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**Obeying the iron law? Changes to the intra-party balance of power in the
British Liberal Democrats since 1988.**

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2011

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

Date.....

The information contained within this thesis are derived from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with 70 individuals, listed fully in Appendix A between January 2008 and July 2011. The thesis has not been worked on jointly or collaboratively. The conclusions arrived at formed part of a contribution to the following publications:

Bale T & Sanderson-Nash E (2011). A Leap of Faith and a Leap in the Dark: The Impact of Coalition on the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The Cameron-Clegg Government: Coalition Politics in an Age of Austerity. S Lee and M Beech. Basingstoke. Palgrave MacMillan.

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University of Sussex

Emma Sanderson-Nash

Thesis submitted for degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Summary

This study examines intra-party power in the Liberal Democrats, looking at the formal role and remit of the various sectors that make up the party bureaucracy, and evaluating the exercise of power with regard to policy, campaigning and the use of resources. It is interested in two overarching questions: has the party professionalised, and has power moved toward the top? If so could this have had an impact on its electoral success?

The theoretical context for this study is a well-established tradition of scholarship on party organisation going back to Moise Ostrogorski (1902) and Robert Michels (1911). The hierarchical nature of party organisations has been a constant refrain in this literature, especially in respect of major parties that are serious contenders for governmental office (McKenzie 1963; Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz & Mair 1995). This thesis offers a test of these theories by applying them to a smaller party that gradually evolved from a party of opposition to a party of government. While the incentives for intra-party centralisation are clear in office-seeking parties (the leadership requires maximum autonomy in order to devise and adapt a competitive strategy), this research explores whether it is a necessary precursor to electoral success. It will test whether the party has become more professional, or top-down, by looking at the policy making process, at the way the party campaigns, and at its distribution of resources. Finally the thesis examines the role of intra-party politics in achieving and maintaining the coalition with the Conservatives negotiated in May 2010.

The research spans the lifetime of the party from 1988 to present day, and relies on an extensive series of semi-structured interviews with 70 individuals connected to the party including prominent politicians, senior staff and ordinary members. It argues that the party has become significantly more professional during this time, and that this was a contributory factor in delivering office.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Summary.....	5
Appendices & list of table	11
Abbreviations.....	12

I – Research Foundations

Chapter 1	Introduction.....	13
	i) Introduction	13
	ii) Research Questions	14
	iii) Context.....	15
	iv) Chapter outlines	16
	v) Strategy, methods and logic	20
	vi) Rationale and methodology - Insider status and mitigation	22
	vii) Conclusion	25
Chapter 2	Literature review	26
	i) Introduction	26
	ii) The Iron Law and its critics	27
	iii) An explanation of party models.....	29
	iv) Parties, power, and organisational change.....	33
	v) The Liberal Democrats.....	34
	vi) Conclusion	38

II – The Liberal Democrats 1988-2010

Chapter 3	Background	39
	i) Introduction	39
	ii) Party Origins and merger	40
	The Liberal Party.....	40
	The Social Democratic Party	44
	Alliance	45
	Merger.....	46

iii)	Electoral Fortunes	48
	1988-1992	48
	1992-1999	49
	1999-2006	51
	2006-2010	52
iv)	The Party Leader	53
	- 1988 Launch of Liberal Democrats	54
	- 1999 Ashdown stands down	54
	- 2006 Kennedy resigns	54
	- 2007 Ming Campbell steps down	55
v)	The Party President	55
vi)	Conclusion	57
Chapter 4	The Constitution and party structure	59
i)	Introduction	59
	- Federal Structure – an overview	60
ii)	Membership and local parties	61
	Membership	61
	Local parties	63
iii)	Policy-making, Federal Conference and Federal Policy Committee	64
iv)	The Federal Executive and other party committees - The Federal Executive	65
v)	The Parliamentary parties	67
vi)	Candidates	69
vii)	Officers	69
	Party Treasurer	70

viii)	Associated Organisations, Specified	
	Associated Organizations	70
	- Association of Lib Dem Councillors	72
	- Liberal Youth.....	74
	- Party Communications :.....	75
	- Liberator.....	76
	- The Reformer.....	77
	- Liberal Future.....	78
	- The Beveridge Group	78
	- Social Liberal Forum	79
	- Progressive Vision and Liberal Vision	79
	- Centre Forum	80
ix)	Conclusion	80

III – Power and decision-making

Chapter 5	Policy.....	82
i)	Introduction	82
ii)	The origin of policy	83
	- The federal conference.....	85
iii)	Leaders, policy papers and manifestos	89
	- Ashdown ‘Our Different Vision’	89
	- 1992 manifesto ‘Changing Britain for Good’	90
	- 1997 manifesto ‘Make the Difference’	91
	- Kennedy ‘Its About Freedom’ & ‘Meeting the Challenge’	91
	- 2001 manifesto ‘Freedom, Justice, Honesty’	92
	- 2005 manifesto ‘The Real Alternative’	92
	- Campbell ‘The Green Switch’	93
	- ‘The Orange Book’ and its critics	93
	- Clegg ‘Make it Happen’	95
	- 2010 manifesto ‘Change That Works For You’	96
	- The Manifestos – a summary	97
v)	Case study – Opposing the War on Iraq.....	99
	Case study – Abolishing University Tuition Fees	101
	Conclusion	104

	vi)	Ideology and power – what they say and what they do.....	104
	vii)	Conclusions	105
Chapter 6		Campaigns	108
	i)	Introduction	108
	ii)	Campaigns – strategy and tactics	109
		- 1992 and 1997	109
		- 2001 and 2005	111
		- 2010	113
	iii)	The Campaigns Department.....	114
		- Private polling	116
		- New Media	117
	iv)	Candidates.....	118
		- Constituency case-studies	121
	v)	The rise and fall of Chris Rennard	123
	vi)	Conclusion	127
Chapter 7		Resources	129
	i)	Introduction	129
	ii)	The Parliamentary party	131
		- Short and Cranbourne Money	132
		- Parliamentary staff 1986-2011	133
	iii)	Cowley Street.....	136
		- Federal Party finance.....	136
		- Headquarters staffing arrangements	138
		- The Medium Term Review.....	140
		- The Bones Commission.....	141
	iv)	The party on the ground.....	144
	v)	Patronage and peerages	145

vi)	Conclusion	148
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IV - Conclusions

Chapter 8	Findings and Conclusions	151
i)	Introduction	151
ii)	Findings	152
	- Policy	152
	- Campaigns.....	153
	- Resources.....	153
iii)	Conclusions	154
iv)	Causes of party organisational change.....	156
v)	Individuals, interests, institutions and ideas.....	157
Chapter 9	Reflections on the 2010 Conservative Liberal-Democrat Coalition	159
i)	Introduction	159
ii)	Five days in May	159
iii)	Policy	161
iv)	Campaigns and grassroots	163
v)	Resources	164
vi)	Conclusion	166
	Bibliography.....	168

APPENDICES

Appendix A Interviews.....	173
Appendix B Party structure May 1992.....	175
Appendix C Federal Executive membership (1988-2009).....	176
Appendix D Former MPs – where are they now? (1988-2009).....	179
Appendix E Making policy diagram (reproduced with kind permission of Dr Tom Quinn, University of Essex).....	180
Appendix F 2010 Ministers and majorities	181
Appendix G Party structure Nov 2009.....	183
Appendix H Party structure Oct 2010	184
Appendix I Becoming a Lib Dem candidate 2011	185
Appendix J Focus leaflet (East Saltdean)	193
Appendix K List of Liberal Democrat Ministers (05/2011)	195
Appendix L Committee Chairmen 1988-2010	197

List of Tables:

1. Liberal leaders 1945-2011 by constituency.....	41
2. Liberal votes and seats 1950-1989	43
3. Liberal Democrat votes and seats 1992-2010.....	43
4. The Federal Structure of the Liberal Democrats	60
5. Responsibilities of different party strata	61
6. Membership figures Federal Liberal Democrats 1988-2010	63
7. Liberal Democrat whipped votes 1997-2007	68
8. Membership of Liberal Youth (formerly LDYS) 2002-2009	74
9. Conference keynote speeches and policy motion time allocation 1995-2008.....	87
10. Conference keynote speeches and policy motion time allocation 2006-2008.....	88
11. Origin of motions appearing on Final Agenda 2002-2007.....	88
12. Women Liberal Democrat MPs in general elections since 1992	121
13. Short and Cranbourne money 1997-2011	133
14. Declared Party income 2003-2009.....	137
15. General fund and campaign fund income 2002-2009	137
16. Number of Liberal Democrat MPs and Peers 1988-2010	145
17. Summary of conclusions	155
18. Summary of findings.....	156

List of Abbreviations:

ALDC	Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors
ALC	Association of Liberal Councillors
AGM	Annual general meeting
ASDC	Association of Social Democrat Councillors
AO	Associated Organisation
ASLDC	Association of Scottish Liberal Democrat Councillors
CCC	Campaign and Communications Committee
CEO	Chief Executive Office
CIX	Compulink Information Exchange
CMG	Conference Marketing Group
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
COG	Chief Officer's Group
DAGGER	Democratic Action Group for Gaining Electoral Reform
DELGA	Liberal Democrats for Gay and Lesbian Action
EARS	Election Agents Record System
FFAC	Federal Finance and Accounts Committee
FPC	Federal Policy Committee
FCC	Federal Conference Committee
FE	Federal Executive
KMPG	Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler
HQ	Headquarters
LDYS	Liberal Democrat Youth & Students
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
MSP	Member of Scottish Parliament
PCA	Parliamentary Candidates Association
PICS	Parliamentary Information and Communication Service
POLD	Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
PPERA	Political Parties, Election and Referendums Act (2000)
PRU	Parliamentary Research Unit
SAO	Specified Associated Organisation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
STV	Single Transferable Vote

Chapter 1 Introduction

i) Introduction

In May 2010 the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats took just five days to agree an historic coalition that appeared to many to be counter-intuitive. This study examines intra-party power in the Liberal Democrats and argues that entry into coalition should have come as no surprise. It challenges assumptions about the party's grassroots orientation and suggests instead that the party leadership was able to pull off coalition at least partly as a result of long-term organisational change that has seen it become more professionalised, more centralised and with regard to these two key elements, as much an electoral-professional party as Labour and the Conservatives.

Since 1988 the party has changed. Its bureaucracy has expanded in tandem with an overall growth in support, and professionalism has followed. It shifted to the left under Kennedy and to the right under Clegg. At the same time a series of subtle changes have happened within the party's support base. Gone are the beards and sandals, replaced instead with a clean-shaven, suited and booted activist, many of whom cut their teeth in council chambers up and down the country. It now relies not just on its givers of time – the army of focus-leaflet deliverers – but on its givers of money – hedge-fund managers and corporate supporters. Organisationally it now resembles a smaller version of its two larger rivals. These developments are consistent with much of the party organisational literature which has long emphasised the point that electorally oriented parties tend to give greater autonomy to leaders who need it to play the game of party competition with maximum strategic flexibility (McKenzie 1955; Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1994). Indeed such flexibility plays a vital role for a party whose most realistic hopes of office lie in negotiating with its rivals. The hierarchical nature of parties has been a constant refrain in this literature, particularly in respect of those which are serious contenders for governmental office, a position only very recently realised by the Liberal Democrats. This is, of course, an oversimplification. The party remains bound by a constitution that can restrict the leader on matters of policy and binds him or her to a set of powerful democratically elected internal committees. It is, therefore, a party in transition.

This research fills a gap in the literature both about the Lib Dems and about party organisational change. It helps us gain an overall understanding of the character of an under-studied third party, that has now become a 'party of office', making this research all the more salient (Katz and Mair 2002). It also allows for a detailed empirical study of party organisation adding to a number of other case-studies (Bille 1997; Webb, Farrell et al. 2002), important because they are based on the premise that party organisational tendencies contribute to our understanding of the wider political system. As well as exploring the party's grassroots orientation this study also challenges the assumption that the Liberal Democrats are naturally inclined to the left. What emerges is a picture of a party less driven by ideology than used to be assumed, difficult to place in the right/left spectrum but held together by broad ideological aspirations and political pragmatism. Although this thesis focuses on party organisation rather than party ideology, an understanding of the different beliefs of those within it, and which are dominant, can provide some useful indications of

where power lies. Unlike the Labour party it is 'under-factionalised' (Grayson 2010) making protagonists and cliques hard to identify (Grayson 2010). Unlike the Conservatives in recent years it did not publicly, self-consciously and openly embrace change (Bale 2010). What has happened instead has been a gradual, quiet and subtle evolution in which vote-seeking, seat-maximising and ultimately office-holding, have become the all important goals, at the leadership level at least.

The party known as the Liberal Democrats has at its origins in the merging of two parties, one of which was born out of a fundamental disagreement over party organisation. Whether the Gang of Four chose the issue, or "the issue chose them" (Crewe and King 1995), the Limehouse Declaration explicitly criticizes the Labour Party for moving away from its "commitment to parliamentary government" and so set out its centre-left, top-down, electorally expedient agenda.¹ That this new party sought to merge with the Liberals, and bring together two very different organisational tendencies, is important to this study. It re-emerges throughout the research, raising questions about the relationship between its origins and questions about the party's ideological identity and organisational coherence. As such the party "bears the mark of its formation" (Panebianco 1988) and for this reason the thesis compares the party as it is now with the party it once was, and looks at a series of events over time, beginning with its formation in 1988. The thesis looks at all aspects of the party's organisation, borrowing from other work that looks at the individuals, interests, ideas and institutions that make up the political party (Helco 1994; Russell 2005; Bale 2010). Without any one of these four features the study would be incomplete and it is the ways in which these features interact with one another that gives us the most comprehensive understanding of intra-party power.

ii) Research Questions

The first research question asks if the Party has become more centralised during its first 22 years. The party has a federal structure, and is often therefore described as 'de-centralised'. In this thesis the term 'centralisation' means the process of drawing power toward the centre, in this case more specifically, toward the Leader and parliamentary party. It should not be confused with devolution, to which the Liberal Democrats and predecessor parties have historically been committed and which divides the party in to state parties which are governed separately, with their own constitutions, leaders, and now in Wales and Scotland, their own Parliament and Assembly². We are concerned with the federal party and power within the organisation as it relates to the UK government. This study focuses on whether there has been a gradual subversion of power away from the party's grassroots and toward the party elite. It looks for evidence of changes in the relationship between the parliamentary party and the extra parliamentary party. Or are the divisions ideological, harking back to the division between former members of the SDP and Liberal parties, or those more recently organised under the 'social liberal' versus 'economic liberal'

1. The Limehouse Declaration, issued by Shirley Williams, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Roy Jenkins to the Press Association on 25th January 1981. http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=73&item=history accessed 5.10.10.

2. The impact of devolution on intra-party relations is discussed in more detail in Hough, D. and C. Jeffery, Eds. (2006). *Devolution and Electoral Politics*. Manchester, Manchester University Press. The "co-existence" of genuinely autonomous state parties and centralising tendencies at the federal level in the third party, is explained here as contributing, largely through the experience of coalition, to the party's overall strategy of electoral gain (p238).

banners? (see Hickson 2010). We examine the extent to which the interview data, much of it reflecting the perception among the party elite, demonstrates that centralisation and professionalisation are necessary preconditions in order for the party to a) adopt successful electoral strategies and b) grant sufficient flexibility to the leadership in order to negotiate cross-party coalitions. There is no doubt that prior to May 2010 the Liberal Democrats failed to make the independent breakthrough in electoral terms at Westminster, that many had hoped for, and so the first hypothesis, H1, states that the Lib Dems, as a party interested in maximising seats in order to gain executive power, underwent a process of centralisation. This tests the 'iron law' put forward by Michels and posits that the internal changes described, particularly under Campbell and Clegg, were a factor in the Liberal Democrats gaining power (Michels 1911).

The second hypothesis allows for a more detailed examination of one of the key elements of party change, professionalisation. In addition to H1, this second hypothesis (H2) states that the Lib Dems, as a party interested in maximising seats in order to gain executive power, underwent a process of professionalisation. The difference between these two, which are closely related but often confused and treated as if interchangeable, is explained by Robert Harmel: professionalisation is to do with organisational complexity, while centralisation affects organisational power (Harmel 2002). Although centralisation and professionalisation are quite different, the relationship between these two elements of organisational change is also considered. These questions bring the thesis up to the point at which the party entered into coalition with the Conservatives in May 2010. Room is also made for an assessment of what we might expect to happen in the future in the Liberal Democrats generally and therefore further our understanding of the internal workings of political parties in Britain.

iii) Context

In keeping with a diachronic design the thesis charts the party's evolution from being in single figures in the polls and close to bankruptcy in 1988, to attracting multi-million pound donations and being in government in 2010. Significant moments in the party's history emerge throughout the study as evidence of party organisational change. In particular the party doubled its numbers in Westminster following the 1997 general election, and benefited from the accompanying 'Short money' (introduced by Harold Wilson's government in 1974 to assist opposition parties with their parliamentary duties), which allowed it to fulfil some of its aims toward professionalisation. Outside the party this phase was also significant in that it signalled the failure of Paddy Ashdown's ambitions to work with the Labour Party, his so-called 'project' withering as Blair's popularity grew. After Ashdown's resignation in 1999 the tenure of Charles Kennedy saw the party shift both organisationally and politically. A very different leader in both style and political inclination, Kennedy was more laid-back and during his eight years as party leader presided loosely over an organisation that became somewhat more fragmented, resulting in a diffuse distribution of power across a number of different bases. His opposition to the Iraq War put the party distinctively on the political map, and while not intentionally positioning the party to the left of Labour, drew its increase in electoral support from precisely that group of voters (Russell 2005). The series of

personal disasters that befell not just Kennedy but other senior parliamentarians in the party is also significant in that it generated a solidarity and leadership-loyalty behind Nick Clegg in 2008, that contributed to the ease with which he was able to negotiate the coalition (Grayson 2010).

