction training sessions for Members on a cross-party basis. This was pretty crucial in some of the success of this. In dealing with individual parties, it became very clear that the parties would prefer to have training sessions party by party. Getting agreement to that across the parties, so that each party was offered the same thing in an impartial way and it was kind of “safe space” training for members of the same party, encouraged a lot of people to attend sessions and to ask the questions that they perhaps might not have asked in other company.

The other information that I was gathering was what the parties themselves were going to be offering as induction courses for their Members of Parliament when their new Members arrived, so that we did not clash with them in timetabling or in content. That was very helpful.

Luke Skipper: In terms of timetabling in particular, there were a lot of moving parts going on internally. Also, with the training that you offered, they were kind enough to say, “If you need anything else for your Members, just let us know”. I did take them up on two particular things. One was a more in-depth security briefing for Members of Parliament once they first arrived, and the second was a bit more about the inner workings of the Table Office. The reason I did that was so Members would feel comfortable being able to go to the Table Office with their questions and help with drafting things.

Q5 Martyn Day: A follow-up for you, Luke: how did your experience working with the House in advance of the election compare in 2015 to 2010?

Luke Skipper: It was vastly different, and I have to commend the House authorities for being very sensitive in that planning because—as I am sure members may agree—when party X predicts Y outcome in an election, journalists become extremely excited, but it is also incumbent on senior members of party staff to plan for different contingencies. The way in which they engaged early was hugely appreciated, but the sensitivities around that were understood and very important.

Q6 Michael Fabricant: In the early hours of the morning when I got my result, Diane Tilley, who is the returning officer in Lichfield, presented me with a dramatic pack. I didn’t know what it was.



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Chair: You didn't say when. 1992?

Michael Fabricant: No, this was not back in 1992, this was—

Chair: What about this time?

Michael Fabricant: Shall we start again? Sorry about the interruption there from the Chairman. In the election last year, Diane Tilley, my electoral returning officer, handed me a pack, and it was the information pack. How successful was that? To your knowledge, did that happen uniformly across all 650 seats? Was it well received by those Members of Parliament who did get it?

John Benger: Our main focus was on the new Members, obviously, but it was certainly sent to all Members. What we learned from our research was that only about half of the Members we spoke to in the interview project claimed to have got that pack in 2010. It was sent to all of them. It was definitely sent to all of them, but only half of them got it. Either they were not given it or it got lost and caught up in the bundle, so we were very conscious that this was not a foolproof way of getting that information, particularly, to the newly elected Members who were our prime focus. When we did those phone interventions over the weekend, one of the things we checked via our contact centre was, "Have you got the new Members' welcome pack?" If they hadn't we sent it electronically, so there was no problem with that. We had everything in electronic as well as hard copy form. So, as far as we know, everybody got it.

Q7 **Michael Fabricant:** What was the reception for it? Did people read it, or were they too exhausted? Was the information contained inside relevant for them? Maybe I should ask Luke, because he represents the party that is furthest away from Westminster. As far as you know, did newly elected SNP Members find it useful? Did they know how they were going to get down to Westminster, given the cost of getting down to Westminster, and so on and so forth?

Luke Skipper: There were a few instances where they claimed that they did not receive it, but it was often that it had been given to a senior member of their campaign team and it was found later. What was much more important was that, in those early few days, the House reached out to us about those travel arrangements and about accommodation, so pretty uniformly they knew where they needed to be and how they were going to get there. That was incredibly useful for us, because we knew when they were going to arrive so we could find them. It is practical things like that that, in those 48 hours, are really important to hammer down.

Q8 **Michael Fabricant:** They probably had guessed—at least one hopes they had guessed—that they would have to come down to Westminster at some stage in the game, having become Members of Parliament. Were they all content with the fact that they would receive funding for their trip? Certainly, I have heard of friends in the Labour Party who have been



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out of pocket from fighting election campaigns. I am not quite sure how it works with the SNP. I wonder if you had some semi-bankrupt newly elected MPs.

Luke Skipper: No.

Michael Fabricant: Obviously not bankrupt, otherwise they would be disqualified, but you know what I mean—almost bankrupt MPs. Did they have the wherewithal to get down?

Luke Skipper: Yes, they did. In terms of their immediate expenses, the set-up that IPSA had was quite good for MPs. There could probably be a little bit more guidance in the immediate aftermath about what they can and cannot spend on, but that is pretty much par for the course.

Q9 **Michael Fabricant:** Some of that information was provided in the pack, but you also had it with the contact centre. Could you speak a little bit about how effective or not the contact centre was, which was established this time?

Luke Skipper: In terms of their contact after being elected, yes, absolutely, but—and I might be covering this later—the buddy system was quite integral to that.

John Benger: I was in the contact centre over that weekend—and I think you were as well Kate—and it was terrific. We had volunteer staff coming in, bringing the sandwiches in and seeing everyone was supported. It is probably worth saying that the Travel Office was part of the contact centre. I suppose we are very lucky that with the way technology works now, we can actually send the tickets electronically to the Member for trains, for planes, for almost any way of getting here. More often than not, Members did not have to expend any money at all in getting here. We did all that in advance. That was the plan, anyway.

Q10 **Michael Fabricant:** It sounds pretty good, but have you learned anything from this experience that you would change next time?

John Benger: That is a good question. I think the good things to bank were the relationships with Members and with the Whips. Trying to integrate our programme with the political parties' programme was a real challenge, but I think we got there in the end. It was quite last-minute, bits of it, saying, "We have the Wednesday, you have the Thursday and the Tuesday" and so on.

There is one thing that struck me from what the New Zealand Parliament did for their induction. I heard a recent talk on how New Zealand ran its very recent election. They held a mock sitting for the new Members, which apparently was very popular. That was not something we thought about. We offered the opportunity to have a practice of your maiden speech. We did all sorts of other guidance with the buddies and so on, but I thought that was quite a nice idea, so that you could get used to the space of the Chamber and the business of intervention and non-



intervention etc. If I was passing one extra thing on, I might think about that.

- Q11 **Martyn Day:** A small follow-up point: I do recall receiving the pack. I definitely got it. I have to admit I cannot quite recall the contents of the pack, but I do recall the phone call arranging the travel and the hotel. All that was laid out to me. I knew I was not going to be out of pocket. I was going to get down, although I have to confess it had been about a decade since I had last visited London. I did not know the geography. I did manage to get lost en route to the Parliament; however, that is down to me rather than the guidance from the Parliament.

