



*Confidential*  
MR WHITMORE  
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HW

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 March 1982

Dear Steve

Office Technology in Private Offices

I spoke to you sometime ago about the questionnaire attached to Eileen Conn's circular letter of 15 February. I told you that I did not think the circular was appropriate to this office. Instead I offered to let you have a general description of work here. I am sorry to miss the deadline.

You will find two Annexes attached. The first attempts to answer the questions in your questionnaire. The second gives a more general description of the staffing and work of this office. I hope you will find them useful. If you have any questions about them, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

In this letter, I would like to set out my views on how new office technology might benefit this office; but before doing so, I should like to make one general remark, to explain why I feel that your questionnaire is not appropriate to us. For Private Offices throughout Whitehall, the main source of advice for the Minister is the department and its officials. For the Prime Minister, the main sources of advice are other Ministers, and perhaps the Cabinet Secretary, who advises the Prime Minister in his or her role as Chairman of the Cabinet and its most important Committees. This means that the staffing and organisation of work in this office, as well as its lines of communication, are in many respects entirely different from the practice in other Private Offices.

That said, I think there are three areas in which office technology might help us.

a) You will see from the attached papers that various sections of this office hold very large records. The fast retrieval of information is in fact crucial to the running of this office, especially in the Private Office, and in the Correspondence Section. You are already aware of the study of Correspondence Section by the CCTA. It is possible that office technology could be of help in improving information retrieval in sections such as the Garden Rooms and Confidential Filing, as well as Honours and Appointments Sections.

/ b)

b) This office issues a large number of fairly routine letters: standard acknowledgements to members of the public and to Members of Parliament, standard letters commissioning draft replies or advice from departments, and standard replies to the many letters we can receive on particular issues of current concern. There is also a certain amount of repetitive typing within the building: daily, weekly and annual diaries; guest lists, which can need two or three revisions; itineraries for regional and overseas travel; speeches and statements etc. Some of these tasks might be performed by an extension of the system to be introduced into Correspondence Section. Some of them might also justify the introduction of at least one word processor into this office.

c) I would say that the majority of the telephone calls made by this office are to the Private Offices of other departments. The present switchboard and facilities work extremely well. But I am not fully up to date with the latest in telephone technology. There may be scope for some improvements here, although I have no criticism of the existing system, and would not rate this as a priority. The number of calls made between the various sections of this office is relatively small. There is an internal telephone system, which is not at all reliable. There may be a case for its replacement.

As I say if you would like to follow up this letter with a meeting, I would be happy to arrange one.

*Johns ever*  
*Willie Rickett*

Steve Mumby, Esq.,  
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency

a) The staffing of the office and its priorities: attached is a description of the functions of this office and the members of its staff. It is very difficult to rank these functions in order of importance. Perhaps the functions which are of most immediate concern to the Prime Minister are: ensuring that she is properly briefed for meetings with her Ministerial colleagues and for her twice weekly appearances in Parliament; ensuring that she is properly briefed for Cabinet meetings, and for the meetings of other Cabinet Committees of which she is Chairman; ensuring that she is generally aware of current concerns within Government and without, and in particular ensuring that she is aware of matters currently the subject of inter-ministerial correspondence; ensuring that her diary is properly organised, and ensuring that correspondence with Members of Parliament, and members of the public is properly dealt with.

b) Source of correspondence: most correspondence with this office comes from members of the public, outside bodies, and from MPs. The Prime Minister receives approximately 3,000 letters a week. About 50 or so come from MPs. But more important, perhaps, is the inter-ministerial correspondence that is copied to the Prime Minister, and the submissions that Ministers make to her. It is hard to say how many of these papers we receive a week, or how many are seen by the Prime Minister. Also very important is the briefing from the Cabinet Secretary for the Prime Minister in her role as Chairman of Cabinet and other Cabinet Committees. Relatively speaking there is very little paper generated within the office. Constituency mail is dealt with by the Prime Minister's constituency secretary, who is not part of the permanent staff of the office.

c) Urgency of incoming correspondence: formally speaking, all the incoming correspondence is treated as urgent. The aim is that no paper should remain in the Private Office for more than 24 hours. Obviously there are some long-running issues which generate correspondence that has to be treated more slowly, but relatively little of this is dealt with in the Private Office; it is more likely to

/ be the responsibility

be the responsibility of other sections of the office (see Annex B).