Although less visible to political scientists until now, there has also been a quiet and significant shift of emphasis within the party. In particular two relatively minor events signify this. Firstly, according to insiders, one of the party's main benefactors, Paul Marshall, disappointed with the party's incremental growth at general elections, and frustrated by its arguably nostalgic commitment to 'pavement politics',³ not only rekindled ideological debate by co-authoring *The Orange Book*, seen by many as a turning point back toward economic liberalism, but shortly afterwards gave a £1m donation to fund a new think-tank, Centre Forum, which carried these ideas to a wide audience.⁴ Secondly, Ming Campbell's short period in office is not without importance for this study. Aware of the frustrations of being a Liberal Democrat Leader, and regularly warned of the dangers of being seen as the 'caretaker', Campbell began to highlight the inadequacies of 'weak party structure' and set about reforming it (Campbell 2006). Soon after his departure his successor Nick Clegg set up 'The Party Reform Commission' (known as The Bones Commission), the most wide-ranging and significant internal review in the party's history, published in September 2008. It brings together the many strands of opinion about its organisational origins, strategic development and internal operation. The impact of its recommendations are still the subject of some debate, and are an ongoing indication of the tensions inherent in the organisation. There is little doubt, however, that Nick Clegg's leadership ambitions and the Liberal-Democrat Conservative coalition itself, were in part facilitated by these factors, which we examine in detail.

iv) Chapter outlines

In order to set out the areas of particular interest in this study, the thesis is divided in to four main sections;

- I Research Foundations
- II The Liberal Democrats 1988-2010
- III Power and decision-making
- IV Conclusions.

The opening section, Research Foundations, comprises two chapters that cover the background to the production of this thesis: Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 2 (Literature Review). The introductory chapter looks at the research questions that are posed, how these might be operationalised in practice, the overall hypotheses and a detailed explanation of the methodology and research methods. The second chapter provides a detailed literature review that spans the classic works of political science (Ostrogorski 1902; Michels 1911; McKenzie 1955; Kirchheimer 1969), as well as more recent literature on party models and party organisational change (Panebianco 1988; Harmel and Janda 1994; Katz and Mair 1994; Katz and Mair 2002). In

³ Interview 27, 2010.

⁴ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article538115.ece> (accessed 23.03.2011).

particular it asks if the party now conforms to the electoral-professional model and how this research makes use of some of the themes in the literature on party classification. Since the creation of the Liberal Democrats in 1988, there have been a number of historical accounts (MacIver 1996, Douglas 2005), one detailed study that focuses on grass roots campaigning (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006) and recently an enlivened debate about ideology (Hickson 2010). However none has covered party organisational change in any depth.

The second section of the thesis aims to provide a historical framework for the study. It is divided into two chapters: Chapter 3 (Background) and Chapter 4 (Constitution and formal party structure). Given the lack of literature specifically on the Liberal Democrats, Chapter 3 provides a background, with analysis that explains key moments in the party's development. These include the formation of the SDP, the Liberal-SDP Alliance, merger and creation of the Liberal Democrats. It asks what motivated the merger, and focuses on key phases in party development and how these correspond to different periods of leadership. This chapter also looks at the party's electoral fortunes and how the party has performed at general elections, by-elections and local elections as well as how it has fared since devolution. It charts the party's move from a distinctly third and somewhat irrelevant entity, into a mainstream opposition party in 2005 (Webb 2005) and party of government in 2010. It also attempts to provide a sense of what else was going on of relevance outside the party, to situate it in the political landscape (although without attempting to offer a comparative study). It looks at which individuals are associated with change and closes with an examination of the events building up to the 2010 general election. This chapter demonstrates that the party launched in 1988 was a new entity and a new organisation and for this reason the period of time being examined begins with the birth of the Liberal Democrats.

Chapter 4 describes how the party formally organises its various functions. The Lib Dems are a complex and changing organisation and this section aims to explain the formal constitution and federal nature of the party in full, assessing where significant changes and adaptations have been made. It explains the party constitution, setting out its federal structure, the role of membership and local parties, the Federal Executive and other key committees, the parliamentary party, president and leader. It explains how the party elects various key individuals and committees, candidate selection and the role of various associated bodies, particularly the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) and the party's youth and students organisation (Liberal Youth). It also looks at how the party bureaucracy has grown informally, looking at associated party magazines and newspapers, think-tanks and various other significant developments such as communicating with the party through the internet and the first web-based party conferencing system 'CIX'. It explains the party's formal rules and how it is intended to function as an institution and concludes that while the constitution remains robust there is a great deal going on outside its confines.

The third section of the thesis looks at the most extensive body of empirical data collected for this research project. It is largely based on semi-structured interviews, and looks at three areas in which power can be exercised in the party: Chapter 5 on the formulation of policy, Chapter 6 on

campaigning and Chapter 7 on the distribution of resources. These three areas are the focus because as well as being implicit in the literature (Webb, Farrell et al. 2002) they are those aspects of political life that have traditionally set the Liberal Democrats apart from its two larger rivals. The Lib Dems, in the widest sense, view their party largely as one that believes in grassroots involvement in policy, campaigning and the distribution of resources. This thesis examines each of these assumptions and finds a move toward both centralisation and professionalisation, at varying paces, while continuing to demonstrate a democratic policy-making process.

Chapter 5 focuses on policy, in particular at the party's Federal Policy Committee (FPC) and conference, and the increasingly significant role played by the parliamentary party and leader. Evaluating the detail of this process both in theory and in practice allows for a test of the growth in the centralisation of party bureaucracy. According to their constitution, the Liberal Democrat Conference is its sovereign body and responsibility for making policy rests with it. The party has been caricatured as one that enjoys the opportunity to 'give the leader a bloody nose' by rejecting his policy proposals at conference. More recently, however, it has become a twice-yearly showcase event to endorse the elite, to rubber stamp party business, and raise funds. The parliamentary party has increased in size and significance, producing themed policy papers and making increased use of media opportunities at conference, while differences of opinion are now more likely to be hammered out behind closed doors in party committees. The party leader has to contend with a potentially rebellious parliamentary party, but at the same time enjoys significant autonomy over the production of the manifesto. Finally this section asks if the purpose and status of party policy has changed, particularly in facilitating the flexibility necessary to negotiate coalition. Has the character of the party changed or has it just become more efficient, better managed and more professional? The chapter concludes with two detailed case-studies of Liberal Democrat policy on a) the decision to speak at the 'Stop the War' rally, which highlights a brief phase of grassroots militancy, and b) the policy on the abolition of university tuition fees, which demonstrates the enduring power of the Federal Policy Committee.

Chapter 6 examines the party's campaigning tradition. It looks at the development of the party's successful targeting strategy and how it approaches what it calls the 'ground-war'. Here the relationship between the party bureaucracy and its grassroots is important and has undergone a period of change in which the party has centralised and standardised much of its campaigning activity. The way the party finds, selects, nominates and trains its candidates is explained as well as examining how much autonomy local parties are able to exercise over these decisions. Here we use the term 'grassroots' to describe party members and activists. It may also describe activists that hold office in local councils or those that are elected on to federal party committees, but would exclude those elected to national office (MPs) or employed by the federal party. A brief series of case-studies demonstrate how this process can be controlled from the centre. Party communications are examined here together with the impact of the growth in the new media and the use of the intra-net as a standardising tool. The prominent role played by Chris Rennard, who became very powerful, both devising the party's strategy, and seeing through its implementation as Director of Campaigns, then Chief Executive, over a 20 year period, is assessed here.

Conclusions are drawn from looking at the party's success in by-elections and local elections in all areas of the UK, not just its traditional rural heartlands, and incremental growth at Westminster, as well as at and some of its mistakes, including the gradual waning of the impact of targeting and the unsuccessful 'decapitation' strategy aimed at winning Tory seats in 2005. Although the party clearly failed to break through in the terms necessary to signal a permanent end to the two-party hegemony, it appears to have been successful in the re-orientation of its goals from vote-maximising to office-maximising and negotiating a role as the junior partner in coalition government.

Finally the last of these three substantive chapters, Chapter 7 examines how the party makes use of its human and financial resources. Without the reliable backing of business, union or interest group donations, the Liberal Democrats have always convincingly argued that their development, strategy and degrees of professionalism are dictated by a lack of resources. Here it is argued that, although this lack of resources may impact on the extent to which it is able to put its aims into practice, it presents no barrier to the party's aspiration toward professionalisation. The party has undergone two major reviews of its internal bureaucracy, in 1997 with The Medium Term Review, and 2008 with The Bones Commission. Both of these recommended the party rearrange its organisation to streamline, to reflect the reality of electoral competition and to enable the leadership. These internal documents, along with Electoral Commission data and interview evidence, allows us to build a coherent picture of party priorities, through an assessment of funding, spending and staffing patterns. Finally this chapter looks at what the party has in its gift, particularly the giving of peerages. What is of interest here is the leadership's refusal to take note of the grassroots 'interim peers list', a democratic process agreed at conference, but to which he is not bound. It demonstrates a gulf between the elite and the grassroots in this important aspect of party activity, where Peers outnumber, and could potentially outflank, MPs.

Chapter 8 (Findings and Conclusions) reiterates the findings outlined in previous chapters and asks what conclusions can be drawn from them. It makes the case that the gradual strengthening of the leader's hand was important in enabling Nick Clegg to gain power, in support of H1 and H2 (see p14). It does this by explaining that a combination of factors have led to this, in particular a series of events that lend itself to a path-dependent explanation of outcomes (Pierson 2000) There has been a twin-track process at work, in which the party's parliamentary activity has become much more professional and the campaigning activity at Cowley Street has become more centralised. At the same time and while the party continues to elect important committees and make policy at twice-yearly democratic conferences, the leader has been able to exercise an increasingly free-hand. In a party so long without power, without a reliable income and frustrated by the two-party squeeze, the grassroots have practiced political pragmatism and leadership-loyalty above all else, in the shared goal of office-maximising. The thesis closes with Chapter 9 (Epilogue) where the events of May 2010 and the party entering in to an historic coalition with the Conservatives is examined in light of these hypotheses.

v) Strategy, methods and logic

The framework for this study is one that enables the examination of both the institution of the party and individuals within it. It owes much to the traditional historical institutional perspective that suggests a cyclical pattern to party organisation in which either actors change structures or vice-versa, as a consequence of environment or events. In particular the two phases of internal reform are pinpointed as moments of organisational reform - the 1997 Medium Term Review and the 2008 Bones Commission. They act as useful focal points since documentation and the process leading to it gives set of clear reflections and recommendations for change. It is, however, too simplistic to see these in isolation and divorced from other aspects of party life that will have played a part in their coming about. The events and shifting complex relationships between both groups and individuals within the organisation, as well as external factors such as electoral competition and events outside the political centre may also be important factors.

Just as politics in general can be seen as a process of consensus and conflict among interdependent individuals, intra-party politics is also marked by the consensual and conflicting relationship among interdependent party sub-groups. (Hellman 2011)

This study was designed in order to give different weight to each of the different sectors of the party, the 'sub-groups', in order to understand who or what may have been powerful at a given time, and influence change or the reinforcement of the status quo. It is based on the premise that a complete understanding of the motives and methods employed by a political party are impossible to understand in their entirety. As the research demonstrates, there are many shades of opinion, including different versions of the same event and it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what is accurate. A greater understanding is, however, possible using a combination of methods and triangulation. This research has been designed in order to offer a thorough understanding of both the institution of the party, with an examination of the constitution and formal rules, as well as the day to day conduct of official party business, while at the same time describing the informal workings of the party and looking at the roles played by key individuals. It aims to capture the character of the party, using a combination of data drawn from an extensive schedule of semi-structured interviews, biography and autobiography, blogs, newspapers, web articles and case-studies. The systems the party has devised in order to solve organisational problems and to maximise its goals provides a number of competing explanations, and the primacy of leadership is a theme that runs throughout. It stops short and deliberately so, of making claims about structure and agency, in part because they polarise two views that this study intends to blend, and because the key components of that debate can be confounded by insider research. To make claims about the institution of the party while having been an individual engaged in its activity over a long period of time, and having developed close personal and professional relationships with many of the individuals involved, is problematic. Equally to base this research entirely on that personal experience and to overlook the importance of its formal rules and structures, would be to simplify and narrow the scope of its focus. The work contained in this project, then, strives to achieve neutrality, makes good and relevant use of access, and

therefore examines the party through a combined approach to the questions of what constitutes facts, and knowledge, and what can be claimed with a degree of certainty.

One approach that was considered and that adds explanatory power to political science, was a comparison of the Liberal Democrats with their rivals – the Conservatives and Labour party. Having been fortunate enough to find the Lib Dems fully co-operative with this research, and providing privileged access to senior interviewees, the comparative angle was outweighed. It was also apparent that the gap in the literature meant that this study would involve a significant amount of empirical research and descriptive content. For this reason the study is comparative across time, and seeks to compare the Liberal Democrats as they are in 2011, with the party since its creation in 1988.

The research was conducted using a series of semi-structured interviews, (see Appendix A) and these were carried out in three broad stages. In the early stages of this research a number of informal discussions with former colleagues were carried out, to gauge over-all co-operation, questions of access and what resistance, if any, the research might encounter. This was off the record and aimed largely at being able to proceed with the second and third stages of research in the most efficient manner. The second phase of research comprised the main body of semi-structured interviews, including a formal request in writing, usually by email, and a standard form for giving consent to conduct the interview, tape it and use the transcripts. Interviews were initially conducted on the record, although after the first few it became clear that being able to attribute statements to certain individuals had to come second to getting more closely involved in the answers themselves. Interviews were subsequently conducted off the record, a well-understood tradition in political circles, and respondents were mostly open and unguarded. In total 70 people were interviewed, 6 of whom were interviewed on more than one occasion, typically lasting 45 minutes each, fully taped and transcribed, during a period of 18 months. It was anticipated that the questions themselves might generate an informal discussion among MPs and Peers, particularly given my insider position. For this reason long gaps between the interviews would have been counterproductive and so colleagues were grouped together. In preparation for the interviews as well as the theoretical framework already explained, the use of biographies and auto-biographies proved particularly useful (Ashdown 2000; Ashdown 2001; Campbell 2006; Hurst 2006). It enabled questions that went beyond the descriptive and used the biographies as a starting point from which to ask more questions about motivations. Autobiography as a research resource is sometimes dismissed as a resource in qualitative inquiry since it can only convey one view and should be seen in the context of ongoing political competition (Creswell 1988, p49) although in this research, and in the absence of much other material, it provides a helpful starting point for elite interview questions. The data autobiography offers needs to be treated with caution and as secondary data provides an account of key events that, as Burnham & Gilland say, 'are most effectively employed in combination with elite interviewing and/or with the analysis of primary documents' (Burnham, Gilland et al. 2004 p169). The third and final stage of the interview process was to save a number of key interviews to be conducted last and once the writing up process had started. This was in order to take into account gaps that would inevitably appear in the data and

analysis.

As many of the texts on qualitative research methods predicted, the success of the interview process depended on re-examining the questions and approach, and adjusting accordingly along the way (Creswell 1998; Shostak 2006). In particular, just at the moment when the interview data appeared to be reaching a saturation point, when interviewees were repeating one another and the overall body of material had been gathered, the 2010 general election and subsequent Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition introduced an entirely new set of circumstances.⁵ This had the impact of sharpening the focus from what might happen, to what had happened, and generated a further tranche of interviews. The majority of the research was prepared and conducted, however, with little regard to the possible outcome of the 2010 general election, and should be seen in this light. Suffice to say though, that a thesis must have a beginning and an end, and in order to make the work achievable it was decided to use coalition as the concluding moment, leaving the door open for further research. The questions that subsequently arose are therefore collected in the Epilogue.

vi) Rationale and methodology - Insider status and mitigation

This research methodology starts from the premise that, while academic research about party structures can provide a framework for greater understanding of party organisation, it is the actors that hold the key. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is used, with data supplied by official party records together with a series of semi-structured interviews. Prior to interviews, data was collected about the remit of each body based on formal party literature, past and present, the timing of significant changes to its organisation and the allocation of resources.

There is no shortage of academic literature on the workings of political parties, but detailed accounts of the movements of power within the organisation are rare. The classic literature provides explanations for this, and includes a number of warnings. Daalder's verdict still holds that 'internal party processes...to this day remain very much a blank spot in comparative analyses' (Daalder 1983: p3). Although some of Michels' assertions about the work of political parties and the superiority of the leading class is dated, he was particularly insightful about the reluctance by political parties to be scrutinised in any detail. He noted that the parties themselves resent and resist such study, and 'react with the utmost energy against any attempt to analyse their structure or their nature, as if it were a method of vivisection' (Daalder 1983). Rohrschneider summed up the obstacles to gathering data from conference representative or party members, which seems to apply equally well to a study of party elites (Rohrschneider 2006). They will present a united front in the face of electoral competition, which in turn means that internal controversies are likely to be covered up, which may give a false impression to claims to Michels' 'iron law'. Furthermore, observing parties in this way is necessarily 'past orientated', since the victor of any intra-party

⁵ A survey of staff had been prepared along similar lines to that conducted by Paul Webb and Justin Fisher in 2003. This was abandoned since it was thought that the period immediately before the 2010 general election, and immediately after in which the party suffered significant redundancies, was atypical. See Webb, P. and J. Fisher (2003). "Professionalism and the Millbank Tendency: The Political Sociology of New Labour's Employees." *Politics* 23(1): 10-20.

battle will be the one most likely to be in a prominent position from which to write their version of history (Rohrschneider 2006). Others have commented on the problems of electoral competition in the study of political parties - that is to say the inevitability of a political party wishing to present itself to the electorate as a united organisation, will naturally mask internal divisions (Duverger 1954). Similarly epistemological questions are inevitable when asking those in positions of power to tell the story about how they got there (see McKenzie 1955 , Kavanagh 1984, p10). It is to be expected that a party engaged in ongoing electoral competition will treat academic scrutiny as just another arena in which to present itself in the most positive light. Research should therefore be designed to take this in to account, and mitigate or at least explain the problems this may present.