One of the things that did catch me out—and I know it caught a number of other new Members out—was that to travel on the buses, and things like that, you needed a contactless card or an Oyster card. I come from a town where I can pay by cash and get change, but if you do that everybody shouts at you on the bus. I don't know if that was in the pack. If it was, tired people do not always read everything, but it may be something that people need to be told for the future. It did catch a few of us out.

John Benger: That is a good idea.

- Q12 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** It did remind me of what I thought was very useful advice that I got from the noble Lord Rooker when I first came here. He said, "Remember, when you get comfortable in this place it's time to get out", because in a sense we are here to represent our constituencies and we ought to keep remembering that this is an office rather than a living place.

Mr Benger, you did the new Members' reception area, which, from what I remember, was very well attended, and it all looked to be working well. What was your assessment, and with hindsight, what would you do differently? In that context, presumably, we did not expect quite as many new Members as you ended up with, so was that a problem—just the numbers?

John Benger: Nearly, but not as it happened in the end. I want to make it very clear that the NMRA was not our invention. This was done in 2010. The new Members' reception area was a big success in 2010, so we were building on that success. We had a rehearsal exercise, which was incredibly useful, where about 200 House staff, and some Whitehall civil servants, who were desperate to come and have a poke around the place, came along. That was good, because they did not know the place. They were there for the first time, so that was very, very good.

We modelled it quite carefully, simulating all the different rooms and all the different times that would be taken. We worked out roughly that it would take around two hours to get them all through, so the flows worked quite well. The big sticking points were IPSA and the IT equipment provision, which cannot be rushed too much if we are setting up people with apple IDs and so forth. I think that that went well.



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In terms of the actual crowd management and flow management, the contact centre was absolutely invaluable, because we knew we would get quite a lot of people here on Monday. What we had not realised was they were all going to come right at the beginning of the day. I don't know whether there was a plane from Scotland coming down or something, but we had thought Members would be fairly evenly distributed through the day. There was a huge bulge at the very beginning of the day, the first two to three hours, so we were desperately whipping up our buddies. We had a buddy holding pen ready to link buddies to Members, and there were members of my team scouring the Atrium and cafes looking for anyone who looked a bit like a buddy and saying, "Right, get up there now. We can't wait until 9 am, you are on". There was just one moment when we thought, "We are going to run out of buddies. Someone is going to have to put a yellow lanyard round their neck and pretend they are a buddy", but we just about avoided it. Getting that crowd management right was quite tricky.

- Q13 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** It was about timing—it was more about flow management rather than the things you were covering.

John Benger: Yes. We had the Doorkeeper assistance down there, so we knew. We were given a signal when individual Members had arrived. We had just a few minutes to build that up. We had a lot of people—everyone was available for day one—it was just about the particular time on day one that they were available. We had something like 120 buddies, and each buddy would have up to two Members, one or two Members. We had a little bit of spare capacity, but it was tricky.

- Q14 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Do you have any sense of the extent to which the website and any other things were used to supplement what you were doing at the centre? Or is that too difficult to—

John Benger: You are right; I think that is a point for future development. We did build those tools as well as we could. We have not done any formal analytics on the use of those things or the literature or the new Members' handbook. My hope is that we can build some much better tools for the professional development and further induction of Members in a digital online format, because my distinct impression is that, however much Members say, "We would like more of this professional training, Mr Benger. We would like to have extra sessions run on delegated legislation or financial privilege" or whatever, in the end we will not get them. There are too many competing pressures on your time to make that worthwhile for anyone. I am very keen that we get our online resources in a much stronger position so that you can graze on these resources when you need them, not when we can give them.

- Q15 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Have you considered developing an app for Members?

John Benger: Yes, we have. There is already an Order Paper app. There is a My Constituency app and there is a ParliQuiz app. We have three apps that we have developed. What I am quite keen on is a digital guide



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to the procedures and practices of the House, which we can keep updated in real time. It is a project we are just developing now. This has the authority of "Erskine May" but is up to date and written in language humans can understand, not Clerks.

Ms Gisela Stuart: That may disqualify some of us.

Thomas Doherty: To be fair to John and the team, the big problem about that first Monday was that, in 2010, the first day did not really occur on the Monday because the coalition negotiations were still going on. Of course, all the opinion polls right up to almost the close of polls were pointing to, frankly, the same again. I remember we had had some big conversations about whether the House was going to gamble on booking a large number of hotel rooms across the road. The deal with Park Plaza was that if we booked them and we did not use them, we might have to incur a penalty. In the end there were some very discreet conversations, Sir Paul, with the Whips Offices, because it is not a matter for Parliament to determine when the first day is. It is for the party Whips and the party business managers. They are the ones who determine it. The more advice that the Clerks can get from the business managers, the more helpful.

Kate Emms: There is one other thing. Somebody was asking about what information we had gathered before Members arrived. Part of the contact centre work was ringing Members and organising their accommodation and travel. There was also a team in the contact centre doing potted CVs of all the successful candidates. It was a really worthwhile exercise. A Member would arrive on the Monday morning and would be allocated a buddy. The buddy would take them to talk to the IPSA for a bit and, during the time that the Member was with the IPSA, the buddy had time to go and fish the potted CV of that particular new Member out of a pile of such things, and basically to learn enough about that Member of Parliament to make an effective initial relationship with that Member of Parliament as they were escorting them around the other services. That was really, really good. I should also add that by that time we had also got all the photographs ready for their security passes. We had a photograph of everybody, so we were able to create a pass that they could take away with a lovely picture on it, which we did give them the opportunity to change.

Chair: I remember a confrontation with the policeman at the door in 1992 when I arrived. He didn't believe a word of me.

Luke Skipper: I think that MPs having their passes ready was a huge benefit. They could become an MP with a green and white striped pass right away. I also agree with what Thomas said about discussions with the Whips. In 2015, the SNP was quite blessed in that we had many new Members and there is a magic window when Members will listen to what senior staff say to them. That is usually when they are brand new, so as time marches on that effect lessens. If you told them to come down and



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be there for this time on Monday, they would, so it was quite useful to have those discussions.

