

What is involved in working at The Scottish Parliament

“I was Frida in Abba... now I take visitors round the Parliament”

Caroline Vevers secured a permanent post as a Visitor Services Officer in April 2022.

As a relative new employee, she shared her reflections on working at Holyrood, and why her years singing in an Abba tribute show is useful in her current role and talked about the value her team bring to the national parliament.

Caroline said: “I have a background in the music industry where I was a professional vocalist for 20 years travelling across the UK and Europe. I performed in bands and at discos and latterly was Frida in an Abba tribute show. My favourite song was Take a Chance on Me. Then the children came along and I moved into events management.

“I first joined The Scottish Parliament in December 2018 on temporary contracts in Events and Exhibitions and then in Visitor Services. When lockdown hit, like all of the Visitor Services team, I worked from home on a special project for a time and then moved to a role at The Scottish Government. In April as we eased out of lockdown and the Parliament prepared to open again to the public, I was able to return to a permanent job as a Visitor Service Officer. That was what I really wanted to do and was delighted to get the opportunity.”

This is a very public-facing role and Caroline explained that’s what she enjoys, possibly because of her background as a performer.

She said: "In Visitor Services we're the second face people see when they come to the Parliament, the first being our colleagues in security.

"It's a very varied job. We welcome thousands of people every year. We sign them in if they are going to a committee or meeting with MSPs, attending a cross-party group or an event. We also welcome members of the public who are coming for a visit, whether they're taking a guided tour, a self-guided tour, or going to one of our ten-minute talks. We lead the tours around the building which I really enjoy doing. Then we run the Scottish Parliament gift shop and the new online gift shop and we deal with the email inquiries such as requests for tickets to the Parliament chamber and committees or events. There are around 10 or 12 of us working on a rota basis." □□
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Caroline says that she thinks it is a really important part of the Parliament. She continued: "Often people are genuinely surprised they can come into the Parliament, get a guided tour and see parts of the building such as the Garden Lobby and the Chamber. They're even more surprised to learn it's free. I think that openness and accessibility to people is what the Scottish Parliament is all about and I'm proud to be part of it."

She said that the interaction with the public is what she really enjoys, although admits it does bring challenges too. Caroline explained: "We have to remain neutral in our role but we'll sometimes get people asking us questions about politics or current issues. You have to learn to deal with that neutrally and politely.

"I also really enjoy doing the tour itself which takes about 45 minutes and covers everything from the workings of the parliament and the architecture of the building to the history of the area. The Enric Miralles design has lots of features to highlight such as the inscriptions and swirls carved into the

roof and the stylised cross in the public entrance area.

“A real highlight is when you take people into the Chamber and on to the floor of the Chamber. We have to learn the set pieces of information and you get a lot of support to do that but then of course you refine it and put your own flavour into it. I like to keep mine light and chatty with a touch of humour. I’m sure you could do the same tour with a number of my colleagues and find we all do it slightly differently.”

Caroline has only worked in her role for around seven months but enjoys the “great physical environment” which she works in. She said: “I really appreciate the way information is shared with us, and the support available. Since becoming a permanent staff member I really feel supported. Just one example is I needed new glasses and was able to take advantage of the staff benefit where I could get a voucher for money off.

“It’s also a great thing to be part of. One of the big highlights for me of working as a temporary member of staff here was the 20th anniversary of the Parliament which was attended by Her late Majesty the Queen. The whole run-up to that and the day itself was just so memorable.”

And when she is not working Caroline lives in East Lothian and although she has four older children they have all left home and are “doing their own thing” now.

She said: “We have eight chickens which means a lot of eggs, so I often bring some in for my colleagues. They donate money in return for the eggs which were giving to the Trussell Trust to help with local food banks.”



Caroline Vevers