Firstly, why look at the Liberal Democrats at all? The Liberal Democrats are broadly speaking an under-studied part of British politics, which is an omission that needs rectifying. Potentially they offer political science three benefits;

1. Difference – the Lib Dems are unique in the UK Parliament in four potentially significant ways; being created from the merger of two former parties, having a federal structure, being permanently in opposition and electing two figure-heads, the Party Leader and the President.
2. Sameness – the Lib Dems provide a campaigning and communications experience legitimately comparable with the other two parties.
3. Challenge to classic theory – concentration by political scientists on the two major parties has left theory only partially tested.

Secondly, how does the position of the researcher potentially influence the work itself? As a former member of party staff (1990-2005) it is important to explain and briefly explore the pros and cons of insider research. To begin with it is worthwhile being explicit about the nature of that employment and so in this paper where this is relevant it is declared in the footnotes. This should allow for an understanding of the *a priori* knowledge that naturally accompanies it. It is also worth noting that although an academic perspective may deem this insider research, that is not a view shared by the party, for whom the years that have elapsed between my employment and the completion of this paper, render that part of the past. It would be false to use the term 'insider' other than in the present tense, although there is no doubt that the process of conducting this research was influenced by this former relationship. Familiarity with a number of senior figures, indeed with the majority of those contained in the interview list, meant that obtaining interviews, and sometimes returning to them for clarification, was made easy. It also meant that I had the advantage of knowing a number of those that fell out of favour, lost their jobs or positions or chose to leave, whose perspective was often different from those that continue to work for the party. Such familiarity however, might have inclined this research to only seek the views of those I have easy access to, and is something I aimed to overcome by seeking to interview those individuals that held office but with whom I did not work closely.

In the early stages of research a mitigation exercise was completed with the assistance of colleagues at the University of Sussex, and sought to take in to account the questions raised by insider status. In summary this exercise looked at questions about objectivity raised by the process of obtaining research data, and the assessment of the data itself. Taking the three focuses of research certain elements are particularly worthy of note. Firstly I did not work for the party in any function specifically associated with the formulation of policy, that is in the policy unit, as a specialist (portfolio) researcher, in the Whips Office or in any way that associates me with certain policies or ideologies. My role was primarily as an administrative and research assistant providing back-up material to other party officials. Secondly I have not worked for the party in a capacity formally associated with campaigns, in the campaigns department for instance, or been in any way closely associated with a particular campaign strategy. Assessments of these areas of party activity have been undertaken without the real need for any mitigation. Thirdly, where the thesis is concerned with the professionalisation of the party, and in particular its use of resources, both financial and human, is a question that has at times relied on questions prompted by personal experience. The research period spans over two decades and although I have been engaged in party activity in a number of positions including as staff in both Houses of Parliament and at party HQ I have attempted to mitigate bias by conducting a substantial number of interviews with staff that were both senior to me and often worked over a longer term. Furthermore, a large number of interviews were conducted with people that began working for the party post-2006.

In the process of designing and conducting this research two key points should be noted. The Liberal Democrats have gone from being a small, amateurish and family-like organisation, to being significantly larger, and as this thesis demonstrates, more professional. Access to individuals has undoubtedly been privileged although it is clear from the large number of interviews conducted that no consistent line in regard to the questions posed could have been orchestrated by the party. It is fair to assume that the data represents the views of the wide spectrum of those interviewed. This is supported by the variety of opinions collected. Secondly, an open and professionally revised research design was prepared in order to avoid bias that might interfere with any conclusions. Early fears that the party might in some way consider the research a threat, a betrayal of professional loyalty or most reasonably a nuisance, have (contrary to the literature's warnings) proved generally unfounded. The research has been deliberately constructed to make best use of party documents and quantitative data that is already in the public domain, and to draw inferences by triangulating this with the interview data. Interviews were conducted off the record and tape recorded, often by both parties and I have been explicit during that process about my questions and in explaining the purpose of the research at every stage. It is important to note, particularly given the sensitive nature of the questions posed, that for the individuals interviewed and the suddenly somewhat higher stakes for a party recently engaged in coalition government, that they were expressly given under anonymity and this is strenuously protected.

vii) Conclusion

The thesis has been designed to fill a gap in the literature on the Liberal Democrats and contribute to the literature on party organisational change. It includes descriptive chapters in order to provide a proper context for the substantive chapters that follow. It takes in to account that it is conducted from the position of a former party insider, and makes every effort to mitigate against any bias this may generate. It was prepared and designed at a time when it was hard to foresee the events of May 2010, even if, as this thesis suggests, the outcome should not have come as a surprise. Recent developments may make this research all the more salient, but in the interests of drawing the thesis to a conclusion, the period covered reaches a logical end with the May 2010 coalition. Questions that arise from the period following May 2010 are, however, important and worthy of note and are contained in an epilogue to this thesis. The vast majority of interviews were conducted before May 2010, and the opinions expressed at that time are those of people involved with a party inexperienced in the business of government. Naturally that changed when the party entered government, making the timing potentially advantageous. Not only are the research questions posed every bit as relevant, perhaps moreso, to the period prior to government (indeed before it was envisaged by many), but the people interviewed possibly less guarded and certainly under less time pressure. From the creation of the new party in 1988 to its first experience of holding office provides a chronologically clear, but also rich and largely unexplored, period of transformation.

Chapter 2 Literature review

i) Introduction

It is organisation which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organisation says oligarchy. (Michels 1911)

The extent to which the Liberal Democrats obey the iron law of oligarchy, and are becoming a more top-down party, has to be judged in light of the extensive and well-developed theoretical literature on party organisational change. Here that literature is examined in detail, beginning with the rich and classic theoretical work on the classification of parties (Michels 1911; Duverger 1954; Ostrogorski 1964; Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995). In addition to this there is a growing literature on the empirical testing of these theories (Michels 1911; Harmel and Janda 1994; Katz and Mair 1994; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Harmel 2002), and on individual parties or countries as comparative case-studies (Sartori 1971; Katz and Mair 1994; Bille 1997; Muller 1997; Webb, Farrell et al. 2002; Chhibber and Kollman 2005; Poguntke 2006). With respect to UK parties in particular detailed studies on party organisational change concentrate on the Labour Party (Hughes and Wintour 1990; Quinn 2004; Russell 2005), with some more recent attention paid to the Conservatives (Kelly 2004; Bale 2010). Some useful historical accounts are published looking at the period covering the SDP and Liberal Alliance and subsequent merger (Bogdanor 1983; Ingle 1985; Sykes 1990; Koelble 1991; Crewe and King 1995; Douglas 2005) and at the Liberal Democrats (Ingle 1985; Stevenson 1993; MacIver 1996; Douglas 2005; Russell and Fieldhouse 2005; Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006). As the Party grows in parliamentary significance, some recent studies have looked more closely at the Party's structure and internal democracy (Meadowcroft 2003; Holmes 2007; Cole 2009; Cowley 2009), and at ideology and policy positions (Hickson 2010). Accounts of the recent coalition are beginning to emerge (Laws 2010; Beech and Lee 2011) and there will no doubt be a surge in publications about this typically under-studied political party.

This chapter aims to put the research in the context of party organisational change, drawing closely on the work of Panebianco and considering the extent to which the Liberal Democrats are beginning to conform to his 'electoral-professional' model (Panebianco 1988). It examines party classification and seeks to explain some of the various empirical tests and methods that have been applied by political scientists in order to explain party organisation, organisational change and centralisation. It asks if Katz & Mair's 'ascendancy of the party in public office' makes sense in this case and finally it provides a broad overview of the academic literature on the Liberal Democrats.

ii) The Iron Law and its critics

Michels' work has subtly dominated work on parties for nearly a century. Observing the rise of the mass party, and in particular the German Social Democratic Party, he noted that as the Party grew that growth was accompanied by the growth of an internal hierarchy, that the members were dependent on their leaders, and the result was oligarchy. Michels argued that it was both the organisational features of big bureaucracy and the psychological characteristics of leadership types that made this inevitable. In contrast to Weber, who argued that the domination by elites could be viewed positively, Michels believed that this 'iron law' would be the undoing of the democratic principle in practice. He argued that as parties become more sophisticated so the need for specialisation increased, separating the masses from the leader whose political skill and access to communication channels, together with the authority to appoint key personnel, secured and perpetuated the oligarchy. It is not only leadership's control over communication channels that made this possible – it is coupled with the "incompetence of the masses" (p17).

Michels' observation is based on three key components. The first is that democracy without organisation is 'inconceivable' (p61). He asserts that an organisation that aims to resolve complex questions requires an understanding of complex solutions and thereby becomes dependent on the expertise of key individuals. 'Leaders possess many resources...among their assets; superior knowledge; control over the formal means of communication with the membership; skill in the art of politics' (p16). The second key tenet of Michels' theory is the consent of the membership in being led. He asserts that the need for 'direction and guidance ..is accompanied by a genuine cult for the leaders' (p88). Finally he argues that such leadership ultimately runs counter to the need of the masses and instead becomes detrimental to internal party democracy. 'When faced with a threat to their authority or office from within the organisation the leaders will become extremely aggressive and will not hesitate to undermine many democratic rights' (p18).

Based on the combination of the bureaucratic need for leadership, psychological dependency by the masses and the technical superiority of the political class, Michels asserts that, aided by the press and increasing cult of celebrity, leaders become ultimately 'self seeking' (p212). Although criticisms of his theory (that it lacks "methodological rigour" or is a "hyper-generalisation" see Weldon, 2007), has some force, it remains relevant. As this thesis demonstrates, in enduring for over a century, Michels has struck upon the essential problem faced by attempts to design democratic institutions. As party systems and party models change, and even as parties appear to be in decline, the significance of his work is apparent. Indeed, Lipset's introduction to the 1961 volume explains:

...the malfunctioning of existing democracy, in particular the domination by the leadership over the society and popular organisations was not primarily a phenomenon which resulted from a low level of social and economic development, inadequate education or capitalist control of the opinion-forming media and other power resources but rather was characteristic of any complex social system. (p15)

Michels' theory then, remains widely applicable, and as the literature on empirical testing expands, is, with one or two exceptions (Rohrschneider 2006; Weldon 2007), supported. Weldon's 2007 study of the 'psychological roots of power' concludes that leaders do not display an 'insatiable appetite for power'. He reaches this conclusion following a membership survey and a multivariate analysis that seeks to explain whether 13 parties in Denmark and the Netherlands were driven by their elite or participatory/grass-roots factions. Weldon discovers that it is the leaders, rather than the masses, that place importance on the role of the grassroots. What Weldon does, however, is to reveal the real problem inherent in any attempt to test Michels' theory, namely the difficulty of falsifying the proposition that:

..no matter what a party does organisationally, even fully democratising internal decision making procedures, the psychological tendencies of leaders and rank and file members, conspire to create oligarchy. (p31)

The context of 'Michels' work was the rise of the mass party, and his close observation of the German Social Democratic Party demonstrated the mutual dependence of the leadership and the masses. In the century since it was published however, parties and electoral systems have changed, and the 'iron law' is often tested, challenged and proves adaptable to the modern reality of political life. Duverger, for instance, in his continuation of Michels' work forty years later, claimed; "The iron law is not iron, leaders can and have been removed and need to carry the membership with them to survive" (Duverger 1954). He argues that Michels' theory while sound in terms of the technical and psychological need for leadership, overlooks the fundamentals of the British parliamentary system, in which the elected are accountable to their electorate, and not the mass organisation (i.e., party) that got them there. In essence he says then, that parties are simply vehicles for providing the electorate with a democratic choice.

Lipset was himself a critic of Michels' work, someone who sought out exceptions to the rule and found them in his study of the hierarchy of the American based International Typographical Union (Seymour Martin Lipset, Trow et al. 1956). This organisation devised systems to promote autonomy and transparency, while encouraging regular elections and the input of powerful locally based factions, and did, for a short while, appear to bend the iron law (Goldfield 1998). Other exceptions include the German Green Party, which set about observing rules that prioritised internal democracy and sought to avoid 'distancing' between the grassroots and leadership. Policies including the "imperative mandate" which compelled party representatives to abide by conference decisions and the "diagonal rotation" of senior party officials, appeared however only to have limited success, but eventually succumbed to the iron law (Kitschelt 1989; Harmel and Frankland 2005; Poguntke 2006). It is unlikely then, that a study of a political organisation such as the Liberal Democrats, will reach conclusions that swim against the strong tide in support of the 'iron law' albeit in a qualified, modified form. The literature that began with Michels provides a sound and broad framework within which to conduct a test of this theory with particular regard to a party that until recently had few realistic aspirations to national office.

iii) An explanation of party models

From being a means to an end, parties, that is, the perceived interests of the party elite, become ends in themselves. (Ostrogorski 1902) p303.

The evolution of party in western democracies gives rise to analysis based on models, a brief explanation of which follows. The cadre or elite party model was characterised by common goals, very loose organisation and a growing emphasis on providing candidates. The early observations of this phase were published in 1902 when Moise Ostrogorski carried out the first detailed assessment of its kind focusing on parties in the UK and US. Ostrogorski noted that parties first developed in Parliament around the Whips and began operating outside parliament, at the constituency level in direct response to the 1832 Reform Bill and the production of electoral lists (p72). Organisation at that time centered on elections, and disappeared between election times, but with an increased electorate the value of a more permanent order soon became apparent and central organisations of the Conservative and Liberal Parties were born. Membership was restricted and what emerged was a cross between a social club and a political registration campaign, the Conservatives belonging to the Carlton Club established in 1831 and Liberals gathering at the Reform Club established in 1836. He noted “people still continued...to rely more on direct personal influence than principles and programmes” (pp76) and these ‘elite’ party machines were a mirror to “the manners and customs of the nation”, which in other words, represented the same elite traditions where personal contact, class, education and land-owning were of primary importance.

Ostrogorski went on to detail how these amateur clubs grew, through regional registration societies, in to mass membership organisations, and into movements that became important in their own right. While the local organisations showed enthusiasm they remained “in need of guidance” (p94) and the marrying of these grass-roots local parties with their corresponding parliamentary leadership gave rise to the caucus, a forerunner of what we know as the local branch, and which forms the basic structure for a larger assembly, which we now know as the conference.⁶ He describes the growth in the importance of the caucus, particularly during times of electoral defeat, and how the Parliamentary leadership used this vehicle to draw supporters together to maximum effect. This, he argued “democratise[d] party government” (p292) but he also noted that the dependence of the party organisation on “political professionals” meant that in reality it had “succeeded only in a superficial, purely apparent fashion” (p303).

Following the universal suffrage reforms of 1918 and 1932 the so-called ‘cadre’ then required a means by which to reach out to the wider electorate, and so the ‘mass party’ was born. Maurice Duverger’s classic text ‘Political Parties’ published in 1954 identified the transition from elite to mass party, the elite model characterised as a parliamentary organisation initially created *internally* and drawn from the elite of male landowners who already had political power, to one of mass membership (Duverger 1954). Duverger argues that the evolution of the mass-party was a

⁶ The first meeting of a number of local and regional Liberal Associations was held in Birmingham on 31st May 1877, chaired by Joseph Chamberlain.

response to two factors. Firstly socialist parties lacked big financial backers and a mass-based party had the potential to raise small funds from the many rather than large donations from the few. Secondly it was a good fit with socialist ideology which favoured political education for the masses, and more democratic methods for recruiting candidates. Duverger believed the mass party could, although hierarchical, reflect an overall socialist principle. 'The 'inner circle' is very open and ordinary members of the party can enter it quite easily' (1954; p109). He also observed that the consequences of the mass party was the decline in independent MPs, since the mass party reinforced the authority of the Parliamentary party and the importance of the Whips. Comprising individuals outside the parliamentary scene, then the mass party model is one in which members are united around party ideology and are organisationally concerned with spreading the message through propaganda. The mass party exists in various forms, depending on the precise role of the branch (see Duverger 1954, Kirchheimer 1957), but is fundamentally hierarchical in nature.

The mass party model would by its very nature thwart internal democracy but Otto Kirchheimer went further, suggesting that in the process of seeking the most appealing vote-maximising tactics the 'mass party' had evolved into a bland and compromising 'catch-all' party. In the transition from mass to catch-all parties, according to Kirchheimer, three phases can be identified. The first is the pre-war period in which parties 'gather strength', the second is post-war in which parties accommodate the needs of a more broadly based political consensus and the third is an 'advanced' stage where parties attempt to hold on to their core support at the same time as present electoral choices with mass appeal (p355). He concludes "where obtaining office becomes an almost exclusive preoccupation of a party, issues of personnel are reduced to a search for the simplest effective means to put up winning combinations" (p369). In aiming for the widest appeal possible, in an increasingly middle class era, political parties distance themselves from core ideologies in order to bridge traditional cleavages and maximise votes. Kirchheimer predicted the demise in party membership numbers in tandem with the increased significance in interest groups, supported by modern interpretations of 'supply-side' party membership (Webb 2000). In summary, he concluded that the role of the party in constantly weighing up the trade-off between policy positions and votes reduced its role to one of bureaucratic necessity. The catch-all party therefore offers less in terms of ideology by which voters can differentiate and make their choice, forcing them to rely instead on the personalities of party leaders.

Most of the literature mentioned thus far relates party organisation to the relationship between those seeking office and the electorate or party systems. Panebianco, however, returned to the theme of examining parties as *organisations*. His 1988 work develops themes that had been given less attention by Michels, Duverger and Kirchheimer and describes the transformation from the 'mass' or 'catch-all' party to one where experts and technicians are more valuable than bureaucrats: the 'electoral professional' party (Panebianco 1988). The transition, according to Panebianco, is swifter in parties that are highly institutionalised, and in party systems that are less fragmented. He suggests that the transition is caused by external factors such as the growth in technology, where voters see party leaders on TV, removing the necessity for activists acting as

communicators, further weakening the traditional institutional role of the political party. This results in an increase in the significance of professionals with expertise in campaigning and communication skills, which coupled with the growing reliance on interest groups, results in the professionalisation and centralisation of the Party. It is this to which this research is most closely addressed in its key themes.