d) Action taken on incoming papers: most letters from Members of Parliament and at least half the letters from members of the public are referred to other Government departments for action or advice. A record of where they are sent is kept here. Ministerial submissions to the Prime Minister, copies of important letters between Ministers, and briefs from the Cabinet Office, go to the Prime Minister. Her decisions are communicated to departments on the telephone, and in writing. Less important papers may be noted and filed. Records are kept of almost all the incoming correspondence in one form or another.

e) Filing: most incoming correspondence is kept on paper files, cross-referenced in detail, as in the Registries of most departments. Unlike the Private Offices in other departments, it is not possible for this office to refer papers to "the department" for filing. Consequently, large records are held in this office. As you will see from Annex B, the largest sets of files are kept in Honours and Appointments Sections, the Confidential Filing Section, the Garden Rooms, and the Correspondence Section.

f) Telephone Communication: the various parts of this office make a very heavy use of the telephone. Most calls from the Private Office, the Garden Rooms, and the Confidential Filing Section, are to the Private Offices of other departments. Honours and Appointments Sections may be in more frequent communication with Buckingham Palace than the rest of this office, but they also have to make a large number of calls to other Private Offices. The Parliamentary Questions Section deals largely with other Parliamentary Clerks, with the offices of the Leader of the House and of the Chief Whip, and with the House authorities. The Press Office communicate largely with the Press Offices of other departments and with journalists working in television, radio and newspapers. The Political Office may deal fairly frequently with the party organisation, in this case the various offices of the Conservative Party Central Office. Very few calls are taken directly from members of the public, except from those involved in the arranging of Prime Ministerial engagements, or who have particular queries about correspondence (the latter are dealt with largely by the Correspondence Section).

g) Outgoing correspondence

g) Outgoing correspondence: the vast majority of outgoing correspondence from this office is addressed to members of the public and to Members of Parliament. Apart from this, remarks I have made about telephonic communication also apply in general to outgoing correspondence. Letters generated within the Private Office, for instance, will almost all be directed to the Private Offices of other departments. There is some internal correspondence between, say, the Political Office and the Private Office, or between the Policy Unit and the Private Office, but this traffic is not as heavy as the correspondence with other Private Offices.

h) Workload: this office is reasonably well staffed, and we experience fairly few bottlenecks or delays within the office. Perhaps the largest constraint on the speed with which we can work is the time it takes to obtain information and advice from other Government departments. As far as overtime is concerned, all members of the Private Office, Confidential Filing, the Garden Rooms, the Policy Unit and the Press Office, regularly work overtime each week. As you will see from Annex B, the Confidential Filing Section and the Garden Rooms work a shift system, to ensure that one or more of them is on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Private Office and the Press Office also work a duty rota. The amount of overtime worked varies from week to week. Members of the Private Office can for instance work anything between 10 and 20 hours of overtime a week, and sometimes even more.

i) Office staff, facilities, and services: as I have already indicated, a list of the staff working in this office is attached to Annex B. There are altogether 32 electric typewriters in the whole of this office, and one electronic typewriter. As you will see from Annex B, all of the Private Office's typing is done in the Garden Rooms, the other sections have their own allocated Personal Secretaries. They do also make use of the Garden Rooms. The telephone facilities in this office are extensive. There are direct lines to the FCO, the Treasury, the MOD, the US Embassy (including the hot line), the COI, Chequers, and to various other destinations. In all, there are

/ 51 private lines

51 private lines out of this office. Since the switchboard here also acts for the Chief Whip's Office and for the Chancellor's office in 11 Downing Street, there are a large number of GTN lines: altogether some 19 lines. There are 10 federal lines, and 34 BT lines bypassing the GTN and federal switchboards.

Attached is a list of the staff in post here. It does not include details of the messengers and cleaners. In the Private Office, there are five Private Secretaries (1 Deputy Secretary, 2 Assistant Secretaries, 2 Principals). Each Private Secretary has an area of responsibility. The Principal Private Secretary has to interest himself in everything of current concern to the Prime Minister. But he has particular responsibilities for advising the Prime Minister on honours, for the management of the office, and for security in Downing Street and Chequers (on this he is advised by a security adviser). One Private Secretary handles Foreign and Northern Irish affairs; one covers Parliamentary affairs; one covers home affairs in which there is a significant Treasury interest; and one covers all other home affairs. Each Private Secretary handles the most important correspondence relating to his area of responsibility, except that the Parliamentary affairs Private Secretary handles all letters from MPs. All the Private Secretaries except the Principal Private Secretary, work a duty rota, to ensure that one is available every night and at weekends.

