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What were you doing before you began your internship?

Lucy: I was studying for my master's degree at the University of Edinburgh.

Caitlin: Before my internship began I had just completed a MSc in Environment and Development at The University of Edinburgh.

Hannah: I had just completed my Master of Science in International Marine Science at Heriot-Watt University (2020/21).

Why did you apply to do an internship at Marine Scotland that was part funded by MASTS with the Bright Green Placement Programme?

Lucy: My main interests lie in marine science and policy. I applied to undertake an internship with Marine Scotland to expand on the knowledge I gained at University and to gain practical experience in marine policy. I also have a particular interest in marine benthic ecosystems and spatial management of the marine space, and so an internship which involved work on both Scotland's marine protected areas and blue carbon research seemed perfect for me.

Caitlin: I left University with a keen interest in marine policy and conservation, so this internship with Marine Scotland presented an amazing opportunity to gain first-hand experience of policy development at the heart of marine planning in the Scottish Government. I wanted to utilise the skills I had developed during my MSc and put them into practice by working on key policy documentation, whilst extending my knowledge and experience of marine-related issues. Being able to pursue this within a professional team was a huge learning opportunity. Empowering local communities in marine planning was a key theme throughout my dissertation, so the experience of working in a unit that is focused on delivering this was an exciting opportunity.

Hannah: There were two main things that appealed to me about this internship – the topic and the opportunity to work in Government. It was always my goal to use my Masters degree to work in the field of sustainable development, where nature and people are valued as highly as economic prosperity, so being able to contribute to Scotland’s blue economy strategy while learning more about what’s happening internationally seemed like an interesting and useful opportunity to kick-start my career in this field. Having never worked in Government, I was interested to learn about

how we go from theory and evidence to implementation and action, so I thought the opportunity to learn first-hand about how we do this in a way that impacts all of society would be a really beneficial experience.

Have you had any interaction/direct involvement with members of the wider MASTS community during your internship?

Lucy: Yes, I met some of the MASTS community whilst helping out at the Blue Carbon; Beyond the Inventory Conference.

Caitlin: I attended the two-day conference 'Blue Carbon: Beyond the Inventory' in Edinburgh where I had the opportunity to network with those who were involved with I and I was able to learn more about their valuable work.

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Hannah: Yes, during my internship I had a fantastic opportunity to help organise the international conference 'Blue Carbon: Beyond the Inventory', which was hosted by the Scottish Blue Carbon Forum in collaboration with the Scottish Government and University of St. Andrews. In doing so, I worked with some of the MASTS team to ensure the online event ran smoothly and had the opportunity to meet some of the MASTS executive team and early career researchers.

What are some of the responsibilities you have in your internship?

Lucy: My primary responsibility was to undertake a research project and write a report based on the blue carbon within Scotland's marine protected areas, and the level of protection they are offered through fisheries management measures. I was also involved in drafting responses for parliamentary questions and assisting with stakeholder meetings, including writing minutes.

Caitlin: Throughout my Internship, I have been assisting in the development and delivery of policies relating to the transfer and delegation of management of Scottish Crown Estate assets to a local level. These policies aim to empower communities in local decision-making whilst adhering to the visions and objectives outlined in the Scottish Crown Estate strategic management plan. In specific, my responsibilities have been to develop an overall paper on delegations. I followed this by creating a template paper of what a delegation agreement will look like. I also created a provisional timeline of negotiations, as well as a table outlining the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the delegation process. This will help to facilitate negotiations between Crown Estate Scotland and local Scottish communities/organisations. Outside of these main responsibilities I participate in weekly tasks with my team, usually contributing over a screen sharing platform.

Hannah: The focus of my internship was to conduct a review of international literature on the topic of sustainable ocean-based economies, or the 'blue economy', and use this to feed into the development of Scotland's blue economy approach. My research has been self-directed, though I have also been involved in regular team meetings to discuss the blue economy approach and to scope out next steps. As my internship started a month before COP26, I spent the first half of my internship mostly focussed on helping to organise and host various COP26 outreach events, including a science expo at Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, school visits to the Marine Protection Vessel Jura (MPV Jura), and the blue carbon conference. The run up to COP26 was incredibly busy for my team, so I was given quite a lot of responsibility from the get-go, which I found to be a fantastic opportunity to network and apply my knowledge of the marine environment, while contributing to the team.

What experiences or new skills have you gained from your internship?

Lucy: Whilst undertaking the research project I built on a number of skills including using GIS, scientific report writing, and presentational skills through presenting my research to a wider audience within Marine Scotland. Attending stakeholder meetings was a new experience for me, and has given me a great insight into stakeholder engagement in practice, developing my understanding of the most effective tools and methods for engaging with stakeholders productively.