Panebianco's observations about the transitional phase in party development are particularly salient to this study. In particular he notes the transition from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional organisations, that the work parties once did is now often done by other organisations, and that the party is increasingly specialist, alienating it from ordinary members. Distanced both from core ideology and an active membership, the electoral-professional party, he argues, is a precursor to the eventual dissolution of parties as organisations, together with an ideological backlash against valence issues and toward extremism. Panebianco predicts the consequent re-emergence of the collective identity through new political organisations as parties become more incorporated in to the state and the importance of leaders & advisors increases. He focuses on the transitional nature of this phase and argues that the expertise offered by interest groups usurps the role of members in policy making, and is replaced with tasks such as fundraising and generating electoral support. At the same time Panebianco foresaw that, in order to maximise mass appeal, political parties would be less committed to divergent ideological positions and would rely instead on personalities, and the use of professional marketing, to offer distinct choices to the electorate. This is a pivotal text in helping with an understanding of organisational development and party evolution.

It is useful here to draw upon a more recent case-study that focuses on Panebianco's use of the term 'professional'. Webb and Fisher's seminal study of New Labour's employees at Millbank in 2003 pinpoints five characteristics that can be used as indicators of professionalism:

"A professional may be regarded as a member of the workforce with a relatively high status and strong position in the labour market flowing from a special degree of expertise, commitment, autonomy and capacity for self-regulation, which in turn reflects a particular education and training. By contrast, traditional party bureaucrats will have less status, expertise, job autonomy or capacity to regulate their own activities and are less likely to have been through a special formal education." (Webb and Fisher 2003; Webb 2008).

These characteristics represent ideal-types, and in operational terms, for example in a study such as this, present some difficulties. Precisely what education and training might rightly be considered to provide expertise, for instance, and to what extent might the parties themselves have an interest in being seen to be increasingly 'professional'? (Negrine 2005; Webb 2008). The five indicators, therefore, are best used loosely, as a guide to identifying professionalising traits. Webb allows for a 'soft' use of the term professional when some but not all of the characteristics set out in the ideal-type, such as when commitment and effectiveness are present but not autonomy and self-regulation. This "enhanced degree of work-place effectiveness flowing from a greater sense of

commitment of devotion to work-related duties” is often what is meant by professionalization in the context of this thesis (Webb 2008). Where relevant these characteristics are explained at the start of each chapter in order to provide the closest possible definition of professionalism and how that relates to the area of party life under examination.

By far the most-cited new development since Panebianco in the literature on party development is Katz & Mair’s addition of the ‘cartel model’. This suggests that the modern party acts as more of a broker between the state and the electorate. They argue that change is a consequence of the gradual adaptation by political parties, to the modern political system (Katz and Mair 1995). Furthermore they argue that, in established democracies where party membership is in decline and class dealignment, state funding and the use of new communication techniques is increasing, parties now act primarily to ensure their own survival. In a challenge to Duverger and Kirchheimer’s theory, which focused on the relationship between party and society, Katz & Mair focus on the relationship between party and state, arguing that the mass-party model is outdated and fails to recognise the emphasis that party organisations place on their own agency. In common with Panebianco they argue that the professionalisation of campaign methods turns even the fundamental propositions about party organisation on their head: ‘party oligarchy becomes a virtue rather than a vice’ (Katz & Mair, 1995. p14). In their depiction of party models and their characteristics Katz & Mair state that since the coming of universal suffrage, a combination of professionalisation, capital intensive campaigning, and the blurring of the distinction between member and non-member concludes in the gradual development of the party as agent of the state.

This recent addition to the literature on party models introduces a number of significant changes in the way we think about political parties. It hinges partly on the ability of parties to extract a ‘commission’ for their services. This might include holding office and receiving pay but could also include payments to the party to ensure the survival of the organisation. Katz & Mair argue that parties that are able to manipulate the electorate to their own ends are capable of manipulating governments in the same way, so that their own position becomes a necessity to the smooth functioning of the electoral system. Also In an earlier study Katz & Mair also provide a useful way of dissecting parties for study: any party can be divided up in to the party on the ground, the party HQ and the party in parliament. This approach was adopted in an extensive comparative project on parties in western democracies (Katz and Mair 1994) and provides a useful template here (see also Bale and Sanderson-Nash 2011).

However, placing the Liberal Democrats in the context of models devised by political scientists presents a problem, since before May 2010 the party had been permanently in opposition and much of the literature assumes office-holding (for example McKenzie, 1955). In addition, without the consistent financial or electoral support of large groups such as the trades unions or business community, the Liberal Democrats have had to rely on individual votes, and single-issue campaigning to win, making them a poor fit for the models described (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005). They are to an extent a ‘hybrid-party’ that combines the characteristics of both mass and elite models (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005; Evans 2007), although the evidence in this thesis

suggests that latterly the party has conformed to the electoral-professional type (see also Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2011).

These ideal types, however, do not neatly follow one another and parties may exhibit some but not all of the model's characteristics. What this taxonomy can offer, is a set of broad classifications that depict the transitional nature of political parties. In the case of the Liberal Democrats its predecessor parties come from distinct and different traditions, the Liberal Party would be described as more 'elite' than 'mass' party, while the short-lived SDP existed as a hybrid between the 'mass' and 'electoral-professional' models. However, its successor, the Liberal Democrats, appear to increasingly exhibit more of the characteristics of the 'electoral-professional model', in particular by adapting a more professional marketing style of campaigning, by increasingly concentrating power in the hands of the leader and by embracing modern communication methods. There are no deterministic laws that would govern the development of political parties such as the Liberal Democrats, although we are able to see by this examination of its evolution in three areas of activity (policy, campaigning and the distribution of resources) that as it becomes a more credible contender for power, the leadership has sought greater autonomy from the rest of the party in order to achieve maximum strategic flexibility. Arguably this created favourable conditions in which Nick Clegg was able to negotiate the coalition in May 2010 in spite of the party's continuing, (albeit reduced or temporarily suspended) sense of internal democracy.

iv) Parties, power, and organisational change

Academic case studies of party organisational change adopt a number of approaches. Robert McKenzie's 'Political Parties' is the first extensive examination of the internal workings of the Labour and Conservative Parties, (though noticeably not the Liberals), and has provided a classic text to scholars of political parties for over half a century. The more recent comparativist approach has added explanatory power, providing classifications for parties within different party systems (Sartori 1971; Wolinetz 1988; Lijphart 1994; Ware 1996; Mair 1997; Webb, Farrell et al. 2002; Chhibber and Kollman 2005; Frankland, Lucardie et al. 2008). There is a growing body of recent work that focuses specifically on party organisation and organisational change and here we find a framework for a study of this kind (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Kitschelt 1989; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Harmel and Janda 1994; Katz and Mair 1994; Webb 1994; Muller 1997; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Harmel 2002).

The influential study of British Political Parties by Robert McKenzie aims to see the extent to which the 'iron law' explains intra-party power in the Conservative and Labour Parties (McKenzie 1955). While accepting the manipulation of the hierarchy, particularly in the Labour Party, by the leadership, McKenzie concedes that the membership have the power to remove the Labour leader, and survival therefore depends on the co-operation of the mass membership and the popularity of leaders. He focuses on the relationship between centralisation and office holding, concluding that parties' internal affairs are directly linked to electoral success, reflecting the different needs of a party in government compared with a party in opposition. Although he accepts

that tensions exist, Mackenzie argues that MPs and leaders ultimately do no more than pay 'lip service to the theory of inner-party democracy'. While accepting this is most acute when in power, he says even in opposition no party leadership will allow itself to become merely a 'spokesman'.

Since, in the course of this research, the Lib Dems have had their first taste of power, the relevance of the party in office and the link between centralisation and power come to the fore. Harmel & Janda provide us with a series of definitions, assumptions and prepositions that help underpin studies such as these providing a useful framework in which to closely examine party change. Of particular interest is the identification of independent variables linked to causation, for instance – that vote maximising parties react with change to electoral failure; office maximising parties react to changes in the leadership coalition; policy and ideology advocates react to events that directly influence a policy decision and intra-party democracy maximisers react to factors that influence the make-up of party membership. Here Muller's study of the Austrian Socialist Party provides a useful example, looking closely at the study of party organisational change, dealing with "only one country, only one party in that country, only with organisational change and with only two specific aspects of organisational change" (Muller 1997). The study investigates which of the causal factors proposed by Harmel & Janda (2004) fit most closely with their case, and if it is possible to rank them in order of the relevance of each explanatory factor – in this case the conclusion is that leadership tops the list. Harmel groups previous work into three approaches; 'lifecycle' (Michels 1911), 'system-level trends' (Duverger 1954; Kirchheimer 1969; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995), and 'discrete change' (Harmel and Janda 1994; Bille 1997; Muller 1997).

In all these studies, but particularly the more recent contributions to this field, the focus shifts to the agency of the leadership, and which factors have an impact on achieving maximum flexibility within the structures of party, and what might constrain this (Hellman 2011). What becomes clear from the increasing practice of individual and comparative case-studies of this kind is that the causes are not exclusive and that party organisational change is increasingly best explained using a combination of integrated factors.

iv) The Liberal Democrats

Academic literature on the Liberal Democrats pre-May 2010, is thin on the ground. There is much for historians interested in its predecessor parties, but little for political scientists. There are six books in print that are dedicated to the party, all of which are useful contributions, looking at its early years (Stevenson 1993; MacIver 1996), gradual maturation (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005), its grassroots and voter profile (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006), ideology (Hickson 2010) and coalition (Laws 2010; Beech and Lee 2011). The Party does, however, benefit from enthusiasts among its membership whose archiving and attention to detail has proved valuable to this research. The Liberal Democrat History Group produces a quarterly journal, an up-to-date website, organises regular conferences and produces books and book reviews that are enormously helpful to those interested in the party.

The party has also been the subject of a dedicated issue of the *Political Quarterly* which brought together a number of accounts of campaigning, leadership style, policy making and predictions about the Party's future. This revealed some of the tensions that become more accentuated in the transitional period from one leader to another. Duncan Brack rigorously defends the Ashdown period and criticises Kennedy's style (Brack 2007). This is in contrast to Richard Grayson, who defends the Kennedy term and suggests that, when he left office, he had done more long-term good than Ashdown, who wasted time bargaining with Labour. Both worked as Director of Policy under the respective leaders they defend. This highlights the pitfalls of insider writing, a category in to which much literature on the Liberal Democrats, including to an extent this study, falls. Collections of essays by a combination of academics and prominent politicians (MacIver 1996; Hickson 2010) are no bad thing, but the body of literature makes its greatest strides when people unconnected to the party make more extensive contributions to it (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005; Beech and Lee 2011).

The first of these studies (MacIver 1996) is a useful, if now dated, text that collects both insider and academic writing and is the first to acknowledge the potential legacy of the merger of two disparate political organisations. MacIver begins by describing the conflicts between key individuals, over political philosophy and leadership style (Steel, Jenkins and Owen). He goes on to conclude that the Party was unlikely to make the breakthrough it sought for three reasons. Firstly, he doubts the "coherent ideological position" claimed by the new party whose efforts to synthesise the progressive radical tradition of the Liberals with the Social Democrats were "handicapped" by a failure to communicate. Secondly he questions whether the new party could deliver the organisation required:

The extent to which the party organisation itself has cultivated a centralised, elitist, top-down decision-making and management style in some respects remote from the membership cannot be entirely welcome in a party dedicated to participative democracy. (MacIver, 1996, p17)

Thirdly, MacIver questions the Liberal Democrats' strategy for effectively winning votes, given their strong activist base but electoral disadvantage. In short he argued a number of hurdles faced the new party, some in its control and some not. What is clear from this text published in 1996 is that the trajectory of the Liberal Democrats was unpredictable. In particular MacIver hinted that breakthrough was likely to be in the form of replacing one of the other parties, rather than incremental. In many respects, however, he insightfully set out the problems that faced, and continue to face, this Party.

Russell & Fieldhouse update MacIver in what is the most comprehensive text book on the Liberal Democrats to date. "Neither Left nor Right" published in 2005 is a carefully considered account of the Party, returning to the same themes but in a more optimistic light, taking account of the party's resilience, success and growth. The Party did, after all, survive a decade between publications. Their statistical analysis and series of case-studies of the Party's electoral fortunes points to the

effective, (indeed it could be argued, vital) adoption of 'targeting' in order for the party to progress. The process of transforming an apparently static, or at least slow-growing popular vote, into 46 seats in the 1997 general election, is depicted as something of a turning point. They highlight five important factors in the development of the Liberal Democrats, which appear to have both revived and at the same time thwarted their position on the British political landscape.

The first of these is the "alternative opposition" which transformed the role of opposition from being a government in waiting, to being an end in itself. The 'effective opposition' declared by Charles Kennedy and particularly effective in opposing the Iraq war, has, they argue, placed the third party in an important and distinctive role in British politics. They conclude that while the strategy works well for the Party in theory, the reality is that, with the Conservatives in opposition, the Lib Dems would need to "emulate" them to a point that would be at odds with the core political philosophy of the party membership (p253). They also point out that the move from equidistance helped to secure the party significant rewards, its continued attack on the Conservatives needs to be replaced with a more "multi-faceted set of identities" if the Party is to progress (p254).

The second factor deals with the 'credibility gap' which refers to the problem faced by a seemingly popular party, whose governmental experience remains untested, and who suffer from the classic and self-perpetuating two-party system (Duverger 1954). Russell & Fieldhouse point to this as the key obstacle for political marketers to overcome for Liberal Democrat success. They conclude that following their own detailed assessments of the Party's electoral fortunes this remains the greatest obstacle, not only borne by quantitative studies, but acknowledged by the majority of interviewees.

Linked to this is their third factor, that of 'creeping liberalism', and which many party activists euphemistically term the 'orange glow', namely that credibility is achieved through local success and incremental achievements. Russell & Fieldhouse conclude, unsurprisingly, that "whilst...contiguity to other Liberal Democrat seats may be an advantage, it is certainly no guarantee of success" (p257).

The consequences of this lead to their fourth factor, that of the "dual identity" - not as has previously been identified elsewhere in this thesis as that of liberal versus social democratic, but of the tensions between the local, regional and national layers of a federal party. This is of particular interest to this thesis especially their assessment of that tension and whether it is increasing or staying the same. They conclude that the 'dualism' is increasing, suggesting that what Lib Dems say nationally might differ from what they say at the state, regional or local level – but that this is "more than the triumph of necessity; it is part of the ideological make up of the Party" (p258). Russell & Fieldhouse suggest this works very well for the Party, with the elite exercising control over message without "neutralising" local parties, upon whom they remain dependent. Their final factor looks at "issue based mobilisation" which links their assessment of the grassroots and leadership. In the case of Paddy Ashdown they point to his insensitive suggestion that the Party rename itself "Democrats", coupled with the somewhat secretive joint venture with Tony Blair, the Joint Cabinet Committee, and in the case of Charles Kennedy, to fail to unite over Europe.

Lib Dem leaders are faced with a serious dilemma and Russell & Fieldhouse conclude: "Liberalism as a philosophy has inbuilt tensions which will never be resolved" (p85). They argue that the Party has an unusual following, and one that cannot rely on the traditions of trades union or business support. It does, however, continue to attract popular politicians and popular leaders, and at times mobilise around effectively communicated policy issues. What stands between the Party and electoral breakthrough remains the 'credibility gap', fuelled by financial constraints and a two-party system. Russell and Fieldhouse suggest that incremental growth is their only realistic chance of progressing. They predict that the circumstances on offer to the Party between 1995 and 2002 may not arise again and were a unique opportunity, (perhaps missed) by a party that does not always make obvious choices (p252). Power sharing in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, while helping close the credibility gap, exacerbated the 'dual identity' in the Party's federal structure. It is, they conclude "a long way from power" (p259).

The most recent text to look specifically at the Liberal Democrats is part of the series by Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Anthony Billingham which focuses on the Lib Dems and the party's grass roots (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006). In the first instance they note that without the party's activist base it would have disappeared (p23) and so an understanding of what attracts activists to a party that shows few signs of forming a government raises interesting questions. They provide a useful breakdown of party activists by type, having collected data from 4424 party members in 1998, and while interesting it is unfortunate that it took so long to come to publication. We are able, however, to see a decline in party attachment and activism when they conducted their surveys, and the 26% decline in activism was higher than that of the other parties. There will, of course, have been other important exogenous factors at this time such as the 1997 Labour election victory. Also of particular interest is their assessment in the change in membership base between the early 90s and later in the decade when they note a significant increase in the proportion of public-sector members, at a time when coalition looked possible (pp33). They also reach interesting conclusions some of which chime with both MacIver and Russell & Fieldhouse and others that illustrate the difficulty of using current themes to describe data that is now ten years old. It would be interesting to update this work, particularly in view of its potential with regard to May's law (May 1973) and the arguments contained in this thesis that suggest there has been shift at the grassroots away from radicalism toward pragmatic politics.

There is agreement within the literature on the following two points: 1) the party suffers from a lack of resources, and 2) in common with other parties, membership and activism are declining. It is also true to say that a decline in traditional loyalties is likely to play to the strengths of the Lib Dems' tradition in local politics. What the literature fails to provide any tangible support for, however, are claims that 1) the party's reluctance to adopt a more 'electoral-professional' model in favour of grassroots activism will be to its advantage and 2) the party's federal and de-centralised structure constantly remind the leadership of its dependence on, and value of, ordinary members. The existence of a grassroots tradition, and a strong one at that, does not necessarily mean the absence of an electoral-professional model, to the Party's detriment or otherwise. Similarly, the federal structure of the Party in its constitution does not guard with any guarantee against top-

down decision making. Finally, as the study of changes in intra-party democracy to date suggests, leadership, and in particular, changes in leadership, are a strong causal factor (Russell, Fieldhouse et al. 2007). In order to understand the drivers behind changes in the Liberal Democrats, then, it is important to understand its leaders, and dominant faction.

vi) Conclusion

The iron law of oligarchy is one of the most well known phrases in the study of political parties, and having survived over 100 years deserves to be continually tested with regard to new parties, and indeed old parties behaving in new ways. Party models and their testing, together with a working definition of the term 'professional' also provide a useful framework for this research. The Liberal Democrats are both a new party, having been established in 1988, and one that has made the transition from a small and third party with few realistic aspirations to office, to one that has now entered government in spite of remaining a small and third party. This shift in goal-orientation is important and suggests a transition from policy and vote maximising toward the goal of holding office. In the case of the third party, strategic seat-maximising represents a critical development. In 2010 its vote declined marginally, but its influence grew massively. The changes that have taken place inside this particular party and building up to that important transition have the potential to inform our understanding of party adaptation more generally.