Chair: Does anyone want to add to that? All right then, we are on the next round.

Q16 **Mark Tami:** How well do you think the Chamber briefing and the induction programme went?

John Benger: The attendance rates were dramatically increased from 2010. Only about a quarter of Members went to any of the induction events in 2010 other than the Chamber briefing. The Chamber briefing was popular in 2010. It was extremely popular again in 2015—almost everyone went. Almost everyone went to all three events. As Kate said, the party breakdown was something we got from talking to Members. We had not realised how sensitive it was for Members to be among known friends at that early stage. So, almost every Member went to all of them. The handful of Members who didn't were typically Members who were being returned, who had served in a previous Parliament, so they knew their way around anyway. It was not as if any completely new Members did not go.

We talked and talked and talked to Members in advance of the Election about which sessions were the ones needed in that first week—"What do you need to know straight away?" We came up with: standards, because we thought you could make mistakes in the area of conduct and standards very quickly; setting up your office, which we did not even do in 2010 because we did not think it was our business, but there was a clear demand from Members to be given advice on setting up your office; and going on a Select Committee, because that is one of the earliest things that new Members can do.

The other thing we learned from talking to Members was how critically important it was that Members took ownership of those sessions, not officials. A key factor in the attendance rates of virtually 100% was that it was Members speaking to Members, not officials. I am sure you have all learned to have a tremendously high regard for officials in your time here, but it is not so immediately obvious when you first arrive why you should go and listen to these people; you have come here to escape all this bureaucracy, and so on. We think that Members knew other Members. They were familiar with them and they trusted what they said. Although we had officials at the meetings to support them and give technical advice, the critical thing was that it was Members speaking to Members.

Q17 **Mark Tami:** Some Members have reported that they felt somewhat overwhelmed with the amount of information that they were deluged with over the first days and weeks. I know too little can be a problem, but equally so can too much. Do you think there was too much and, if so, would it be better to do it over a longer period? Some have even said that perhaps you should have sessions in the summer, but I am not



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absolutely convinced how popular they would be.

John Benger: I will kick off and then you will probably come in, Thomas. There was vastly less than in 2010. We had nearly 30 sessions offered in 2010. We had three in 2015 and then one a few weeks later. The written information was carefully assessed to include only what we thought was vital, and the buddies were there to allow people to access more personal information.

I could be wrong here, and maybe Mr Day will comment on it, but I suspect that you get bombarded with an enormous amount of material from all sides as a newly elected Member. It may be that the memory of those Members is not necessarily discriminating between the quite modest amount of information we put out there—it was just a single handbook and the three talks and the Chamber briefing, that was it—and all the other stuff that flew in from all quarters. We made a very big effort to limit other parts of the House service separately contacting Members and supplying their own information. We tried to crack down on that. There were the general Library policy briefings that were available to all Members, as they were in 2010, as a separate policy project. That is about it.

I think we would be criticised if we cut down any more than we had done in the handbook. That was tested to destruction; tested against Members as well, actually, including seeking the views of Members. I suspect it is more the general mass of stuff coming your way that they might be thinking about.

Thomas Doherty: Sir Paul, our thinking in the build-up was exactly as John said—that we wanted to try to restrict it. We did not want to overwhelm people, and it was that first-day, 15-day and 29-day approach.

To go back to the third thing that I forgot before, we were trying to get things to be practically the same as far as possible on the first day going forward. You would use Chambers right from the start. You were not being expected to work out how to get here. You would get a tablet, hopefully—an iPad I think it was—on day one, so you were not just sitting in the Tea Room with reams of letters trying to deal with it in a backlog. I think John is absolutely right. That then probably causes a conflation between the information that the House is trying to give you and the information that 200 lobby organisations are simultaneously trying to give you.

I remember the ones I was most grateful to when I was a new Member were those that postmarked their envelopes. They could go straight into the bin without me even bothering to open them because I knew that they were not a priority, frankly. What would be useful would be if the 2015 intake was to provide feedback to say, "These are the things we did not need to know on day one", but Luke might have a better sense of it than I do.



Luke Skipper: It is a tough balance, and different Members will have different views about how much information they had or otherwise. There certainly was a view that there needed to be further training beyond 29 days, potentially, which could be digital. I totally take your point about Members expressing a desire to have it and then not finding the time later on, but on some of the finer points about the procedure of the House, they thought would be useful to get follow-on.

From a staff perspective, there needs to be a realisation that it takes quite a while for Members of Parliament to build up their constituency office staff, so offering advice and support and training for them right at the beginning is not as useful as it would potentially be in a month, two months or three months, when they staff up properly. The challenge for us was to make sure that those new Members of staff and the new MPs knew that there were further resources down the line that they could access. We are so busy ourselves that sometimes that probably was not effectively communicated.

Q18 **Mark Tami:** Apparently, some Members have said that they wanted more on procedure of the House. I don't know whether we can have their names, but apparently they do. My view is that you are better gaining that by sitting in the Chamber and learning it yourself rather than sitting with someone telling you the ropes.

Luke Skipper: It was a unique situation faced by the SNP in 2015, because normally you would just buddy a Member of Parliament to an existing Member and they could have chats with them about that stuff, whereas it was just all at once—

Mark Tami: Yes, I think the SNP were in a different situation.

Luke Skipper: Yes, it was just different.

Q19 **Mark Tami:** What do other people think about that?

Thomas Doherty: What is interesting is that, from what John says, the turnout was so high in the Chamber because, first, it is "the Chamber" and, secondly, we had identified early on that that was something people would want to know. Most people today want to make that maiden speech quite quickly. Most people want to start writing to Ministers or asking Ministers stuff orally and tabling questions and so on. That is the stuff that comes much earlier and, as exciting and as important as private Members' Bills are, tabling a private Members' Bill can wait down the line.

One thing I would say is that I was surprised that Select Committees ended up at the start, because I would have put them much later on. It is not until we have a Government sorted out, and we have a leadership contest under way for the Opposition parties as necessary and so on, that you get round to it. I suspect Select Committees were not set up until the end of June or start of July, roughly. Frankly, do you need Select Committees in the first week? My view is no, but it is a judgment call.