The Private Office is supported by a section known as Confidential Filing. This is responsible for filing and cross-referencing all incoming papers of a policy kind: Cabinet papers, Ministerial correspondence, submissions to the Prime Minister, letters from foreign governments and other important bodies. It consists of one temporary HEO, 6 EOs and two COs. The EO members of CF also act as Duty Clerks in the Private Office. They work a shift system, to ensure that a Duty Clerk is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The members of CF also prepare meeting folders for the Prime Minister's meetings; chase progress in other Departments on instructions issued by this office; and accompany the Prime Minister on foreign travel when they are responsible for setting up a temporary Private Office and maintaining contact with the UK. The Duty Clerk prepares the Prime Minister's box, and coordinates the support services required by the Private Office: messengers, drivers, and secretaries.

/The Private Office

The Private Office is also supported by a section known as the Garden Rooms. This consists of one HEO, 8 SPSs, and 4 PSs. It provides secretarial assistance to the Prime Minister and Private Office. The Garden Room girls open the incoming correspondence from the general public, and decide which letters should be handled by Correspondence Section and which by the Private Office. They make the travel and administrative arrangements for the Prime Minister's travel within the UK. They accompany the Prime Minister on travel within the UK and overseas to provide secretarial assistance. They too work a shift system to ensure that two of them are always available out of office hours and at the weekend. The Garden Rooms are also responsible for filing all the correspondence handled by the Private Secretaries which is not held by Confidential Filing.

There are a number of sections peculiar to this office. First there is the Honours Section, which is headed by an SEO and which consists of an HEO, an EO and 2 PSs. It assists the Principal Private Secretary in his responsibilities for advising the Prime Minister on honours. The Appointments Section consists of an SEO, (2) HEOs, and ? 2 PSs. It assists the Secretary for Appointments (A/S) in his responsibilities for advising the Prime Minister on Crown and Ecclesiastical Appointments. Both Honours Section and Appointments Section hold very extensive records by the nature of their work.

The Correspondence Section, which consists of 2 EOs, 2 COs, 3 typists, and a CA, is responsible for handling all the general correspondence from the public and overseas which is not handled by the Private Office. The Prime Minister receives on average, 3,000 letters a week, and the vast majority are dealt with by Correspondence Section.

Parliamentary Questions Section consists of an HEO and a PS and assists the Parliamentary Affairs Private Secretary in preparing briefing for the Prime Minister's appearance at Question Time on Tuesdays and Thursdays, in preparing answers to Written Questions, and keeping records of statements and answers made by the Prime Minister. The Section also advises on other aspects of the Prime Minister's relations with Parliament.

/The Policy Unit



The Policy Unit varies in composition depending on the wishes of the Prime Minister of the day. At present it consists of 1 <sup>2nd</sup> Permanent Secretary, 2 Assistant Secretaries, and 1 SPS. Its role also varies from administration to administration. At present it advises largely on short-term industrial and economic problems. Members of the Unit sit on official committees, and communicate with other departments mainly at official level. They generate a certain amount of internal correspondence within this office.

The Press Office is headed by an Under Secretary, with a CIO(A) as his Deputy, and it consists of 1 SEO, 2 SIOs, 1 EO and 2 Personal Secretaries. The office is responsible for handling enquiries from the press, issuing press notices, briefing the lobby, handling the press arrangements for all the Prime Minister's travel at home and abroad, and handling the Prime Minister's appearances or interviews on television and radio, or with the newspapers. The Press Office deals largely with the press offices of other departments, with the media, and with those handling the administrative details of the Prime Minister's outside engagements.

The Invitations Secretary, which is an EO post, is responsible for drawing up guest lists for functions held in Downing Street, for issuing the necessary invitations, and for liaison with the Office Manager over the catering and other supporting services.

Finally, there is the Political Office and the Office of the Parliamentary Private Secretary. These are not staffed from the Permanent Civil Service. They are responsible for handling the Prime Minister's relations with his or her political party, and with backbench MPs. The PPS may accompany the Prime Minister on her travel within the UK and overseas, and may also perform a number of wider political functions.

Mr Whitmore 2 Prime Minister 4

The press notice the Treasury intends to issue about this initiative is attached. If you agree, I will participate in the first stage of this project.



