

Conservative Research Department

24 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HX Telephone 01-930 1471

Chairman: ANGUS MAUDE, TD, MP
Director: CHRISTOPHER PATTEN

SECRET AND PERSONAL

CFP/RME

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MRS. THATCHER

THE FUTURE OF THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

1. I hope I am not presuming on the inclinations of the people of Bath, but it is likely that you will need to replace me shortly and I thought therefore that I should write to you before the election about the future of the Research Department. I am not copying this note to anyone else.
2. I should like to say, first of all, how much I have enjoyed the job of running the Department. It must be one of the most interesting jobs in politics and - for someone of my age - one of the most challenging and responsible. I am particularly grateful that you kept me here when you became Leader, that you have allowed me to get on with the work without interference, and that you have given both myself and the Department such consistent, warm and open support. For my part, the most rewarding work has been "restocking" the Department. Almost three-quarters of the officers have come within the last four years. There have undoubtedly been some mistakes in recruiting, but I am pleased that we now have in the team people like Michael Portillo, Nick True, George Cardona, Peter Cropper, Keith Britto, Bidy Passmore, Michael Fallon, Michael Dobbs, Robin Harris, Rob Shepherd, Bruce Anderson, Sandy Walker and several others, in addition to the splendid long term stalwarts like Charles Bellairs and Tony Greenland and the more recent stalwarts like Anne Bulloch and John Houston. Of course, there are failings in the Department. There are still too many elements of what John Wyndham, twenty years ago, called "a sort of Bohemian efficiency" which it is difficult to eradicate without totally changing the nature of the place. Yet the Department's standards have certainly risen (as is shown for example by our publications), and even where we have not always reached the highest standards, the shortfall has usually been compensated for by enthusiasm and hard work elsewhere. These last two qualities are especially in evidence at the moment.

3. This is not meant to be a piece of self-advertisement. I have had some luck and a great deal of quiet and valuable support from inside and outside the Department. I am also keenly aware that I have not had as much time and enthusiasm for the job since I became a candidate as I did before. This job does demand total dedication and it is difficult to summon up the extra effort, enthusiasm and above all time required in taking on a winnable constituency for the first time (away from London) and running at the same time a Department as big and as dependent on personal contact in its working behaviour as this one always should be. This is a factor which you may wish to take into account when you come to choose my successor.

4. For the election campaign itself I am sure that Adam Ridley will do the job extremely well. We are as fully prepared as we can be and Adam bears much of the credit for this. I would have found it difficult to run the Department without his help. His style is a little different from mine but he should get the best from people here not least because they rightly admire his intelligence and ability. If we do not get a clear-cut victory, it would obviously be sensible to leave Adam in command for the time being. However, I do not expect this to happen.

5. The more likely outcome is that you will be at No.10 and Adam will be somewhere in the machine where he will have an invaluable grasp of the political as well as the civil service network and will also match your confidence in him with total dedication to your interests. He is a strikingly and intelligently loyal man.

6. That leaves the question of who should run the Research Department in these circumstances. I feel very strongly that it would be a grave mistake to run the Research Department down as far and as fast as happened from 1970-74. That created numerous problems when we went into opposition. It is also unhelpful to downgrade the political importance of the Department as happened in that period. For that reason, I believe that the Chairman should be a member of the Cabinet. This was the position from 1951-64, but not from 1970-74. There is also a case, given the pressures on a Cabinet Minister, for appointing a Deputy Chairman drawn from the ranks of junior ministers or from among the more able, experienced backbenchers who are probably going to be part of your team in the future. I am thinking of people like John McGregor, John Cope, Tony Newton and so on who know how the Department works, have some parliamentary experience and can provide support for the

Department and its Director, contact with the House and a regular injection of fresh ideas. It might be an idea to give the post to a suitable PPS to one of the more important Ministers, like the Chancellor or Home Secretary or even to give it to one of your own PPS's in government. The sort of heavy-weight political control that I am suggesting would enormously buttress the Department, provide a strong overall control if you appointed a young Director, and ensure that you had a good team here in what continues to be in government an important job.

7. There is no obvious candidate here for the post of Director which is partly the result of having to recruit so many young graduates since 1974. But there is much to be said for having someone as Director who knows how the Department works. One possible candidate would be Dermot Gleeson who will be returning to the Department, whatever happens, at the end of the year. He has given his notice to Christopher Tugendhat feeling - correctly in my view - that his job in Brussels is really a two-year stint. You will be able to judge him for yourself since he will be doing the Press Conference Briefing in the election, and it will really be up to him to show what he can do. I would only say that he is the best all-rounder that I have recruited. He is diligent, good on paper and with people, practical and tough. By all accounts he has performed extremely well in Brussels and his knowledge of the Community would be useful since one of the first jobs for the Department after the election will be to take a leading role in the Direct Elections campaign. Against him is that he is slightly short of experience, though he would be about the same age as I was when I took over. However, I think it may be a young man's job, and certainly older colleagues like Charles Bellairs and Tony Greenland are great admirers of Dermot and would, I am convinced, be happy to work with him. Anyway, you will have your own views about his abilities after the election and you may also have some other candidates in mind. But without putting in too strong a 'plug' for him, I thought that I should mention his name as one possible candidate.

8. So far as the rest of the Department is concerned, quite a few people will inevitably leave after the election. I suppose that some will be in the running for such jobs as political secretaries as you think need to be filled in Departments, and others will want to continue their careers elsewhere on slightly sounder financial foundations. My successor will have to do quite a lot of recruiting. The Department could and should be smaller in government but the quality should be kept high and this raises the painful

subject of money. Even after the reasonable increases in the last couple of years we still pay able people remarkably little. Good people will be increasingly difficult to hold unless they are paid better in the long term. They should really be paid in line with the civil service. I hope this can be borne in mind and that, even if the strength of the Department is cut down after the election, the budget is not so heavily reduced as to make it impossible to offer reasonable salaries and prospects. It is worth remembering that my successor will be competing in the market against the ludicrously high salaries that will be offered by members of the European Parliament to research assistants.

9. I could say a great deal more about the operation of the Research Department in government but it is obviously not appropriate when there are other more important things on our minds. I trust you will not regard this minute as a needless distraction from the really big job in hand and that you will not think it is presumptuous of me to raise these questions with you without going through the "proper channels". I thought that I would not be doing my job if I did not add this to the pile of things in your post-election pending tray. Needless to say, if you want to talk to me at any time about this, when you are free of weightier considerations, or if you want any other help I will always be happy to do anything I can. You deserve a good Research Department, and I am sure that whoever takes over from me will enjoy working for you in trying to create one as much as I have.



CHRIS PATTEN

P.S. I've set in hand the "Speaker's Notes".