Chapter 3 Background

i) Introduction

The party's position has been that of a surfer, waiting patiently for the right wave to ride and then using all its skills to stay upright and to travel as far and as fast as possible. (Walter, 2003, p3).⁷

The Liberal Democrats have historically been unable to break through on their own initiative and have instead needed to wait for the political weather to change to best realise their chances. Senior politicians have privately acknowledged the party's inability to make significant progress under the current voting system, and have pointed out instead the crucial role that coalitions present to the Lib Dems, giving them their only realistic chance of holding office and demonstrating the pragmatic politics the party espouses.⁸

The Liberal Democrats are different from the Conservatives and the Labour Party - and not simply because they represent a coalition of sorts between the ideologies of the SDP and Liberal Parties. It is, after all, easily argued that all parties represent ranges of views, for instance that New Labour is a 'political composite' (Driver and Martell 2006). They are different because they are shaped by coming third at Westminster. The parliamentary party is traditionally weak, or at least smaller in number, and the local government base is strong. The party has developed survival techniques for decades out of office, relying on by-election wins to boost morale and continuing to enjoy relatively solid support in rural Scotland and the west of England. Analysis of the dynamics of Liberal Democrat support also suggests its vote is different from the other two parties. The party is likely to benefit from a 'leadership heuristic', based on personality rather than its record in office (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006) (Kelly 2007).

Being the third party in a two-party system has created an unusual and sometimes misunderstood political party – one that owes as much to its non-conformist roots as to its activists, both of whom are held simultaneously responsible for the party's survival and failure to break through. This has created an interesting and untypical narrative, and one which this chapter explores using a combination of literature, including biography and a number of interviews with politicians, party officials and activists, many of whom belonged to either the Liberals or the SDP.

This chapter looks at the position of the third party in history, the Liberal Party, the SDP, the Alliance and the creation of the Liberal Democrats. What is the party's past and what has it learned? It examines the trends in third party voting, and asks what the Lib Dems and their predecessors needed to do to survive for so long in the political wilderness.

Firstly then, this chapter looks at the party's origins. An understanding of the Liberal Democrats requires a thorough understanding of the component parts that were brought together in the

⁷ Former BBC journalist and Director of Communications for the Liberal Democrats.
⁸ Interview 3, 2009.

merger of 1988. The Liberal Party was a small and stubborn force in British politics, the SDP conversely a politician-created top-down entity. Exactly what happened during first, the Alliance and then the merger is important in this study, since it enables us to understand the party's overall design. The second section of this chapter looks at the party's electoral fortunes in more detail. The third party has experienced mixed electoral success, coming to dominate scores of local authorities but without making the breakthrough at Westminster many had hoped for. The arguably fortuitous outcome of the 2010 general election notwithstanding, since its inception the party has polled between 9% and 23% of the vote, which has always translated in to fewer than 10% of seats at Westminster. Furthermore its share of the vote typically dips between general elections, a pattern repeated in the elections of its separate state counterparts in Scotland and Wales, in the election of the London Mayor and at the European level. This is at variance with support for the party at the local level and helps in an understanding of the perception of the party and its vote winning capacity. Similarly the Liberal Democrats' ability to deliver some sensational by-election victories but failure to roll out similar results at the national level indicates the uniqueness of its position in the political landscape. This section considers factors likely to influence Lib Dem votes and paints a picture of a party far more dependent on leadership than its grassroots philosophy likes to suggest.

ii) Party Origins and Merger

The Liberal Party

"None of us in this party is interested in office for office's sake. If we were we would never have joined the Liberal Party" (David Steel's speech to 1974 Liberal Assembly).

The post war Liberal Party was one smarting from damaging leadership splits, a lack of distinctiveness and a strengthening Labour movement, returning just 6 MPs in 1951 on 2.5% of the national vote. It was a bitterly divided movement, constantly outflanked by its wealthier and better supported competitors, but one which continued to survive. What followed was a period of mini-revivals, each time the party learning new lessons only to face further set-backs in a cycle of near-breakthroughs and disappointments. Firstly, the party has benefited from popular leaders. With the exception of Nick Clegg, whose constituency Sheffield Hallam, is in South Yorkshire, every leader since 1945 has been drawn from the party's strongholds (from which they drew the majority of their MPs) in rural areas of Scotland and Wales or the south west of England, yo-yoing between the two:

Table 1. Liberal leaders, 1945-present, by constituency.

Leader	Period in office	Constituency
Clement Davies	1945-1956	Montgomeryshire
Grimond	1956-1967	Orkney & Shetland
Thorpe	1967-1976	North Devon*
Steel	1976-1988	Tweeddale Ettrick & Lauderdale
Ashdown	1988-1999	Yeovil
Kennedy	1999-2006	Ross Skye & Lochaber
Campbell	2006-2007	North East Fife**
Clegg	2007-present	Sheffield Hallam

*Between May and July 1976 Jo Grimond returned as Acting Leader

**Between October and November 2007 Vince Cable was Acting Leader

In 1956 the party elected Jo Grimond leader. Grimond was a popular politician who enjoyed both the affections of his party, and respect at Westminster in spite of his iconoclastic style. His phase in office reversed the trend that, had it continued, would have meant the end of the Liberal Party. Grimond's period as leader saw the party developing tactics that it continues to employ, in particular:

- attracting popular and unconventional candidates. The charismatic and popular MP for Orkney and Shetland was able to draw an unusually talented group of candidates to his small and stubborn political party, including Robin Day, Ludovic Kennedy and Clement Freud. His former career in the services helped the party attract a higher proportion of ex-servicemen as candidates than either of the other two major parties (Douglas, 2005).

- focusing on community politics and local elections. Grimond fought the 1959 general election with so few resources his party was barely able to campaign on a national basis, and instead candidates focused on their own individual seats. They were however buoyed by the result, in which of the 216 seats contested only 56 deposits were lost and in the seats they held in 1955 and 1959 the vote increased from 15.1% to 16.9%. This change in fortunes was mirrored by a gradual swell in numbers of Liberals winning council seats, something that the party sought to prioritise and did so by creating a new post at HQ, capably filled by Pratap Chintis, for the co-ordination and support of local councillors (Walter 2003).

- exploiting support in universities. At a time when Labour and Conservatives were beginning to find their own extremists a hindrance, the groundswell in student radicalism suited the Liberal party, who recruited greater numbers on university campuses than either of their rivals (Walter 2003).

- winning by-elections. Many in the party point to by-election successes in Torrington (1958) and Orpington (1962) as the moment the party's fortunes began to turn. The party had consistently done well in local council elections and built a strong local campaigning team. It adopted a young and fresh candidate and benefited from an unpopular Conservative Government against which they polled a sensational 22% swing (Young 1997).
- thinking radically about policies, many of which were adopted by the mainstream, and sometimes by other parties (Curtice 1988).

The party, however, failed to make a breakthrough in the 1964 general election, as their Leader famously marched his troops "towards the sound of gunfire"⁹, and the Liberals made slow and patchy progress in the following decade. Their share of the national vote went down, while their share of seats in parliament went up. The party's dependence on by-election wins to continue to provide the party with much-needed publicity, and to lend momentum to its local campaigning effort, was essential to its survival. Grimond's phase of leadership achieved two further things of significance that were unique to the Liberals:

- the party was able to rely on support on the Celtic fringes, particularly in Scotland where the Liberal Democrats continue to hold his former seat of Orkney and Shetland.
- the party adopted a united and unique policy on Europe, supporting the UK's membership of the EEC, a pro-European stance that the Liberal Democrats retain today, on an issue that at times has badly divided its competitors.

Grimond's time as leader is seen as one in which the party fought off extinction with a leader whose charisma and ideas secured its future, in part organisationally, but also because he inspired the next generation of Liberal party politicians.

In 1967 Jeremy Thorpe, the MP for North Devon, beat Eric Lubbock (MP for Orpington) and Emlyn Hooson (MP for Montgomeryshire) to become its next leader. Thorpe's introduction to the party drew together the themes introduced under Jo Grimond. Thorpe was a stylish and charismatic young man who appeared to understand the modern media (Douglas 2005). He was recruited to the Liberal Party while at Oxford where he became President of the Union. He also benefited from the existence of a relatively strong local campaigning machine that had come together in 1958 during the Torrington by-election where Mark Bonham-Carter won the seat. Thorpe built up the party organisation, successfully fundraised and embraced the party's increasingly decentralised structure by championing community politics.

⁹ Jo Grimond, Liberal Assembly, Brighton 1963.

Thorpe led the Liberals from 1967 to 1976 and his period in office is marked once again by the developing of survival skills. During this time the party made further gains in by-elections, returning some of the party's best-known politicians, notably David Steel in 1965 and Cyril Smith in 1972. The party faced a bitter disappointment in the 1970 general election and returned just 6 MPs and 7.5% of the popular vote. Its Assembly the following autumn acknowledged the importance of local campaigning and local government, passing a motion placing "primary strategic emphasis on community politics" (Copus 2007).

Its active youth wing, the Young Liberals, continued to support local efforts and between 1972 and 1973 the party enjoyed another essential series of mini revivals, winning 5 by-elections and continuing to build on previous success in Scotland and rural England. It also gained 1500 council seats in the spring of 1973 (Thorpe 1999), and in the general election of February 1974 increased the party's popular vote to over 19%. In the negotiations that followed Thorpe refused to enter in to coalition with the Conservatives without a guarantee on electoral reform, and in the subsequent general election of October 1974 the party lost 1% of the vote and returned with just 13 seats. The discrepancy between the popular vote and seats in Westminster was never greater.

Table 2. Liberal votes and seats 1950-1989

Year	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970	1974 f	1974 o	1979	1983*	1987*
Seats	6	6	6	9	12	6	14	13	11	23	22
% votes	2.5	2.7	5.9	11.21	8.5	7.5	19.3	18.3	13.8	25.4	22.6
% seats	1	1	1	1.5	2	1	2	2	1.7	3.5	3.3

(* Alliance)

Table 3. Liberal Democrat votes and seats 1992-2010

	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
Seats	20	46	52	62	63
% votes	17.8	16.8	18.3	22	23
% seats	3	6.9	7.8	9.5	9.6

The party learned from this, that, as well as embracing local campaigning and making headway with the media and the beginnings of personality politics, representation would not improve with an even distribution of 20% of the vote. This led the party to adopt a twin strategy of targeting where it was most popular, whilst arguing for changes to the electoral system. It also realised that having such unusual and locally popular politicians acted against it making a more generic breakthrough in places where it had less historic support (Walter 2003). What followed however, was a further slump, and a difficult period for the party dominated by scandals in Thorpe's private life, resulting in his resignation as leader, and withdrawal from public life (Freeman and Penrose 1996; Penrose and Freeman 1996).

In December 1976 the party announced David Steel had beaten John Pardoe in its first democratic leadership contest¹⁰, and began his term without an inkling that he would be the party's last. Steel was never welcomed as warmly as Grimond, nor thought to be as skilful with the media as Thorpe. He inherited a party with a strong and radical youth movement opposed to any kind of pact with the Labour party. However, in 1977 Steel entered in to negotiations with Labour, proposing PR for European elections and devolved parliaments for Scotland and Wales. The 'Lib-Lab Pact' that followed saw the Liberals able to participate in government, at a level unseen for decades¹¹, but anti-pact Liberals, particularly Cyril Smith made it a divisive period, and the party was punished at the local level, losing three-quarters of its county council seats (Walter 2003). The pact became increasingly unpopular, legislation on PR was defeated and the pact dissolved in 1978. In the general election that followed Steel secured just 11 seats and the Liberal's share of the popular vote was reduced to 13.8%. The 1979 general election was the only campaign fought by Steel alone. The two general elections that followed were conducted in alliance with the SDP, whose launch in 1981 was to permanently and radically affect the Liberal Party. In the meantime the party employed what was now a favourite response to poor election results – to rebuild at the local level. The Greaves and Lishman booklet "The Theory and Practice of Community Politics" published by the Association of Liberal Councillors in 1980 became the activist's bible.

The Social Democratic Party

"..went up like a rocket.....came down like the stick". (Crewe and King, 1995 pvii).

Former Cabinet members, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins, David Owen and Bill Rogers left the Labour Party in 1981 increasingly distant from its policy on Europe and defence and frustrated by internal party democracy. The party launch created tremendous excitement and within the party's first year, boosted by Shirley Williams's victory in the 1981 Crosby by-election, claimed a paid-up membership of over 65,000. The Party its founders had created was different organisationally from the Labour Party they had left and the Liberals they ultimately joined, in several fundamental ways. In the first place, only individuals could join, not organisations such as trades unions. The party was run by its National Committee which was elected but heavily dominated by MPs, as was the party's powerful Policy Committee. The party launched without any grassroots movement behind it, and created a centralised and eventually computerised membership system. Although the SDP attracted strong support from the previously un-politicised blue-collar sector, it had no following in local government and there is some evidence that these newly engaged members eventually slipped away from politics entirely (Crewe and King 1995).

Crewe and King argue that the implications of its failure are far reaching. As well as mounting a serious challenge to the two-party hegemony, the SDP seized a moment of mounting unpopularity for the two old parties, and represented the ongoing process of party dealignment. They set out

¹⁰ This was the first leadership election of any of the national parties to elect a leader by a ballot of the full membership. In 1976 a new procedure was agreed, and David Steel beat John Pardoe 12,546 votes to 7032. Douglas, R. (2005). *Liberals - A History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties*, Hambledon & London.

¹¹ The Lib-Lab pact was short of full coalition as the Liberals did not participate in government but had an agreement to support the Labour minority government in parliament.

two key reasons for the failure of the SDP:

- tactical errors made by the party's founders or its rank and file; the party paid a high price for its ineffective and amateurish internal machinery and was unable to cope with the 'media party' it had created.
- that the party may have fared better if it had never set up on its own and had instead moved directly to join the Liberals. This argument highlights the crux of the contradiction that the new party was based upon. As Crewe and King say 'if offered the choice of becoming Liberals or staying in the Labour Party, most of them would have stayed' (Crewe and King 1995).

Together with these observations they also point out the potential error in selecting Jenkins over Owen as leader, whose style they argue failed to capture the nation's imagination – a job perhaps better suited to Owen (Stephenson 1982). None deny that the process was fraught, but it is widely accepted that, were it not for David Owen's opposition to the Alliance, merger may have happened more swiftly and smoothly (Douglas 2005). The wider implications of the short life of the SDP are perhaps greater for the Labour Party than the Liberals. The Labour Party suffered from the loss of some of its prominent figures, and suffered a protracted period in opposition. It was able, however, to retain the loyalty of many of its 'big beasts' and crucially, funding from the Trades Union movement. It emerged then, following the transitional leadership of Neil Kinnock, John Smith and Tony Blair, able to convince the electorate in significant numbers. The SDP represented many of the ideas of New Labour in embryonic form, but its position in the centre of a two-party system ultimately dealt it the same hand as the languishing Liberals.

Alliance

Rather than fight one another, the two parties agreed to work together. Before merging in 1988 the SDP fought two general elections in alliance with the Liberals. Prior to the 1983 general election the SDP had 29 seats, dwarfing the Liberals 12, and without having fought an election, since their number came from 26 defections from Labour, 1 from the Conservatives and 2 by-election wins. Their combined number, support in the country and forceful personalities meant when the two parties worked together they became a force to be reckoned with at Westminster. Leaning on one another for support the two parties agreed to contest the 1983 and 1987 general elections in alliance, largely since neither had the resources to fight one another as well as the bigger two parties. The parties had already experienced success adopting a co-operative strategy in by-elections in North West Croydon and Crosby, comfortably won by the Alliance candidate.

The 1983 general election was according to many sources a chaotic and poorly judged marriage of these two centrist political parties which sealed the fate of the SDP (Owen 1992; Rogers 2000). The Liberals and SDP agreed not to put candidates forward against each other, which resulted in

the country being 'carved up' between them (Stephenson 1982). The Alliance leadership of Roy Jenkins was criticised and against the backdrop of a popular Thatcher government, boosted by support for the Falklands War, won the Alliance just 23 seats despite netting 25.4% of the popular vote. The election was followed by Michael Foot's retirement as Labour leader, and Roy Jenkins stepping down as SDP Leader, to be succeeded by Neil Kinnock and David Owen respectively. The 1987 general election that followed made matters even worse for the third parties, with David Owen and David Steel failing to find common ground. The alliance and its component parties divided publicly over nuclear disarmament, and the Alliance losing a number of previously held SDP seats. The 'two Davids' ridiculed by political satirists and commentators, suffered from the ambivalence that has dogged the centre parties ever since. David Owen was considered to lean to the right, David Steel to the left. Bringing the two together in government, let alone in coalition, looked impossible. The Alliance returned 22 seats and soon set about permanently merging in order to avoid continuing a cycle of electoral muddles that did not benefit either party. David Owen made it clear he would oppose merger, and resigned when the party opened negotiations.