FROM: Minister of State (C)  
11 February 1982

Yes MS

WMC 11/2

PRIME MINISTER

As part of our work to promote the economic and efficient use of office technology we are proposing an exercise to identify how this technology can benefit the Private Offices of Ministers and senior officials in the Civil Service. Several features of the work of Private Offices, such as handling a lot of paper quickly, suggest that advanced technology could help.

The exercise, to be carried out by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), will look for relatively simple applications which can be implemented quickly and cost-effectively, as well as examining the scope for more complex and advanced applications.

The first stage is a questionnaire to be sent to a number of Private Offices. It has been designed to be filled in by Private Secretaries with a minimum of effort, bearing in mind the pressures on them. This will be followed in March and April with a more detailed survey of some 15 volunteer offices. CCTA officials have had preliminary discussions with some Private Offices, including William Ricketts in your own, and will be writing to Principal Establishment Officers and to all Private Secretaries concerned in the next few days with the details. The offices which we propose to cover are shown in the Annex, though this can be modified if so wished.

I believe that this study is a useful indication of the Government's commitment to the use of information technology, and we are publicising it as part of our contribution to Information Technology Year 1982 and I hope colleagues will take an interest in it.

I am copying this minute to Ministers in charge of Departments, the Minister for Information Technology, Sir Derek Rayner and Sir Robert Armstrong.

BH.

BARNEY HAYHOE



OFFICE TECHNOLOGY IN PRIVATE OFFICES  
PARTICIPANTS IN INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

PS (Mr William Ricketts)/Prime Minister

Cabinet and MPO

PS/Sir Robert Armstrong  
PS/Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
PS/Mr John Cassels

HM Treasury

PS/Chancellor of the Exchequer  
PS/Chief Secretary to the Treasury  
PS/Financial Secretary to the Treasury  
PS/Economic Secretary to the Treasury  
PS/Minister of State (Commons)  
PS/Minister of State (Lords)  
PS/Sir Douglas Wass  
PS/Mr Burns  
PS/Mr Ryrie  
PS/Sir Kenneth Couzens  
PS/Sir Anthony Rawlinson  
PS/Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury and Government Chief Whip  
PS/Chairman, HM Customs and Excise  
PS/Chairman, Board of Inland Revenue

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

PS/Sir Brian Hayes

Ministry of Defence

PS/Secretary of State for Defence  
PS/Minister of State for the Armed Forces  
PS/Under Secretary of State for Defence Procurement  
PS/Sir Frank Cooper

Department of Education and Science

PS/Secretary of State for Education and Science

Department of Employment

PS/Secretary of State for Employment  
PS/Minister of State for Employment  
PS/David Waddington, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
PS/Peter Morrison, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
PS/Sir Kenneth Barnes  
PS/Chairman, MSC



Department of Energy

PS/Secretary of State for Energy  
PS/Minister of State for Energy  
PS/Under Secretary of State for Energy (Mr David Mellor)  
PS/Under Secretary of State for Energy (Mr John Moore)  
PS/Sir Donald Maitland

Department of the Environment

PS/Secretary of State for the Environment  
PS/Mr Moseley

Exchequer and Audit Department

PS/Mr Downey

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

PS/Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
PS/Sir Michael Palliser  
PS/Sir Peter Preston

Department of Health and Social Security

PS/Minister of Social Security  
PS/Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Health)  
PS/Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Health and  
Social Services)  
PS/Sir Geoffrey Otton

Home Office

PS/Secretary of State for the Home Department  
PS/Under Secretary of State for the Home Department

Department of Industry

PS/Minister of State for Information Technology  
PS/Sir Peter Carey

Law Officers Department

PS/Attorney General

Lord Chancellor's Department

PS/Lord Chancellor

Northern Ireland Office

PS/Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
PS/Mr Woodfield



Privy Council Office

PS/Lord President of the Council

Scottish Office

PS/Secretary of State for Scotland

PS/Minister of State for Scotland

PS/Minister for Industry and Education in Scotland

PS/Sir William Fraser

Department of Trade

PS/Minister for Consumer Affairs

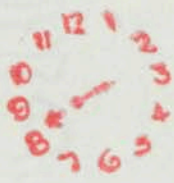
Department of Transport

PS/Under Secretary of State for Transport

Welsh Office

PS/Mr Hughes

11 FEB 1982



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