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John Benger: Yes, I think that is right. On the provision of procedural information, it is marvellous; “Let’s meet these Members.” I remember being at a talk on delegated legislation at a much earlier election. We had been told, “The Clerks will talk to any Members who are interested in delegated legislation, in this room”. We had one very unlucky Member who wandered in and came out an hour later dazed and, I am sure, wishing they had not arrived.

What we try to do is target our procedural guidance at the point of contact. When Members get put on a Public Bill Committee now, the Public Bill Office contacts new Members and says, “If you would like us to come and chat to you about how PBCs work, we would be delighted to do it”, so we are trying to do that.

On questions, we offered the SNP a session on tabling parliamentary questions, which they took up. It was available to other parties. It is trying to pitch it in at the moment of contact. There would not be much point, for example, in giving a talk on estimates procedure—ever, probably, but certainly not in those first few days and weeks.

It is a difficult balance for us. The buddies were meant to be the interlocutor, so if any Member wanted to know about anything procedural from day one, the buddies had an exhaustive list of contacts about who to go to to get that done, one to one, straight away. Now, whether our buddies transmitted that information 100% I do not know, but that was one of the principles behind the buddy system, so that Members could have the bespoke training when they wanted it.

Q20 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Two quick questions. One is a general one. Did the Commissioner for Standards and Privileges make herself available?

John Benger: Yes, she was part of the opening session on standards and conduct. Kevin Barron chaired that session and Kathryn Hudson was one of the speakers. The other thing was that her office personally contacted all newly elected Members on general principles and declarations—so I understand, anyway.

Q21 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Was that later on? That is probably something for day 29, when you—

John Benger: Yes. The conduct and standards talk was one of the Wednesday talks, again guided by Member guidance that it was critically important to get this in early before people make mistakes. That was one of the Wednesday sessions given party by party. We know that all but three or four of the newly elected Members had a one-hour session, and Kathryn Hudson was there. The Commissioner was there, giving them that information and also telling them when they had to declare things, when they had to register things, and so on. I think that was quite successful.

Q22 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** That is helpful.



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A very quick question, and, Luke Skipper, if you don't want to answer this, that is fine. It has suddenly occurred to me that, when the SNP contingent came in, part of your mission statement was to—to coin a phrase—break the mould, whether it was applauding or seating arrangements. Was there a kind of tension within the SNP? You had to find out what the rules were before you knew which ones you wanted to break.

Luke Skipper: There is no such thing as off the record here, obviously. Members of many parties will come here with admirable aims about reforming this place, and my advice to SNP Members is, "While that is very admirable, you must first learn how it works". I think most of them took that advice, in terms of having a solid understanding of how the mechanics of this place work in order to perhaps push the boundaries somewhat.

Q23 **Chair:** Can I aim one at Kate because of her present role? When I arrived here in 1992 there was no advice. I remember being taken into the Chamber and they said, "That is the Opposition, and that is the Government, and the ones at the front are Ministers, so you do not sit there. You do not sit there because Sir Ian Paisley, the Rev. Paisley, sits there". It was a real struggle to learn the do's and don'ts, because there are no written rules on many of the things. After a pretty short period of time I became a Minister, so I had to learn that, but there was no one to teach me that. I did not know about delegated legislation and how you perform. You are just given the papers and off you go.

I did not know about European Committee B. That was a nightmare, and I learned about that the night before I went in. Should we have someone like you with a portfolio to say to new Ministers and shadow Ministers, "Come on, I will show you what to do and how to do it"? It would be about simple things; for instance, I did an awful lot of debates in a short period of time. When you stand up the second time you have to ask for the approval of the House, and Madam Speaker had great delight in giving me a pasting for not doing it. Should we do that?

Kate Emms: It is a very good question. What I am doing at the moment is participating in a programme to increase the knowledge of civil servants across Whitehall of how Parliament works, so that they can better support Ministers in exactly the way that you describe. We are targeting various groups of civil servants in this with private offices, fast streamers, the senior civil service, and the parliamentary clerks in each department that run the parliamentary branches, which have the main day to day contact with Parliament—Lords and Commons. We are on it, and I think Ministers now are better supported than they might have been then. I am working on it, but the answer is, yes, it is recognised as an issue and we are doing something about it.

Q24 **Nigel Mills:** If you had an ideal world, how would you try to structure and time new Members' induction? Would you do the American thing of taking Members away for a weekend somewhere in a nice, closed



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conference centre, having their full attention for a day and a half, or do you think that is not desirable? It is rather tricky with the timetable. Having your count on a Friday morning and being here on the Monday might make it a little challenging to get that weekend. Would you think taking people away and having a safe space to get all this in one go would be better?

John Benger: I was terribly lucky. I went to the Kennedy School induction for the newly elected congressmen with three British Members on the normal exchange programme. It was absolutely fascinating, and we learned quite a lot of practical stuff there. I think there are a couple of problems. First of all, there is the timing problem. If we pushed it back and said we would do it in the first week of the recess, or something like that, no one would want to disappear to a conference centre somewhere for three days. We do not have that lame duck period that the Americans are very fortunate to have.

The other really practical thing is that Harvard University, where the Kennedy School sits, is a very, very wealthy institution that is more than happy to support that programme. We would have significant reputational issues if we were seen to be housing Members somewhere that looked even remotely comfortable, let alone luxurious, and giving them meals, talks and so on. It is tricky.

That said, the content is fantastic. The Kennedy School does not focus very much on the practicalities of induction, which is done much more in Washington. It is more on policy issues, and what they very cleverly do is get fantastic guest speakers from the different political sides. They don't have neutral speakers. They have a distinguished Republican, a distinguished Democrat or whatever, and they mainly project the discussions forward. They would say, "We want to talk about education, but we are not going to talk about the current rows and the issues. We are going to say what it is going to be like in 2025. What are our kids going to find?" That was a really good way of opening up.

Another thing that worked really well was that people got to know each other. The social bonds were formed. Members' partners were invited as part of the programme. Again, imagine if we had wives, husbands, spouses, partners being subsidised and so on. We would struggle with that, I think. That would not pass a reputational test. It would be ideal, but it would be very difficult to pull off.

Q25 **Chair:** Thomas, you wanted to say something about a little difficulty leaving if you have been defeated.