Merger

"The way in which the organisation was formed, will leave an indelible mark" (Panebianco 1988 pxiii)

Time and again studies of party organisation point to the party's origins and the way it came in to being as of crucial importance. Panebianco states: "Party analysis must go back to the party's formative phase and introduce the historical dimension as central". Central to this thesis is his 'genetic model' that, combined with institutionalisation, form the fundamental stages of modern party organisation. Having already examined a little of the background to each of the parties that came together in the merger of 1988, we now turn to that process in order to see how and why the Liberal and SDP merged to form the Liberal Democrats.

Academic literature on merged parties is far from extensive, and mostly in the form of case-studies, for example the merger of the Dutch Reformed Political Unit (GPV) and Reformed Political Federation (RPF) which became the Christian Union in the Netherlands (Coffe and Torenvlied 2007), and the Progressive with Conservative Party and Reform with Canadian Alliance parties in Canada (Belanger and Godbout 2010). These two examples both see merger as an extreme form of party adaptation, in which the primary concerns are goal orientated, and put vote-maximising and policy advocacy over other concerns such as office maximising or the representation or participation of members. Belanger and Godbout note three factors that are likely to lead parties to merge: votes to seats disproportionality, access to new resources and rebranding (Belanger and Godbout 2010). In addition, studies of the merger that drew together the 'German Left' are insightful (Olsen 2007; Lees, Hough et al. 2010). The process by which the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) transformed in to the 'Left Party' is used in their study, to identify a series of specific stages in the process of party merger. In particular Lees, Hough and Keith identify risk-taking and consequent trust-building

at the elite or leadership level and the tasks subsequently given to a 'development' or professional team, as fundamental stages bring the new party into being.

Two under-represented parties, such as the SDP and the Liberal Democrats, would naturally benefit from merging to increase their levels of representation. It is also fair to say, and Chapter 7 on resources helps demonstrate this, that each predecessor party brought with it a degree of organisational strength that its partner was lacking. One interviewee explained that, put simply the SDP lacked a grassroots organisation which the Liberals were able to offer, and the Liberals lacked internal discipline which the SDP had been able to demonstrate.¹² The SDP had a number of highly rated former office-holding politicians in its ranks, lending credibility to a party that was unable to counter the charge of inexperience.

Rebranding, however, created some difficulty. Liberals refused to accept any title that excluded the word Liberal, such as Alliance or Democrat, and the SDP insisted on including something sufficiently new to reflect that this was a merger of two parties and not the bolting on of the SDP to its more established neighbour. The Party compromised on The Social and Liberal Democrats, and free from David Owen, decisively elected Paddy Ashdown its first leader. Ashdown used his first conference as leader to tackle the pilloried new name and shortened it to 'Democrats'. This was narrowly passed but this owed more to uniting behind the new leader than preferring the new name, and while the party's support continued to slide amidst ongoing internal turbulence, it was eventually dropped in favour of Liberal Democrats (Douglas 2005).

Merger meant an end to the otherwise uncomfortable and unpopular muddle in which the Alliance had conducted the past two elections. In merging with the Liberals the SDP achieved a structure, a working party HQ, and an army of local party activists.¹³ The Liberal party was able to use the opportunity to drop some of their more frustrating internal procedures, including the Liberal Council. Plans to merge, however, divided the SDP into those that supported the move and allied with Roy Jenkins, and those that opposed it, led by David Owen. The Liberal Party harboured opposition too. Cyril Smith famously commented that the SDP "should have been strangled at birth", and the Young Liberals and radical wing associated with the publication 'Liberator' campaigned vehemently against what they considered to be an end to the liberal movement. The negotiations took longer than expected and opposition was strong on both sides (Pitchford and Greaves 1989).¹⁴ Post merger both parties continued to suffer from some minor complications caused by their un-merged separate entities, which continue to exist as The Liberal Party¹⁵ and The SDP¹⁶ although only in insignificant numbers and at the local level.¹⁷

¹² Interview 64, 2009.

¹³ The Liberal Party had their Party HQ in the National Liberal Club, the SDP setting up temporary offices in the more up-market offices at 4 Cowley Street, Westminster. The ultimate moving of Liberal Party staff in to Cowley Street created hostility in Liberal ranks, there is some anecdotal evidence that for some time the move was a bone of contention.

¹⁴ Pitchford & Greaves offers a day by day account of the merger negotiations.

¹⁵ <http://www.liberal.org.uk/> (accessed 8.11.10).

¹⁶ <http://www.socialdemocraticparty.co.uk/> (accessed 8.11.10). It is arguable that the current SDP is not a successor to the former party of the same name, since the founders of the SDP formally disbanded the party in 1990.

¹⁷ In 1994 Richard Huggett exploited confusion over the party name, standing in the European Parliamentary elections of that year under the name "Liberal Democrat" and won over 10,000 votes. Deliberately attempting to mislead the electorate in this way was outlawed in 1998.

The consequence of merger is a theme often returned to in analysis of the Liberal Democrats, and one mentioned by a number of interviewees who framed party successes and failures in the context of the predecessor parties. The SDP was a failure according to Crewe and King, something naturally disputed by those whose legacy depends upon it having been a success. It is described as “the aggressive takeover of the SDP by the Liberals” (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005) and organisationally at least, the SDP were the more junior partner. Biographies of the ‘gang of four’ describe four very differing responses to its alliance and eventual merger with the Liberals. Shirley Williams’ actions spoke louder than words and she left the UK in 1988 for an academic career in the USA, eventually returning in 1995 to take a more active role in the House of Lords where she led the party between 2001 and 2004¹⁸ (Williams 2009). David Owen blamed a lack of independence for the SDP’s swift demise, and believed that the general election Alliance was a mistake. It was “looking like the Liberals” that led to its shared third-party squeeze and eventual demise (Owen 1992). Roy Jenkins and Bill Rogers enjoyed distinguished careers in the House of Lords. Although the framers of the merger are no longer at the forefront of politics, there are some that argue their legacy can be seen in the coalition of May 2010 – a theme returned to later in this thesis (Ley 2011).

iii) Electoral Fortunes

1988-1992

As the vote in the country goes down the party’s number of seats goes up. As support for Labour grows, support for the Lib Dems grows. Its very existence calls in to question some of the fundamental nostrums. Duverger’s law states that a first past the post electoral system favours a two-party system, implying there is no place in the UK for a third party (Duverger 1954). The Liberal Democrats however, have confounded this by competing and consistently making gains against the other two parties, failing to make the breakthrough at the national level but displaying a permanence at the local level, they bounced back from bad results with some regularity. The party’s pattern of election results suggests that there is a strong link between success at a local level or at by-elections that is then reflected in success at Westminster. For this reason the assessment that follows looks at election results across the UK, at the state parliament level, in Europe, and in local elections, together. The party’s survival owes much to these sub-national victories.

The new party had a difficult task ahead. Voters that left the Liberal Party in the 1960s and 1970s were showing no signs of voting Lib Dem (MacIver 1996). The party continued to reel from the damage of the divisive merger, to contend with confusion caused by the unmerged ‘rump’ of its predecessors, and to suffer from ongoing internal battles over the party name. In the local elections of 1988 and 1989 the party lost 122 and 195 council seats respectively. The party’s lowest point came in the European elections in June 1989 when it polled 6% coming fourth behind the Green Party whose vote was more than twice that returned by the Lib Dems. What may have

¹⁸ The author of this thesis was personal secretary to Baroness Williams in the House of Lords 2001-2003.

saved it was that Ashdown began to establish a voice over the issue of passports for Hong Kong nationals and began to be a familiar face on the television (Leaman 1998). The party continued to suffer in local elections in 1990, while Labour grew in strength; however, Labour was never likely to win a by-election in the affluent south east, and the new party's fortunes were temporarily revived with a sensational by-election win in Eastbourne (October 1990). The 'dead parrot' had squawked. These individual moments of success became the glue that held the party together. For activists they represent success and triumph, although British by-elections are fundamentally 'second-order', and as such are inclined to reflect protest votes rather than positive votes for the Lib Dems. (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Heath, McLean et al. 1999). While it is not disputed that by-elections are a vehicle for protest and tactical voting, their impact on party morale, for smaller and third parties as in this case, should not be underestimated (Crewe 1997).

Eastbourne gave Paddy Ashdown an opportunity to boost party morale, to enjoy much-needed positive publicity and accelerated the process that many in the party argue led to the eventual resignation of Margaret Thatcher (Bale 2010). It established Ashdown within his own party as a credible leader. His military background attracted a lot of attention, making him an unusual figure in the House of Commons, and a popular one in the country during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and by 1991 he was declared the most popular of the three party leaders (Butler and Kavanagh 1992). In the 1991 local elections the party gained 407 seats and their number of councillors rose to 3672, pushing their vote up from 17% to 22%. As Ashdown's popularity grew, and opposition to the Conservatives soared, the party was boosted by two further by-election wins (in Ribble Valley and Kincardine and Deeside) just prior to the 1992 general election.

Success was short-lived however, and the party slipped back to 20 seats, with a reduced share of the popular vote in the 1992 general election. The party had secured itself as a serious third party, seen the demise of the Owenite SDP who lost all their seats, and had driven its vote up from below 10% to consistently polling in the high teens and often in the 20s. The Conservatives were returned to office, and one month later in May 1992 during a public speech in Chard, Paddy Ashdown formally ended equidistance, promoting co-operation with Labour on specific issues.

1992-1999

In the years that followed the party continued to make strong gains in local elections and by-elections. In 1993 the party had 4123 councillors - more than the Conservatives - and were sharing power in 28 out of 36 English county councils. This total rose again in 1994 when the party also won its first two seats in Europe. Huge swings against the Conservatives delivered sensational by-elections victories in Christchurch, Newbury and Eastleigh. The successful conversion of local campaigns in to seats at Westminster certainly convinced many in the party that this tactic should be paramount, but its embrace may have owed more to a lack of resources than an ideological commitment to local politics (Harrison 2007).

Of perhaps the greatest significance in the leadership of Paddy Ashdown however, was the death

of John Smith and the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader. Seeing the momentum of New Labour, Ashdown began engaging in secret meetings that sought to draw the two parties together in a pre-election pact known as 'the project', known only to a handful of his closest advisors. Scholars point to this as clear evidence of power being concentrated at the leadership level (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005). Meanwhile the party on the ground continued to make strong gains in 1995 and 1996 by which time it had 5078 councillors, and won another impressive by-election victory at Littleborough & Saddleworth. By now the party had a very strong by-election winning formula, and a campaign department that valued the importance of these incremental victories. In these local contests the party benefited from the unusual circumstances a by-election brings but remained unable to transfer these gains at a national level, largely due to a 'fickle and inconsistent' vote that suffered when its support was evenly spread at the national level (Curtice 1996).

The 1997 general election brought a landslide for Labour and a historic result for the Liberal Democrats, netting them 46 seats on a popular vote that went down by 1%, the largest parliamentary number for a third party since 1929. The party had adopted a highly successful strategy for targeting its resources and focusing ruthlessly on seats it believed to be winnable (Douglas 2005). Ashdown's close relationship with Blair continued, but it was now largely superfluous to New Labour's needs and the 'project' began to fall apart (Ashdown 2001). Ashdown had a lot going for him. He was by now well established, made good use of Prime Ministers Questions, was outspoken and impressive over the war in Bosnia. He suffered however from his closeness to Blair, who failed to deliver on private promises of cabinet seats for the Lib Dems leaving Ashdown in a weakened position with his own party. It became difficult to find distinctive policy, and the party inevitably moved to the left to counter New Labour's move to the right (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). The 1997 result is also particularly significant to the Lib Dems since it greatly increased their 'Short Money', and in this case became the life-blood that enabled a transformation of professional efforts at HQ and in Parliament. This is covered in greater detail in Chapter 7.

After 1997 the Conservatives began to claw back some of the councils they had lost but the Liberal Democrats were by now campaigning hard in the first round of elections to the Scottish and Welsh Assemblys, and in the European parliamentary elections. A drop from 17% to 12% was converted in to an increase from two to ten seats at the European level. Predictable results followed where the party achieved in 17 seats to the Scottish Parliament and 6 in the Welsh Assembly largely reflecting their traditional support in rural areas at the Westminster level. What was significant however, was the coalition deals that followed, teaching the party important lessons for the future (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005).

1999-2006

In 1999 Ashdown stepped aside and Charles Kennedy became party leader. His first move was to

re-establish equidistance from both parties and put a clear end to notions of co-operation with Labour. The latter's honeymoon was over and although the Lib Dems took the Romsey seat from the Tories in a by-election, the party stood still at the local level and polled a poor 12% in the first election for London Mayor. By 2001, however, Kennedy himself soon become established as a popular political figure. The party's additional funds enabled it to produce a professional and properly costed manifesto, adding environmentalism and a focus on civil liberties to make it distinctive and keep the pressure up on Labour (Butler and Kavanagh 2001). Kennedy had to lead a party now making headway against the Labour party in the north east and in urban areas across the UK, requiring consistency at best and coherence at least. The result was a geographically more widely-spread vote and a small increase of six at Westminster.

The September 11th attacks in New York and subsequent "war on terror" marked a shift in Liberal Democrat political positioning and support. The party's stand against the Iraq war is covered in more detail in Chapter 5 but the groundswell of support for this decision can be seen in the growth once again of council seats, this time in Labour areas. In 2002 and 2003 the pattern of party support began to change, with the Liberal Democrats gaining 200 councillors and control of five further councils. The party stood still in the second round of elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, returning 17 and 6 members respectively, holding on to its support in areas of strength. While the Welsh campaign was judged a poor one, it did lead to a build up of support in promising council areas, delivering 4 councils as a result in 2005 (Deacon 2007).

The by-election victory by Sarah Teather in Brent East (September 2003), however, marked a new and significant point for the party that was now taking votes from Labour in inner cities, in part due to opposing the invasion of Iraq earlier that year. This extraordinary result, a massive swing of 29%, was followed with another sensational victory in Leicester South where the party elected its first minority MP. At the same time the Conservative Party were experiencing a leadership crisis of their own and failing to portray themselves as a credible opposition (Bale 2010). The Lib Dems failed, however, to extend this at the European elections (June 2004), where they suffered from an increase in support for UKIP who beat them to third place with 16% of the popular vote, nor at the London Mayoral elections, where the party lost out to the personally popular Ken Livingstone. Its candidate Simon Hughes brought the vote up to just below 15%. This pattern strongly suggests the Brent-East result reflected dissatisfaction with Labour rather than a consistent surge in support for the Liberal Democrats, although Sarah Teather was able to hold the seat in 2005 and after boundary changes in 2010.

This was reflected in the 2005 general election, which was very different in tone and style than Kennedy's first effort in 2001. Despite polling 22% of the popular vote and returning its best ever result with 62 MPs, the party fell short of the breakthrough of between 70 and 100 it had hoped for. The numbers, however, fail to tell the full story, as the pattern of Lib Dem support underwent a subtle but significant shift away from the tradition of doing well mainly in Conservative seats, to doing well in traditional Labour areas. The party failed to make numerical gains at local elections but did make an important shift in the demographic of its local support, continuing to rely on its

traditional support in the rural heartlands but making strong gains in the inner cities, taking control of Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle and working in anti-Labour coalitions in scores of others (Butler and Kavanagh 2005). The manifesto continued on the party's theme of opposing Labour on the war in Iraq, defending civil liberties and a centre-left policy supporting public spending on social care. Support was minimal in Conservative heartlands, where the party's strategy of 'decapitation', aiming to deliver a series of Tory front-bench scalps, failed completely.¹⁹ The 2005 general election is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly it positioned the party as anti-Labour, although its vote failed to penetrate in Conservative strongholds. Secondly it demonstrates that, in spite of strong performances and by-election wins the party failed to make breakthrough gains. The dual nature of the party's appeal rendered it fragile (Driver 2011), leaving it with a paradox "the party must fight Labour in Labour held seats, but still win Labour sympathisers in Conservative Liberal areas" (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005).

2006-2010

What followed was a period of turbulence and soul-searching that led to the party's turning away from this conundrum and instead following a path that eventually led to coalition with the Tories in 2010. In 2006 Charles Kennedy resigned following pressure from his parliamentary colleagues, amid questions over his ability to lead following his confession to alcoholism. Opinion remains divided over Kennedy's legacy, from those that believe he led a consistent and successful phase in the party's history, making gains at every level (Hurst 2006), to those that believe his lack of leadership skills left the party without direction (Brack 2007) particularly when faced with a revitalised Conservative party (McAnulla 2009). What is significant about Kennedy's resignation is that it highlights the growing power of the parliamentary party, members of whom issued ultimatums to Kennedy which led to his departure, and whose influence has steadily grown since (Russell, Fieldhouse et al. 2007).

Following Kennedy's resignation, scandal engulfed the party, resulting in leadership hopeful Mark Oaten declining to stand, Simon Hughes withdrawing his candidacy, and Ming Campbell emerging as the unity candidate. Despite this the party still won a by-election victory in Dunfermline and West Fife, believed to be a reflection of growing opposition to the Iraq war. Campbell's two years as leader began a process of internal change for the party, which again made little progress in electoral terms. In the 2007 Welsh assembly elections the party stood still with 6 seats and failed to secure a potential coalition with Labour, an opportunity seized instead by Plaid Cymru. In Scotland the SNP support surged giving them an opportunity to enter minority government, while the Liberal Democrat vote remained static, and their numbers at Holyrood reduced from 17 to 16 MSPs. The party vote dropped in the London mayoral contest in 2008 with Brian Paddick's vote representing a drop overall of 6%. The party managed to make gains in local government, however. With the Blair government in overall decline, taking control of a further 12 Councils pushed the Labour Party in to third place. Campbell then stood down. His successor Nick Clegg's first two years as leader were relatively uneventful, his only national-scale election being the 2009

¹⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lib-dems-hold-inquest-after-their-decapitation-strategy-misses-targets-489833.html> (accessed 19.09.11).