Caitlin: My internship has allowed me opportunities to gain first-hand experience of policy development at the heart of marine planning in government. This was an experience that was new to me having come straight from university. Throughout the internship, I have been able to participate in a number of training events, courses, and seminars, which have built upon my skills gained in university. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to showcase my work in a presentation to senior management within Marine Scotland, expanding on my communication and interpersonal skills. I have now had the experience of working collaboratively with a team that welcomes my contribution, giving me the ability to go forward in my career with confidence in my ideas.

Hannah: This internship has been my first experience working in Government, so in terms of what new experiences I've had... everything! I think one of the most rewarding aspects of this internship for me has been applying the skills I already have and the knowledge I recently gained in my Masters degree to a field that I truly care about. Prior to this internship, I had worked in various industries and businesses, so I had a fairly wide and applicable skillset, but this internship has helped me to challenge and grow my knowledge of sustainable development, marine user interactions, nature-based solutions, etc., and to apply it in a real world context.

Do you feel that you know more about MASTS and Scotland's marine science community because of your internship?

Lucy: Yes. I have developed a better understanding of the central role that MASTS plays in the marine science community in Scotland, particularly through attending the blue carbon conference where MASTS has a big presence. I have also gained a broader understanding of how Marine Science organisations in Scotland and the UK interact, for example how organisations such as NatureScot and JNCC provide advice to Marine Scotland for inshore and offshore work respectively.

Caitlin: I have learned a lot during my internship about Scotland's marine science community. I have always been encouraged by my team to organise meetings with colleagues from different departments, for example, those working in Marine conservation, and learn more about what they do, and how this affects marine policy. The crossover between marine science and policy is something that I am very interested in and hope to expand my knowledge of this by extending my internship. Additionally, after having networked with those who work with I during my internship at the Blue Carbon conference, and actively researching more about the organisation, I do feel that I have an understanding and value the important work I has in the marine science community.

Hannah: My knowledge of Scotland's marine science community has grown a lot during this internship and in particular I've gained a better understanding of how all the different institutions, organisations, businesses, Government, etc. work together. I've taken time during my internship to reach out to different people working across Marine Scotland, NatureScot, and in various NGOs, which has helped me to build this understanding and has given me a deeper insight into the different roles of each sector.

Why did you accept the internship extension?

Lucy: I learnt a lot during my first three months with Marine Scotland, and had really enjoyed my time there. The internship extension was a great opportunity to expand on some of the work I was undertaking there and to continue to learn as much as possible from my colleagues in the biodiversity team before leaving.

Caitlin: Throughout my initial 3 months at Marine Scotland, I have had such fantastic opportunities to learn from my team and the many training events, seminars, and courses that Marine Scotland has provided. With every piece of work I presented to my team, I always have received valuable constructive feedback, gaining support and expertise whilst being encouraged to develop my ideas. I'm looking forward to learning more from my colleagues and continuing with my contribution to the ongoing work within the team. I'm keen to remain involved and track the progress of the policy documents we have developed and the impact our work has towards achieving Scotland's sustainable development goals as outlined in the National Performance Framework.

My three months so far have had a massive impact on me personally and my own learning. I'm excited to carry on with the internship and welcome the new opportunities it will bring!

Hannah: I felt that the first three months of my internship were a fantastic primer for working in Marine Scotland and having integrated into a really nice team, I am delighted I can continue my placement for longer. The work I'm involved in is focussed on sustainable development and how we can help nature and people thrive, which is exactly the area of work I'm interested in, so it's exciting to be a part of these developments that will ultimately help Scotland progress towards achieving a just transition to net zero.

What would you advise someone who was thinking about doing an internship?

Lucy: Taking on a paid internship such as this after finishing your studies is a great entryway into the marine science community. For me, this internship has been pivotal in gaining the professional experience required to be accepted into full time employment in the area that I am interested in. I would say when on an internship to take every learning opportunity and to connect with as many people as you can, even over a coffee on zoom. The marine science community in Scotland is so interconnected, and there is such a great range of expertise, you are bound to come across interesting conversations and new opportunities all the time.

Caitlin: I would fully encourage anyone with an interest in marine-related issues to apply for an internship. For me, it has been an essential learning experience in understanding the process of policy implementation in government. I consider this to be a valuable insight for anyone with an interest in sustainable marine development. Even if you are wanting to do more conservation work than policy- having an understanding of the policies that drive environmental changes is highly beneficial. Additionally, the breadth of opportunities and experiences that I have had in my internship is something I think every graduate would benefit from.

Hannah: My experience is likely to be unique to my own life situation, so it's difficult to give anyone else advice, but I would simply say that if you like the sound of the internship, then apply. I think working in Government is a unique experience that is likely to be useful to any future marine-related career, as there will always be connections to Government, from the policies and legislation to funding. I think you never know what experiences will come your way either – I certainly hadn't anticipated having so much involvement in COP26 events, which turned out to be the highlight of my internship – so I think it's always worth giving it a shot and having 3 months of new experiences.