Thomas Doherty: There was a huge amount of work that went into new Members, and for retiring Members the House had pretty much got it sorted out. To be fair, part of the problem is that this was IPSA's first out grouping, because in 2010, those colleagues who were defeated were done by the old Fees Office. My wife said to me last night that just



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thinking about IPSA still makes her angry, more than a year later. Some of it is their own fault and some of it is not necessarily their fault.

They decided they would not give ex-MPs a single penny from 6 May or whatever it was, 7 May, until the very last bill was settled up, but then expected ex-MPs to pay all the bills. I was then having to go to a bank manager and say, "I have just lost my job, but would you mind awfully increasing my overdraft?" For example, I had to pay for the removal company to move my stuff out of my flat in London back to Scotland, which is a considerable distance. I forget how much Pickfords charge, but it was, say, £3,000. I had to pay that money up front and then claim it back, and then be able to pay BT so that it would then sever the lines, get a receipt from BT, then go back to IPSA, then pay the next bill. The taxpayer ended up having to employ people at IPSA for far, far longer than they needed to.

When I finally got my severance, which I think was the end of September—it might have been October—IPSA said to me that I was one of the first ones they had settled. I have suggested to the Clerks that they need to ask IPSA for a breakdown of which month they actually got round to paying it.

Part of it was IPSA's own fault because of the way IPSA treated ex-Members. There was one ex-Member I knew, a Scottish MP from central Scotland, who had driven down on the Monday after the general election, I think it was, to see IPSA to start the process and to clear his office. He put in a mileage claim because he was clearing out his own office. He did not have that much stuff; most of his office was packed up in advance. IPSA phoned him up and said, "We are not going to pay you that mileage, because you cannot prove that you drove rather than flew or got the train down". He said, "First of all, I was coming to meet you so you know I must have made the journey, and, secondly, I have not put in a train claim, I have not put in a plane claim, so this is ridiculous". It took him a week to persuade IPSA that he somehow did not need to go back to a petrol-filling station and find someone. That was the level of nonsense that IPSA was going through.

I also want to pay a huge bit of credit to people like Fiona Channon, who I thought was absolutely brilliant, and Andy Martin and Andrew Walker, but also—and I can say this because I am no longer beholden to them—the Whips. The Whips were great. They were sympathetic. They were practically helpful. Yes, all right, you can buy me a pint afterwards. They were the people who took an interest in what was going to happen to ex-MPs and ex-MPs' staff.

That is my opening moan about it. Parliamentary democracy is fantastic. I am very proud of the fact that in 2010 I took a seat from another party. In 2015 I lost it, and I have no complaints about losing. I just think the way that it then behaves is frustrating and it makes a difficult situation worse.



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John Benger: Two very quick points, if I may. The policy line with IPSA was out of our control. It is independent, so we absolutely got that, and that is something you will probably want to pursue, those issues that Mr Doherty has raised with you. What I would say, though, on the logistical arrangements and their integration with the new Members' reception centre, is that with all the literature and the things that went out, we had a really excellent relationship with IPSA as part of the planning group. They were not integrated into the planning in 2010, so I think that has at least worked very well.

The second thing to say on the relationship with the Whips is that, I agree, we had fantastic feedback and co-operation from the Whips, which is very difficult for them; they have plenty of other things to do. I would want to place on the record the fantastic job that Kate did. She took up that role fairly late on in the planning process, and I think she worked miracles and formed really good relationships with the Whips of all the parties.

Q26 **Chair:** There has been a discussion on whether information and files from one MP should be passed to the next MP.

Thomas Doherty: I worked in 1997 for a brand-new Labour MP, who had defeated a Conservative MP, just to get her set up for a few months. I had worked previously in here. She was very pleased one day quite early on when her successor couriered over a box of caseloads and she said, "He is such a nice gentleman getting me started off". If you recall, those of you who have all had handovers, the files that were handed over were those that were called "frequent flyers". Leaving aside the issue of data protection law—and I am thankfully not a lawyer—I did not hand over to my successor anything, not out of some spite, because I thought he was entitled to form his own opinions on these constituents. There is also an issue about data protection in that.

John Benger: There is a legal issue, yes. We have put that in the guidance, and I also came to both the 1922 Committee and the parliamentary Labour Party to talk about this specifically. The data is the subjects' data. The Member is kind of temporary guardian of that data in that relationship. The Act gives a transitional period where the outgoing Member has those files. If the incoming Member is to receive that data, they need the permission of the data subject for that handover. The outgoing Member can write to all of those people and say, "Is it okay if Fred gets this data?" They can do that, or they can shred it. What they cannot legally do is just say, "The files are in the back room there. Good luck".

Q27 **Chair:** I can think of some of my people for whom I would love to pass the information on, regardless of what the party is. Thank you very much.

One last thought; it is a bit of a mischievous thought. You must have had some tremendous laughs at some of the gaffes and some of the



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questions. Do we put out a tiny sheet for the amusement of everyone else, utterly anonymous, with some of the gaffes and things? I can think of some of my gaffes. Madam Speaker giving me an absolute pasting and my forgetting myself and replying with some phrases that did not go into Hansard.

John Benger: One of the things we wanted the buddies for was so that Members could ask what they described privately as idiotic questions. We want them to be able to ask idiot questions, which are perfectly reasonable things to ask in your first few days in a new job. Everyone asks idiot questions; so much better that they can do that with someone who says, "Well, I completely understand why you want to know that, but don't worry". So, I don't think I came across any. It was all suppressed.

Thomas Doherty: One of the things that we tried to do was look at creating those safe spaces. I have two things to say. One is about creating safe spaces to ask the stupid questions, whether that be through the buddies or through the party-only meetings. We figured that you were more likely to put your hand up and ask what you thought might be a stupid question if you didn't have Opposition MPs in the room, who would then run off and phone Black Dog. Actually, that is what your own side would probably do to you!

The other bit, which probably has not been examined today because of time issues, goes back to Mr Mills's question. It is, to what extent are we placing on the House stuff that the parties should be delivering? I look, for example, at the Chair of the PLP. When I was first elected in 2010, Tony Lloyd was the Chair of the PLP and he organised seminars and events on an ongoing basis. It might be Dennis Skinner who came in and did a bit of chat to the new MPs about standing up and asking questions, "What's the right way of asking an effective question at oral questions?" "What is a ten-minute rule Bill? How do you go about doing it?" Is it right that Kate and John are being expected to do that rather than, say, Luke, or rather than Michael in his days as a Whip, or Mark as a Whip or John as the PLP Chair?