European parliamentary elections, where the party returned only 11 MEPs. The party's numbers at the local level held firm, however, its default position in local government enabling the leadership to steady the ship and rebuild once again.

iv) The Party Leader

Prior to merger, the leader of the Liberal party was elected by the party's MPs until 1976 when the party introduced a ballot of all party members. The Party Constitution sets out the formal process for electing and removing the Party Leader and stipulates that a leadership election is triggered under the following circumstances:

- a) leader calls it
- b) leader dies or is incapacitated
- c) leader loses parliamentary seat
- d) leader resigns
- e) parliamentary party in House of Commons passes vote of no-confidence by simple majority
- f) 75 local parties call for contest having held quorate meetings
- g) none of the above circumstances have occurred 1 year since a general election providing
 - i) the FE can postpone this by 1 year with a 2/3rds majority
 - ii) the leader is a member of the government.²⁰

The rules of election of the Leader have changed very little, with two exceptions. First, following the leadership contest of 1999 (in which five candidates put themselves forward, three of whom failed to secure more than 10% of first preferences), a rule was passed at the 2005 Federal Conference requiring candidates to secure more than 10% of the Parliamentary party in a nomination process; previously only a proposer and a nominee had been required. This would prevent the expensive and potentially embarrassing situation in which too many candidates with minimal support use the process to gain publicity without having a genuine hope of winning. Second, inconsistency and confusion in the 2005 leadership election led to the passing of a further rule in 2006, which enabled candidates to communicate directly with the membership via email. Previously rules about direct contact with the membership relied on candidates obtaining contact details from sympathetic membership secretaries, rather than having access to the central list from HQ, and was seen as unfair. The election is conducted via single transferable vote, and there have been four leaders and four contests, summarised below.

²⁰

Point g) means that the Leader is required to be re-nominated after each general election. This is a 'rubber stamp' exercise conducted by the parliamentary party

1988 Launch of Liberal Democrats – Ashdown the uniting candidate

The contest focused on two areas of identifiable difference between the two candidates, Paddy Ashdown and Alan Beith, that of the party name, and of its ongoing proximity to Labour (Francis 2010). The campaign was generally considered to be somewhat 'bland' (Punnett 1992), and the result above all suggested a party weary of crisis. Beith and Ashdown, although very different in style, both supported the merger and were widely considered to be 'uniting' candidates. Just under 72% of the eligible party membership returned ballot papers and Ashdown won a strong victory polling, 71.6% of the votes. Ashdown's period in office was one that provided stability (Brack 2007) and a new, somewhat untypical, character to the office (Williams 2009). His candid autobiographies frequently describe moments where he is thwarted by the party grassroots at conferences and through representatives on its various committees. He was able to begin to make progress on his own agenda of co-operation with Labour toward the end of his period as leader, albeit through clandestine discussions with Blair. This was contrary to his somewhat combative style in negotiations with his own party where he had a reputation for blasting through the middle of anything that stood in his way.

1999 Ashdown stands down – Party chooses Kennedy and equidistance

A key component in the election of leaders is the timetable and what triggers the election in the first place. Paddy Ashdown, who chose when to go, wrote a letter to the party's FE informing them of this intention, giving a six-month period in which to conduct the contest for his successor.²¹ The issue at the heart of this campaign was where candidates stood on Ashdown's flagship 'project', and of continuing to work closely with Labour (Alderman and Carter 2000). Five candidates came forward: Jackie Ballard, Malcolm Bruce, Simon Hughes, Charles Kennedy and David Rendel. Perhaps of equal significance, however, were those considered to be potential candidates - Nick Harvey, Menzies Campbell, Paul Tyler and Don Foster - who did not put themselves forward, an indication that the pro-project stance²² was losing popularity (Francis 2010). The single transferable vote resulted in Charles Kennedy's overall victory. In the final round of redistribution Charles Kennedy secured 57% of votes to Simon Hughes' 43%, following a first preference distribution of 54% (Kennedy) to 39% (Hughes). Turnout was atypically low, at 62% in this contest and went back up again to exceed 72% in the next leadership election in 2006.

2006 Kennedy resigns – A party in crisis

In January 2006, following the resignation of Charles Kennedy after 7 years as Leader, the party was plunged into a period of crisis. When nominations opened the following individuals were expected to stand; Simon Hughes, Mark Oaten, Ming Campbell and Chris Huhne. Mark Oaten's nomination was never received, following scandal about this private life, and having failed to

²¹ Ashdown declared his intention to resign 20th January 1999, aged 57, after 11 years of leading the Party, to spend more time with his family. He ceased to be leader when Charles Kennedy took office, 11th August 1999.

²² 'Project' became the term for referring to Paddy Ashdown's plans for closer co-operation with the Labour Party.

gather sufficient support among the Parliamentary party to continue.²³ Further revelations about the private life of Simon Hughes made this a particularly painful period for the Party.²⁴ The single transferable vote resulted in Menzies Campbell being elected with a redistributed 58% of the vote to 42% for Huhne, following 45% of first preferences, compared with 32% first preferences to Huhne and 23% of first preferences to Hughes. A less than resounding victory dogged the new Leader, who within 18 months had resigned amid negative press over his age and health (Kelly 2007). It was a campaign that began with some promise that it might reflect a wider debate in the party sparked by the publication of *The Orange Book* but which descended in to one of personal tragedy and crisis, and a party craving unity (Francis 2010).

2007 Ming Campbell steps down – Victory for the ‘Orange Bookers’

The unhappy circumstances surrounding the resignation of Kennedy, the disastrous events around other potential leadership candidates, and the unsuccessful tenure of Campbell, led to a decisive two-way fight between the party’s latest two front-runners, Chris Huhne and Nick Clegg. In practice the immediate effect of Campbell’s resignation led to Deputy Leader, Vince Cable, assuming the role of ‘Acting leader’. Although Vince Cable was highly rated during this period, he was persuaded by close colleagues of the need for younger blood and did not put himself forward (Cable 2009). Again this two-way contest stimulated a relatively low turnout from members, with 64.4% of the eligible membership returning ballots, giving Clegg a very narrow victory over Huhne. Clegg won 20,988 first preferences (50.34%) compared with Huhne’s 20,477 (49.12%). With just 511 votes separating the two, this represents the closest of all recorded contests for the Leader of the Liberal Democrats (Kelly 2007). The election was more bad-tempered in tone, with talk, for instance, of ‘Calamity Clegg’²⁵, and yet very little to distinguish the two candidates from one another on policy.

vi) The Party President

In the Liberal Democrats the position of party President is important. The position is similar to that of a deputy leader, but is open to individuals outside the parliamentary party and acts as a go-between speaking typically on behalf of the party grassroots and representing their interests to the leader. It is left very much open to individual interpretation and what follows is a brief history of the individuals that have held this post.

Sir Ian Wrigglesworth won the election for President of the newly merged party in 1988 against two other contenders in a clear battle for the heart of the party. A former Labour MP, then SDP member, Sir Ian secured just under 50% of the votes from a ballot of the entire membership against Des Wilson, former member of the Liberal Party, who secured 38%, and Gwynoro Jones from the Welsh Party with 12.5%.²⁶ Turnout was high at over 71% of those balloted. He faced the unenviable task of sacking more than half the party’s staff and securing sufficient private funds and

²³ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article717349.ece> accessed 6.7.2009.

²⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4651640.stm accessed 6.7.2009.

²⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7100615.stm> (accessed 15.10.10).

²⁶ <http://www.cix.co.uk/~rosenstiel/delections/presidential.htm> (accessed 13.10.10)

loans to keep the party from bankruptcy. His reputation within the party was one of a well-liked northern businessman, disinclined toward being a puppet of the leadership while at the same time able to demonstrate managerial competence. During this time of the crisis his role was one of overseeing the General Secretary and the day-to-day business at HQ in Cowley Street.

Seen by some as an attempt to balance the 'liberal' leadership of Ashdown, the 1990 Presidential election saw a further triumph for the former SDP, in the resounding success of Charles Kennedy, securing 82% of the vote, with a markedly reduced turnout of 36.3%, arguably a demonstration of the healing of old wounds and a foregone conclusion in favour of Kennedy. His period as President was also a popular one, in which he became known throughout the country speaking at local party fundraising dinners and at conference in the build up to the 1992 general election. He was re-elected President in 1992, again with a low turnout, and with 70% of the vote.

Charles Kennedy's period in office was followed by his Highland neighbour, MP for Caithness and Sutherland and former SDP member, Robert MacLennan. Again the contest represented a ballot between three well-known figures from the Liberal Democrats' former parties and the component countries of the federal party, with MacLennan from Scotland, Don Foster from Bath in England, and Martin Thomas former President of the Welsh Liberals. MacLennan was a less well-known and less convivial character, credited by the party elite for skillful negotiations during the merger and a passionate advocate for a Scottish parliament. He was nonetheless re-elected unopposed for a second term.

MacLennan was succeeded by Diana Maddock, whose victory in the 1993 Christchurch by-election was a symbolic moment for the party. Despite being defeated at the 1997 general election, Diana Maddock occupied a particularly sentimental place in the party's heart. Her failure to hold the seat was widely considered to explain support for her election as President, which she won unopposed but held for just one term and was succeeded by Navnit Dholakia, a former Liberal and the party's first ethnic minority President.

Dholakia was also well-known and a popular figure across the party, and was elected twice unopposed. As well as giving the party an opportunity to demonstrate diversity, something its parliamentary party failed to do, he traveled widely in his duties as President, and oversaw what many consider to be the most difficult period for the Federal Executive. During this time FE meetings were regularly disrupted by radical grassroots activist Donnadhach McCarthy. Dholakia also oversaw the difficult departure of Charles Kennedy. He was succeeded following a second unopposed term, by unsuccessful leadership candidate but darling of the grassroots, Simon Hughes.

The interpretation of the role of party president was most critically tested by Hughes, who without consultation with the FE or amendment to the constitution, created four new senior 'Deputy-presidents' in his second term in office. Hughes cleverly used his position as Chair of the Federal Executive to obtain backing for this decision, which was supported by an FE vote, but which was

overturned when Hughes failed to produce the necessary annual reports and reviews on the post, which were required for its continuation. He also failed to seek what many felt were necessary amendments to the constitution, added to which there was apparent leadership fury at his appointing of his own supporters to these newly created posts. Vice-Presidents are determined by the state parties; in England the Chair of the English party is automatically a Federal Vice-President, and in the Welsh and Scottish parties the Vice President is a person nominated by the Executive.

Informally the President is not usually expected to take sides in a leadership contest, but again Hughes broke with convention in 2007 when he publicly backed Nick Clegg, while other senior politicians including former leaders Charles Kennedy and Menzies Campbell, refused to back either candidate.²⁷ Hughes, however, remains highly popular among party activists, strongly associated with the party's radical wing. He enjoyed a high profile Presidency, renewed unopposed in 2006.

Lembit Opik stood against Simon Hughes in 2004, losing by 14,331 votes (37% of the vote), but stood again against Ros Scott amid a backdrop of negative publicity about his private life. On this second occasion Scott won by 14,489 votes, a victory for intensive lobbying by the party elite, keen to keep maverick Opik out of the spotlight, and by the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) supporting Scott, a former group leader on Suffolk County Council. Opik's name on the ballot for President appeared also to have the impact of returning turnout numbers from the low 30,000s to almost 50,000. Ros Scott was another popular figure among the activists, highly visible in the party, brokering the relationship between members and the leader, and touring the country speaking at fundraising events. She was formally responsible for drawing the party together at the special conference called in 2010 to demonstrate the 'triple-lock', (although it is clear from David Law's account that the need for this 'event' was already at the forefront of the minds of the coalition negotiation team) (Laws 2010). Scott, however, resigned her post shortly after the coalition was agreed, only serving one of the potential two terms, and was replaced by Tim Farron MP in what appears to be an early demonstration of the role coming to represent differing factions within the party. Farron has been outspoken and openly opposed the leadership on the abolishing of university tuition fees and has been critical of the coalition.

v) Conclusion

A party without a record in office suffers from being unable to point to success. On the other hand it has no failures on its watch. The Liberal Democrats have traditionally been able to maximise protest votes by attracting charismatic and popular local politicians. Combined with a strong base in local government they have become, in spite of an electoral system that works against them, a permanent force in British politics.

²⁷ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/should-the-lib-dem-president-be-neutral-in-leadership-elections-1819.html> accessed 11.06.2009.

This brief summary of party history demonstrate lessons the party has learned over the years. The first is that the party benefits from strong charismatic leadership by both the leader and the president. Jo Grimond was praised for his memorable oratory, Jeremy Thorpe for his flamboyance and charm, Paddy Ashdown for his military-inspired style, Charles Kennedy for his 'chat-show' ease. Ashdown and Campbell in particular took over the party in crisis, and having united the party, were followed by leaders, Kennedy and Clegg, able to enjoy improved electoral results. Kennedy, Dholakia and Hughes have also all played important parts in the important role of Party President. The second is that it has been dependent for its survival on grassroots members, particularly in its rural heartlands and among the young, acting as the glue that binds the leadership and the electorate together.

Local elections and by-elections matter to the Liberal Democrats. They represent moments of reflection and the opportunity to protest for the electorate, and are interpreted by activists as evidence of party revival. The largest share of by-election victories that have resulted in a change in party since 1979 have been won by the third party, benefiting from both 'campaign specific' and 'referendum' wins (Norris 1990) and while accepting the second-order nature of these contests, these are very important to the third party. Although the Lib Dems often lose these seats at general elections they have held on to enough to survive. Votes for the Liberal Democrats at general elections, however, have been cast in a voting system that discriminates against smaller parties that lack regional concentrations of support. Although their vote could be seen to be gradually increasing, it was the jump in seats delivered in 1997 that is most worthy of note. It signaled a step-change not just in the size but also the character of the parliamentary party. It doubled the party's Short Money and marked the end of a trend in Lib Dem support mirroring that of the Conservatives. From this moment on the party began to make advances at Labour's expense. It could threaten both parties, but failed to ever look convincingly like replacing them. This on the face of it suggests that the party benefit from fluctuating protest votes (Curtice 2007), although recent research indicates that it is more closely connected to a protest against the *party in opposition* and particularly the opposition leader (Belanger, Nadeau et al. 2010). We can see, therefore, that its political positioning is seen by those outside, and crucially inside the party, in terms of equidistance or lack of it. Notwithstanding the events of 2010, these three lessons are not unique in any political party, but seem particularly crucial to the Liberal Democrats.

Chapter 4 The Constitution and party structure

i) Introduction

Our decision making arrangements arise out of a constitution that was formed when the parties merged and you had a Liberal tradition that you never trust the leadership, and an SDP tradition that you never trust the membership. (Interview 46, 2009)

This chapter focuses on the party constitution, and how the party was designed. It explains the formal rules that govern it, and explains how these rules work in practice. It aims to capture the nature of the party as an institution, and look at how that has changed over time. The constitution of the Liberal Democrats came in to effect in 1988 as the document that formally brought together its founder parties, The Social Democratic Party and The Liberal Party.²⁸ A more detailed account of the merger is contained in Chapter 3. At 284 pages the constitution represents a lengthy document, which embodies the party's commitment to democratic processes. Controversial amendments to the constitution are few and far between, since it may only be altered by a two-thirds majority of representatives at the Federal Conference (Article 2.5 (a)). As a piece of formal documentation it is important, largely because the transformation of the party described elsewhere in this thesis, the primacy of manifestos, the centralising impact of PPERA, the standardising effect of the internet and crucially the ceding of power from the Federal Executive to the Chief Officers Group, have taken place without recourse to its articles.

At the heart of this thesis is the tension between the democratic principles that guide the ideology of the party, and the bureaucracy necessary for it to function. The constitution aims to achieve two main objectives, one concerning the people involved, the other concerning process. Firstly, it puts in place a series of systems that divide the roles and responsibilities of the federal party's main sections so that it can carry out its day-to-day duties. These duties are; "determination of policy, the party's overall strategy, preparations for parliamentary and European elections, the presentation, image and media relations of the party and its international relationships" (Article 2.3). In particular it sets out how various individuals and committees should be elected in order that these functions can be carried out by a collection of party bodies. Secondly, the constitution puts in place a method by which the party can arrive at policy decisions. Woven into its text are its framers' attempts to reconcile the needs of the grassroots activists and the leadership. Rather than provide a system of checks and balances to guard against over-zealous leadership, it is designed so that the grassroots of the party have a number of means by which they can play a central role. This chapter looks at the written word of the constitution, and the workings of each component part to see how it functions in practice. It describes a constitution fundamentally unchanged since the party's birth.²⁹ It sets out the framework for a democratic and grassroots orientated party, with policy at its centre, which has enabled the party to function with a

²⁸ The Constitutions of the Liberal Democrats exist in one single document that encompasses the entire UK-wide party structure, thus comprises "The Federal Party, The Liberal Democrats in England, The Scottish Liberal Democrats, The Welsh Liberal Democrats/Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru".

²⁹ The party conducted a constitutional review in 1992-1993 following which extensive changes were made to the English Constitution, but the fundamentals in the Federal Constitution remained the same.

considerable degree of organisational stability. It demonstrates that the document remains useful in enshrining party principles, and providing rules and regulations. It also provides evidence that at times the party elite can exploit and even by-pass the constitution when the need arises.

Federal Structure – an overview

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. (Preamble to the federal constitution).

The preamble is a set of principles that guide the party, and the remaining 284 pages explain how the party intends to achieve a working organisation to promote these ideals. The Liberal Democrats are unique in British politics, existing as defined by the Party Constitution as a federation of three separate state parties: The Liberal Democrats in England, Scottish Liberal Democrats and Welsh Liberal Democrats. Each state-level party has its own constitution, and with it considerable powers, including different membership rules, model local party constitutions and each state party also produces its own manifesto. They are sub-divided into regions, and regions are comprised of local parties divided, broadly speaking, across Westminster constituency boundaries.

Table 4. The Federal structure of the Liberal Democrats

Federal Party		
English party	Scottish party	Welsh party
English regions (11*)	Scottish regions (8**)	Welsh regions (4***)
Constituency parties	Constituency parties	Constituency parties
Branch	Branch	Branch

* English regions, comprise Devon & Cornwall, western Counties, London, Eastern England, Southern Central & South East England, East Midlands, West Midlands, North West, Northern England, Yorkshire & Humberside.