I don't know if you are getting evidence in from the PLP, the '22 group and the SNP group, but I want to know what they thought their role was in all this.

Q28 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** The first induction session on questions I got from Betty Boothroyd. I had asked a question that started by saying, "No doubt the Minister is aware—" so she hauled me up to the Chair and said, "Don't ask questions like that; you say, "Has the Minister got any idea that—?" and that just sparked the thing. To what extent is Mr Speaker involved on this?

John Benger: Well, we don't have a Speaker.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Anyway, later on, for day 29, the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker may just want to say, "This is—"



Thomas Doherty: I think you were still working with him, Kate, but what he was very good at—certainly in 2010—was that he would get 15 to 20 MPs in at a time, give them a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, and I think he even stretched to a Bourbon biscuit, and he would ask, “How is it going? What do you think? Have you got any questions? How are we getting on?” But to be fair, I think that is a day 29 type thing, rather than day one.

Chair: Thank you all very much.

Examination of witnesses

Jess Phillips MP, Martyn Day MP, Myfanwy Barrett and Donald Grant.

Chair: Thank you all for coming. Before we start, do any of you want to launch in and make a statement? No? Shall we start with questions, then? Michael, the floor is yours.

Q29 **Michael Fabricant:** Jess, you are sitting next to Myfanwy Barrett, so quite clearly the buddying experience was not too bad, but you might want to say a few words. I feel a slight ownership about the buddying thing, simply because, back in 1996, I suggested to my own party that we do buddying. They did not understand what buddying was, and after about 10 minutes of discussion, I gave up. But they have learned. How did you find it?

Jess Phillips: I found it to be really helpful, in that I did not know my way around the building—I had been to Parliament twice. I had been in this building twice before I was elected to come here, so it was a complete and utter mystery to me. I was not expecting somebody to be waiting for me, to help me, so it was a pleasant surprise.

I had come in with my children and I did not even know where I was meant to park my car; I had no concept of what it was going to be like when I arrived. I thought that we would have longer between being elected and our arrival, because we thought there was going to be a hung Parliament. I was completely thrown in at the deep end, but I had Myfanwy there to answer my questions. I used to text her and say things like, “Where is this room?” and she would come and find me and help me get there.

Also, you are constantly aware of making mistakes, certainly with things like registering with IPSA. I have read all the stories about the terrible things that people have done, and you feel like you are going to end up in one of those stories by complete and utter accident. So having an independent sounding board was very useful. I was here for the end of what you were just talking about—the bit about what the parties do. In the Labour Party, when I arrived there was a series of sessions that were put on. I still don’t know the names of everybody in all the different parties, so I would not have found it very easy on my own to identify somebody I could go to, other than my brilliant Birmingham colleagues,



who are brilliant. You do not want to feel as if you are pestering people, so having somebody that is outside of your party structure I found to be really useful.

Q30 Michael Fabricant: One of the issues we found in the Conservative Party, which also did a whole series of these inductions, was that people welcomed it but about a week later they had forgotten it all; it was information overload. Did you find that, too?

Jess Phillips: Definitely. I still don't know what some of the rules in the Commons are—I'm not sure I am that fussed about breaking them—but we had a series of sessions that were organised by Parliament and another series that were organised by the Labour Party. It was incredibly bamboozling, because there was so much information about how you are and what you do in the Chamber. The best advice that anyone gave us was that you have to just do it until you know what you are doing, but that is terrifying if you have never been here before; certainly if you have not come up in local government or have not been in this sort of experience. I see some people, and I am not surprised that they are terrified when they are standing in Parliament.

However, from the point of view of the buddy system—when I didn't know what I was doing, and you don't have an office and all that sort of thing—I didn't realise there was a post room that I was meant to go to. When I got there it was like I was Phillip Schofield in "Going Live" with all the competition entries. I had a bag of post this big to open, and I didn't even know what was going on there, and that was only a week's worth of post. It was Myfanwy who said to me, "You can go there and pick it up". No one had mentioned that to me, so without that help I would not have been able to do that, but it was too much information from all the other sources.

Q31 Michael Fabricant: In an earlier session, Martyn revealed that one of the issues he had was that he did not know—which is perfectly respectable not to know, I hasten to add—that you need an Oyster card to use buses. I will confess that I still find London buses utterly confusing and I stick to using Tube trains, which at least have a map that I can more or less follow. So whoever runs the buses, if they are watching this, please come up with a nicely labelled map. They will probably say they do have one, but anyway, Martyn, were there other issues that you found difficult?

Martyn Day: Just the general ones that Jess has already alluded to. You first arrive, and, in similar circumstances, I had not even been in London for at least a decade prior to my election, and the last time I had been in the Commons I was nine years old and a guest of Tam Dalyell when he was Member for West Lothian, so I had no knowledge of the layout of the place or the procedures other than the odd clip you watch on TV and the BBC documentaries that they did before the election, which were fascinating.



Jess Phillips: Terrifying.

Martyn Day: I watched them again in the summer recess and they made a lot more sense to me than they did the first time round.

So the first thing is complete bamboozlement with the geography, and then you have a second tier of bamboozlement. Bear in mind this would be bamboozling for anyone arriving in a fair state of mental and physical health. After an election campaign you are shattered, so you have the fatigue, you have a confused geography, both of London itself and Parliament in particular—

Q32 **Michael Fabricant:** I guess you both thought you could go on holiday immediately afterwards.

Martyn Day: I would have liked to. In previous incarnations, where I have been an election agent, I have disappeared for a fortnight afterwards, and of course I did not do that. So I was particularly tired; you had the confusing geography; and then you had the confusing language and terminology that is used in Parliament, which is not everyday English, so it adds to the confusion and the education you have to pick up.

Q33 **Michael Fabricant:** Are there any things that, with the benefit of hindsight, you would like to have been told about that you did not get told about, both of you?

Martyn Day: It is different for different people. I came from a local government background so I had dealt with constituents before, but the types of cases we were starting to get were quite different. In the first fortnight you start to get visa cases; I had never dealt with a visa case. So we could have benefited from having a point of contact to assist us with guidance on how to deal with new casework. New Members who came in without any government experience would really have benefited from that as well, because you were sitting with a list of hotlines—and I was the most experienced caseworker, but I didn't have an office until September—and you were phoning up and just asking.

Jess Phillips: Some information about single points of contact, for example at the Home Office, would have been incredibly useful. I came from a background of being an advocacy worker, so I was able to deal straight away with very vulnerable cases that came in. However, who exactly you should contact isn't made particularly clear, and what you don't want to do is constantly go to all of your colleagues and say, "Can I just ask you this?" Even though if anyone did it to me I would not mind, you do feel like you don't want to be bothering people, so we need some better information about exactly who those contacts are. I suppose it depends on different constituencies, because some people will still never have had to deal with a Home Office visa case, whereas I had 40 waiting for me on my desk when I arrived.

Q34 **Michael Fabricant:** I am not sure that Members of Parliament would



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want to go but, given the information overload in those first few days, do you think that the Whips or the House authorities should do a follow-up induction programme a few weeks later? Or do you think MPs would then be so bogged under with all the casework they would not be able to go or would not want to go anyway?

Jess Phillips: It is difficult, because MPs do not turn up for anything unless they really have to, do they? I say that now, a year and a half down the line, as opposed to a few weeks after I got here when I still didn't know where half the things were; I found a room the other day that I had never been in. I would probably have appreciated it, because there were still lots of unanswered questions. Things like how who can speak in the Chamber is prioritised; it seems like a complete and utter mystery, as if it is being invented on the spot. I sat in the Chamber for hours and hours and hours, when I should not necessarily have done, and then never got to speak. It is important to do that when you are first here, but afterwards it would have been good to touch base to see which gaps you still have. I probably would have gone along.

Michael Fabricant: Console yourself, by the way, that some of the best speeches you have ever made were the ones you have never made.

Jess Phillips: Yes, I get my voice heard, I think it is safe to say.

Q35 **Michael Fabricant:** Can I ask Myfanwy, from the buddying point of view, how did you find it as a buddy?

Myfanwy Barrett: I really enjoyed it; that is the main thing I will say. I was very happy to volunteer to do it because I thought it would fun to be part of those first few days after the election. Although in my role I do have contact with MPs in the domestic Committees in particular, and with the pension trustees, this enabled me to get a completely different perspective on what it is like to be an MP, to be elected, and what some of the challenges are. I welcomed the opportunity, and I think nearly all the staff who took part would say the same thing—that it was a valuable opportunity to see everything from the MPs' points of view.

Also, it was very levelling, because everybody who volunteered was a buddy and it did not matter what your day job was. I did not even tell Jess quite what my job was, because I wanted to focus on what she needed out of it and I think that was really effective, too. In terms of how we respond to MPs as our customers in the future and how we energise staff, it was a really valuable experience.

Q36 **Michael Fabricant:** Finally, is there anything different that you would do next time round?

Myfanwy Barrett: I might tell the person where the post room is. I am interested to hear some of the observations. It is quite a difficult balance, how much information you provide and how little. The staff who volunteered had quite a lot of training so that we could answer questions about all the services. We did not have to know it all inside out, but we



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had to be able to point people in the right direction. We did a tour ourselves so that we could find our way round, to show people, and had customer service-type training. All of that paid off. John Benger mentioned earlier that we had a rehearsal of the reception area with pretend MPs before you got here. That really paid off, because it ironed out quite a lot of issues.

One of the first things we did was to give the MPs a big folder, in a bag, and I wonder if that was really used or if that was just too much paper and whether just asking us questions was easier.

Martyn Day: Not just those things, but all the things we got in the various inductions and things—I found it was just a bit too much all in one go. But I did find time to read through it during the first summer recess when I was starting to go back and look for things. It was handy to have for signposting, but at the time we did not have enough time to go through it in detail.

Donald Grant: I found it a very rewarding experience. I had two Members. I was a Principal Engineer in the Estates Department at the time, not normally a Member-facing Department. There were not very many people from that Department either, because it was our busy time of year, getting offices and things ready, but I managed to spend the time. It was about six months' worth of training beforehand, which was helpful, not just for me but for other colleagues who were not in Member-facing areas, because there are so many different areas of the House that you do not come into contact with. That helped give me the training that we would never ordinarily have had, and if that could be built on for the next election, it would improve the service as well.

Q37 **Michael Fabricant:** Donald, were you chosen to look after Martyn because you were also Scottish?

Donald Grant: No, the polls were not known at that time.

Chair: There is one thing the buddies did not have to do. I found the first time I walked into the Chamber it was tiny, until I had to stand up, especially at PMQs, and then it is huge and it is packed and everybody is looking; yes? Yes, that's heart-warming to hear.

Q38 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** To the two buddies: in terms of your training, was there anything that, with hindsight, you wish you had been told about?

Donald Grant: It is difficult to say, I think, the things we were not told about. We had contacts and we knew who to go to, and there was always the option to ask fellow buddies as well, because they had set us up into groups to integrate with other buddies. It would be difficult to fault the training we had. There was an awful lot of it.

Q39 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** As the buddies buddied up, what were the bits you were asking each other about?



Donald Grant: I am trying to think of specific examples but it was mostly in terms of expenses and setting up accounts, for example. I phoned somebody in accounts and said, "Where is the link for that on the internet?" and I was able to get it. Private Members' Bills, the ballots, those were the other ones that I phoned somebody up to ask, "Where is that, again?" Small things where you knew you had had some training about it but you could not quite remember it or you had not been trained on that specific item. But I don't think I could fault the training. It was certainly an awful lot of it, which we would never have received if it had not been for the buddy scheme.

Q40 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Myfanwy, what was your experience?

Myfanwy Barrett: The premise of the training was that we did not necessarily have to answer all the questions but we had to know where to get the answer from. As Donald said, we knew who to ask if something came up. We were put into these sub-groups of buddies and we all had our mobile phone numbers and a group on WhatsApp and so on. We had an IT person in our group, which was really helpful. If any IT things came up, we could ask him for a bit more help. All that worked really effectively.

Over the weeks after the election, we did try to give further information through the buddies. We did try a bit later to point to some of the training that was available from the procedural teams, and some of the things that were available for the Member's staff. We were asked to go every few weeks and give an update, or give some extra information, one of which was about private Members' Bills when the ballot came round. I think that was quite helpful because, when you have thousands of emails, if you at least could see it was from the buddy you might think, "Oh, well, I'll have a quick look at that".

Q41 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** Presumably you both would do it again.

Myfanwy Barrett: I would.

Donald Grant: Yes.

Q42 **Ms Gisela Stuart:** You still had a day job to do and, as you were buddying two new MPs, how did you juggle that?

Donald Grant: Our Department has a lot of input into the new Members and the elections as well, particularly in terms of the offices, once the Whips let our section know who is going where; there is a lot of work there so everybody is focused on Members anyway. If you said, "I can't go to this meeting because of something to do with a Member", then it was not an issue, and the whole buddy scheme had been well-publicised in advance anyway. Everybody was behind it and it was good that we had the understanding of the people with us, behind us and above us.

Ms Gisela Stuart: What about the other two?



Myfanwy Barrett: It helped that we knew when the election was going to be, so we had plenty of notice about when the training was, when the new Members' reception area was going to be open and about the briefing in the Chamber. I had plenty of time to block all that time out in my diary. After that, it was not so much a time commitment; it was just being responsive. If Jess sent me a text or an email, I was keeping an eye out for things so I could respond quickly, or go and rescue her if she got lost. It wasn't a big time commitment after that; it was just being available to answer a question.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Martyn?

Martyn Day: Obviously Donald was an absolutely excellent source of information and confidence for me in my early days. But when I approached him I didn't have my staff, and we probably stretched it a bit beyond the normal buddying process, because when eventually I did have staff and an office, my staff were also getting in touch with Donald for advice and guidance. Maybe for the future we need some kind of buddying for new staff for new MPs, because not only was I a complete rookie but so was my entire team that was appointed around me.

Q43 **Michael Fabricant:** Do you think two was an optimum number to buddy with, or you think it would have worked better with one, or does it not make any difference? Could you have managed three equally well?

Myfanwy Barrett: Two was fine, because of the logistics of going round; we went round the new Members' reception centre, which took an hour and a half or so, then we went on the tour; then we went to find the locker; then we were getting information during the day, saying in Jess's case, "There is a Labour Party meeting at this time in this room. Can you make sure your Member gets there in time?" We were doing that as well. Working with Jess and another Member on the day was fine. I could accommodate that. I would not have been able to have three in one day, because of the logistics of getting round all the stops at the Members' centre and doing the tour.

Q44 **Michael Fabricant:** But then you were servicing—if that is the word—or buddying Jess and the other mysterious MP, who we don't know—

Myfanwy Barrett: It was Edward Argar; not mysterious.

Michael Fabricant: Right. Yes, you were looking after Edward Argar and Jess and servicing them, in the sense that they could email you with questions. How long did that go on for?

Jess Phillips: I still do it sometimes.

Myfanwy Barrett: Yes, sometimes; but two or three weeks, mainly. Gradually, as they found their way round and found out what they needed to do, it just fizzled out a bit. But I did have contact with some of the staff in Jess's office.

Q45 **Michael Fabricant:** This is for both Myfanwy and Donald: if you had had



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three—given what you have said about the reception thing on the first day—could you have handled three, or would that have been just too much? Again, was it a strain, dealing with two people and would you have preferred one?

Myfanwy Barrett: I was very happy to work with two because you got a bit of a different perspective. Edward had been a researcher, so he knew the geography of the Palace quite well, which was different from somebody like Jess who—

Q46 **Michael Fabricant:** Was it organised like that or just good fortune?

Myfanwy Barrett: No, it was chance. It was like a taxi rank; you just stood at the front of the queue and took the next person who came along with you. It was not prearranged. But I think two is enough, if they are all going to arrive on the same day.

Q47 **Michael Fabricant:** Donald, do you agree?

Donald Grant: For the ongoing relationship—which is certainly encouraged and has happened with both Martyn and my other Member, Anna Turley for Redcar—to not impact on the day job, the earlier question, I think two is probably an optimum number, for me anyway.

Q48 **Chair:** An additional thing you both mentioned, or three of you have mentioned, was the fact that it is ongoing, if needed. If you get in a real panic, you send her a text. I reckon that is good. You mentioned staff coming in as well. Did any of your staff contact the buddy as well?

Jess Phillips: Yes. Certainly in the early days, when I was worried about my staff for any reason, that they might not know something. Although the person I employed here in Parliament had worked in Parliament for a long time. They have their own networks in this place, don't they, all gossiping with each other? When I am concerned about their wellbeing or I did not know where to go—because it is an unusual set-up, for somebody who has employed lots of staff in the past, the lack of HR links in this place is an unusual thing—I got in touch with Myfanwy about support for my staff.

There has always been somewhere you could go and here you are just you in this building and you are your own business, which is unusual. So, that was afterwards. Then I got to know Myfanwy and, because of our own areas of interest that we talked about as we got to know each other, I will keep in touch with her about those things.

One of the things I think is really good about it is that interface between MPs and the people who work here because while it is levelling for you, as you said, Myfanwy, it is incredibly levelling to remind Members of the masses that goes on in here that you do not realise is happening; all these different Departments. You were saying that you were an engineer. Obviously there are engineers here. It is a big building. But you forget that those things are going on and you can become very full of your own



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self-importance in this place. That is an incredibly levelling factor and it is a good thing.

Q49 **Chair:** We should bring in the people from They Work for You so they can understand that just because you are not sitting there, you are everywhere else.

Jess Phillips: Also, I would suggest that some of the people from IPSA should have to spend some time with Members of Parliament, because I think sometimes we are asked to do things that would never be tolerated in a normal working environment. It is not like I used to work for a big, rich company that could relocate people. I used to work for a charity, and we still would not have expected our staff to have to do some of things that are expected by IPSA. It would be interesting for them to come and have to do my daily commute with me, saying goodbye to my children.

Q50 **Chair:** Did you respond to their questionnaire?

Jess Phillips: I think the Labour Party has done a joint response but I think I did also do a response because, especially being a mother of young children, I would like them to come and have to spend some time with me. Anyway, that is a different issue.

Chair: Thank you very much. This has been quite fascinating. We will conclude. I am very grateful.