**Scottish regions are Central Scotland, Mid Scotland & Fife, Glasgow, North East Scotland, Highlands & Islands, Lothian, South Scotland and West Scotland.

***Welsh regions are North Wales, Mid & West Wales, South West Wales and South West Wales Central.

Table 5. Responsibilities of different party strata

Federal party	UK wide policy Federal Conference Parliamentary elections Fundraising
State party	Operation of local parties State policy Day to day management of membership services
Regional party	Oversee region-wide campaigns Regional conference Regional events and fundraising
Constituency party	Local campaigns and fundraising Candidate selection
Branch*	Elect representatives to attend federal conference.

*Not all constituency parties are broken up in to individual branches.

The party's federal structure is an important factor in understanding the character of the merged entity. In the years immediately post-merger the Liberal Democrats debated the inconsistency of the existence of a Scottish, Welsh and English Party each with its own constitution and conference, but for which the policy-making powers of the English party presented an anomaly. A constitutional review conducted by the party in 1992-1993 changed the system so the English Conference gave policy-making powers to the Federal Party on its behalf. Although the day-to-day business of operating within the federal structure is at times laborious, and often misunderstood outside the party framework, challenges to this most fundamental part of party philosophy have not been made. Indeed, the federal structure of the party provided a useful head start when devolution to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assemblies became reality. It has survived the test of time.

ii) Membership and Local parties

Membership

When the two parties came together in 1988 a number of interviewees explained that precise membership figures were impossible to cite, either because they had been exaggerated during the negotiations, or because they had simply never been centrally collated.³⁰ Membership figures for the Liberal Democrats were not regularly published until required by the Electoral Commission under the Political Parties Elections and Referendum's Act (2000) (PPERA). The figures quoted in this chapter (and elsewhere) are derived from total numbers of ballots sent out during various 'all-membership' votes to internal elections, such as for the party President or Leader.

³⁰ Interview 10, 2009 & Interview 64, 2009 gave differing accounts of reasons for the discrepancy in the membership numbers provided by both parties prior to merger. They argue that this led to a budget for the new party based on incorrect membership tables, which led to the mass redundancies of 1989. This is described in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Membership of the Liberal Democrats can be achieved in four ways.

- by joining the local party for the area in which you live
- by joining a different local party outside where you live with its prior permission
- by joining the youth and student Specified Associated Organisation
- by joining a state party direct (where there is no local party, i.e., for overseas voters)

Membership can be refused or revoked on the following grounds.

- disagreement with objectives of the Party
- bringing the Party in to disrepute
- membership of or support for another Party in Great Britain
- standing against the Party's official candidate at any level

In keeping with the Party's federal structure, a Joint State Membership Committee coordinates the promotion of membership in the UK, and the Party's Federal Executive following consultation with state parties, sets the membership subscription rate, subject to approval by federal conference. A proportion of the funds raised through membership is remitted back to the Federal Party. Overall levels of membership have been in decline, with figures up until 1996 between 80,000-100,000, which dropped to approximately 60,000 (Marshall 2009) then saw a revival following the 2010 general election. According to the party, membership peaked in 1997 in response to the unpopular Conservative Government, as membership swelled in seats where Liberal Democrats represented a genuine threat to the Tory incumbent. Subsequent decline broadly follows periods when the Party was preoccupied with itself, ie; changing leaders and making pronouncements about its own organisation. One senior party official commented: "It dips when we're inward-looking – the membership don't like it".³¹

³¹

Interview 34, 2009.

Table 6. Membership figures Federal Liberal Democrats 1988-2010.³²

P – figures obtained from internal presidential elections (ballots sent out)

L – figures obtained from internal leadership elections (ballots sent out)

*membership lapses after 3 not 6 months

Year	Source	Total
1988	L	80,104
1988	P	80,071
1990	P	82,455
1992	P	101,768
1994	P	101,091
1999	L	82,827*
2004	P	72,868
2006	L	72,064
2007	L	64,713
2008	P	60,357
2010	P	65,861

More detailed analysis of party membership trends, including the most recent data derived post-coalition, and the socio-economic groups of members is discussed in Chapter 6.

Local Parties

Local Parties are encouraged to adopt a formal constitution, exist within single constituency boundaries, and must have at least 30 members. The Local Parties can be suspended by the State Party if;

- membership has been below 30 for 6 months
- failing to comply with PPERA (2000)
- if events have taken place that are seriously detrimental to the party

The most significant change to the function of the Local Parties has been the requirement under PPERA legislation, that they disclose all gifts or donations over £200, and that they are received from a legally acceptable donor. Disclosure has to be made by the Local Party Treasurer, and in the absence of a Treasurer, the Local Party Chairman. The Liberal Democrats require Local Parties to give them this data on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, which is then checked and submitted by the Compliance Officer, to the Electoral Commission who then publish it quarterly on their website. All this promotes uniformity:

³² Tables taken from website of Colin Rosenstiel, accessed 07.10.10
<http://www.compulink.co.uk/~rosenstiel/ldelections/welcome.htm>

Prior to PPERA the average constituency would vary radically and that would be a reflection of its electoral significance. In theory now they all have the same level of contact with Headquarters. All constituencies are the same – they have to do the same stuff – it's a legal requirement. (Interview 2, 2009).

That said, the party experiences occasional rogue party behaviour, and exercises its right to suspend individuals or entire parties accordingly. In 1992 the party held an internal inquiry in to the campaigning activities of the Tower Hamlets Liberal Democrats and expelled three members whose campaign literature was thought to have “pandered to racism”. With the exception of this inquiry which attracted national attention, expulsions and suspensions are, generally speaking, of a personal and localised nature.

iii) Policy-making, Federal Conference and Federal Policy Committee

The policy-making process in the Liberal Democrats is clearly laid out in the Constitution:

..the Conference shall be the sovereign representative body of the Party, and shall have the power to determine the policy of the Party... (Article 6.7).

Chapter 5 looks at this in greater detail and here the rules as set out in the constitution are explained. Firstly, the constitution states that the State parties are separately responsible for policy on State party matters, and the Federal Party on federal matters. It establishes The Federal Policy Committee (FPC) that consults, develops and researches policy matters. FPC draws up federal policy papers which are then submitted to the party's twice yearly federal conferences. FPC is chaired by the Party Leader, and comprises 1 MP, 1 MP from each of the state parties, 1 Peer, 1 MEP, the President, 3 elected councillors, 1 representative from each of the state parties, and 15 directly elected individuals elected by federal conference reps, to serve on a 2 year basis. The constitution makes provision for the election of a further committee, the Federal Conference Committee (FCC), which is solely responsible for the running of the conference, and that it should include the President, the Chief Whip, representatives from each of the 3 State parties, 2 members of the Federal Executive, 2 members of the Federal Policy Committee, the Chief Executive, a staff representative and 12 directly elected members, elected by Conference reps for a 2 year period. FCC's role is primarily to set the conference agenda, but also to present the party to outside bodies, and to “make interim policy on topical issues” (Article 7.1 (d)). FPC is also responsible for preparing the party's general election manifesto and to set up policy-specific working groups. The constitution also sets out guidelines for the party conference, which bodies should be represented there, and how many representatives local parties can send. Details of precisely how the conference should be run, how the agenda should be set, who can speak, standing orders, reports back and other party business, are contained in a lengthy annex to the constitution. At both the Spring and Autumn Conference the party's various bodies described in the constitution make formal reports, which are appended to the Agenda.³³

³³ Reports are given by FCC, FPC, FE, FFAC, the Parliamentary Parties (Commons, Lords and Europe), the Campaign for Gender Balance and the Diversity Engagement Group. These reports can be seen on the

iv) The Federal Executive and other Party Committees

The Federal Executive

The Liberal Democrats operate a number of formal committees at the Federal, State, Regional and Local Party levels. Formally speaking, its most senior body, the Federal Executive (FE) is set out in Article 8 of the party's Constitution which states that the FE is "responsible for directing co-ordinating and implementing the work of the Federal Party". The FE consists of a number of ex-officio and elected members comprising; the President (who chairs FE), three Vice-Presidents, the Leader, 2 MPs, 1 Peer, 1 MEP, 2 Councillors, 1 state party rep from each of the 3 state parties and 15 representatives elected every 2 years by the Federal Conference. In addition there are non-voting members; the Chief Whip, Chair of FFAC, Federal Treasurer, Chief Executive, staff representative and the Chair of FPC.

FE has a number of significant powers, for example, overseeing the Party's budget, SAOs and AOs, compliance with PPERA, employment and whole-party ballots on matters deemed to be of importance to the membership. The FE oversees the day-to-day workings of the party, including that it sets up a company limited by guarantee that holds and disposes of party assets, and that it can vary the rules on the day to day running of the party in order to comply with PPERA legislation. In addition to this, the Party operates two other senior committees under the umbrella of the FE. The Federal Finance & Accounts Committee (FFAC) oversees the Party's budget and its Finance Department at Headquarters, and is elected. The Party also convenes a Federal Campaign and Communications Committee (FCC) that oversees communications and media, and is also elected. In addition, the FE elects various other posts where Liberal Democrats are representatives:

Chair of the International Relations Committee (IRC)

Two members of the IRC

One representative on European Liberal Democrats Council (ELDR)

Two representatives on ELDR Congress

Two representatives on the Liberal International Executive

Two representatives to the LI Congress

Chair Campaign For Gender Balance

Two Vice Chairs Campaign For Gender Balance³⁴

Election to the Federal Executive has until recently been a hard-fought internal contest that provided a strong indication of overall levels of support for the Leader. The Party elects members to the Federal Executive by a ballot of all conference reps, which is conducted using STV. Significant informal lobbying on behalf of various groups, including the Leader, is commonplace. While the Leader is well aware that a sympathetic FE makes his life a lot easier, the Party has

party's website for example in Spring 2011:
<http://www.libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/conference/Sheffield%20Reports%202011.pdf> (accessed 28.03.2011).
³⁴ <http://www.libdems.org.uk/party/partyelections2008> accessed 11.06.2009.

tended to elect a number of rebellious and anti-establishment members to this internal committee with obvious consequences. The electorate comprises those members elected to be conference representatives, regardless of attendance at the conference (conference representatives are chosen at local level based on a sliding scale according to the size of the local party).

In 2009 the total number of people who had been at some time elected to the party's Federal Executive was 92, of which the longest serving elected member had served for 13 years.³⁵ It reads like a 'who's-who' of the party, including over a dozen peers and a similar number who went on to become MPs. MPs are not entitled to stand for election to FE in their own right but clearly it has been a body to which those who seek office aspire. A full list of FE elected members and the years they served is contained in Appendix C. Few changes have been made to the rules governing these committees. The three most significant amendments are as follows. Firstly in September 1993 Conference passed a resolution providing four different options to formalise the type of campaigning members could undertake in pursuit of their successful candidature. In order to prevent endorsements and to stop post-merger factions developing, it was agreed that a standard written hustings would be produced by each candidate and circulated to each member, stipulated as one side of A5 per candidate. The spending limit for campaigning to membership to the Party's Federal Executive was set at zero.³⁶ Secondly, the most significant change to rules governing the composition of the Party's Federal Executive was that in September 1998 a constitutional amendment was passed preventing MPs from being eligible to serve this committee, other than in an ex-officio capacity.³⁶ Thirdly, in 2007 a rule was passed making a 'term' to the Federal Executive two years rather than one. The decision to switch to elections every two years arose from a largely pragmatic criticism that its members were becoming increasingly concerned with their re-election every 12 months and this was interfering with the business of the FE.³⁷

The radical wing of the party has traditionally realised its greatest opportunities by being elected to the FE, notably Tony Greaves, Gareth Epps and Donnadhach McCarthy, all of whom became notorious for questioning elite decisions. This is covered in more detail in the case-study on the decision to participate in the Stop the War rally, in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Providing there is someone informally representing this faction at the federal level, the party grassroots can point to this as intra-party democracy in action and, historically, it has been here that some bitter battles have been fought. Leader's biographies testify to these and the need to 'handle' this particular committee (Ashdown 2001).

Since its inception in 1988, until the Bones Commission in 2008, the work of the party's internal committees was fairly constant, and shifted in emphasis according to external factors, in particular the party's changing priorities according to electoral successes, and the relative strengths of different individuals holding office. There is evidence of two ways in which the leadership has been able to gain influence within these formal constraints. It has undertaken informal lobbying to gain support on the party's main committees, in particular its Federal Executive. Secondly and

³⁵ Interview 2, 2009.

³⁶ Article 7 (Federal Policy Committee), amendment to Article 7.2 at end of h).

³⁷ Interview 46, 2009.

more recently, far-reaching reforms have by-passed the party constitution altogether. The Campaigns and Communications Committee that decides on the party's media strategy and the General Election Committee that decides on strategy, do not appear in the constitution.³⁸ Furthermore, the Bones Commission did not seek to alter party strategy, but its recommendations represent a reshaping, as well as streamlining, of the organisation that has an impact on almost every aspect of the constitution. It recommended the party: "avoid the temptation to perfect our own constitution rather than get on with the job of pursuing power" (Bones Commission Report p27).

The Bones Commission introduced a Chief Officers Group that is charged with "the management of the Party...for determining the Party's overall objectives and strategy, as well as ensuring delivery of results" (p86). It is accountable to the FE and the federal conference although the recommendations of the Bones Commission are not formally constituted and include the delegating of authority on almost all key aspects of party management (p32).³⁹ Some interviewees expressed the view that this was in order that the party become dependent on the new structure and are presented instead with a *fait accompli*. In any event, the reluctance by party officials to bring that debate to the fore implies that these reforms go to the heart of the spirit of the constitution, one that has long established the party's internal democratic tradition. At the same time as the transition of power away from FE and toward COG took place, the party experienced the resurgence of interest in election to its Federal Policy Committee (FPC). This shift is described in more detail in Chapter 5 and appears to be a reflection of the fact that differences between the grassroots and party elite are now over matters of policy and less over matters concerning process and the operational running of the party. (The Chairmanship of the party's internal committees is contained in Appendix L.)

v) The Parliamentary Parties

The Federal Constitution of the Liberal Democrats sets out, simply, that the Parliamentary Parties of the House of Commons, House of Lords and European Parliament are those that receive the Whip. It states that they shall "make provision for a Chief Whip" and excluding the European Parliament, "if thought fit, a Deputy Leader" (Article 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3). In effect, the Chief Whip, Deputy Whips and Deputy leaders in both the Commons and Lords are elected at an annual meeting of the Parliamentary party. The constitution says nothing about the role the Parliamentary party plays in the removal of the Party Leader, but it played a pivotal role in the resignation of Charles Kennedy and as such represents a very powerful body (Russell, Fieldhouse et al. 2007; Cole 2009; Cowley 2009; Driver 2011). Regulations governing votes of no-confidence in the Chair of the Parliamentary party, the Deputy Leader and the Chief Whip exist in its Standing Orders, but the regulations concerning votes of no-confidence in the leader remain somewhat

³⁸ CCC and GEC are not always separate bodies – this varies from election to election.

³⁹ At the autumn conference in Liverpool 2009, the FE report included a commitment to a review of the recommendations of the Bones Commission, which would report back, and would include an assessment of the success of the Chief Officers Group. <http://www.libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/conference/Liverpool%202010%20Reports%20to%20Confere nce.pdf> (accessed 28/03/2011). The report in the FE report to Spring Conference 2011 reaffirmed the existence of COG which would now meet on a quarterly basis.

vague.⁴⁰

The Parliamentary party of the Liberal Democrats has undergone two significant transformations since 1988. The first is that as its parliamentary representation increased in number, its tendency to vote against its whip reduced (Cole 2009). Secondly Table 8 shows that the party has shifted politically; Cowley and Stuart demonstrate that the party had “transformed into a bona fide party of opposition” reflecting its uniform and consistent opposition to the Blair Government (Cowley 2009). The party opposed the Conservatives, demonstrated a phase of sympathy toward Labour and then developed a consistent opposition to Labour as its term continued. Interviewees also often commented on the change in character of the parliamentary party, away from the maverick local campaigners, such as Cyril Smith and David Penhaligon, toward a more pragmatic and professional Liberal Democrat MP, bringing with them experience of the council chamber (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2010). Most notable perhaps is that, although reaching numbers that enable it to have both front and backbenchers, the party remained dwarfed by its competitors.

Secondly, the parliamentary party has experienced a change in character since the new intake of 1997 contained a significant number of individuals with prominent experience in local government, including a number of former Council leaders, as well as marking an increase in individuals from business backgrounds. This trend continued and by 2010 a brief look at MPs biographies reveals that over 50% have at some time held office on their local authority.

Table 7. Liberal Democrat Whipped Votes 1997-2007.⁴¹

	With Labour		Against Labour		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
With Conservatives	58	2	1364	52	1422	54
Against Conservatives	848	32	369	14	1217	46
Total	906	34	1733	66	2639	100

In addition it is interesting to see the careers MPs enjoyed before they were elected. Of the 56 for which data is available, 22 had previously had careers in business or accountancy, 16 came from the politics/charity sector, 10 from education, 4 from law and 4 from miscellaneous other careers including farming and engineering. The increase in business experience appears to have shifted the character of the parliamentary party and, it has been argued, played an important part in providing fertile ground for the ideas that emerged in *The Orange Book* (Marshall and Laws 2004) (Quinn and Clements 2010).

⁴⁰ Interview 59, 2011.

⁴¹ Reproduced from Cowley & Stuart 2009.

vi) Candidates

Procedures for the selection of candidates at general, mayoral and European elections are set out in the constitution. Each state party is required to set up a Candidates Committee, and that committee oversees the approval, selection, adoption, and training of candidates. In effect these procedures have allowed local parties a significant degree of autonomy, although they have been lengthy and subject to some amendment over the years. This is considered more fully in Chapter 6. Candidates to the Westminster parliament are required to complete a questionnaire on 'competencies', which are then tested before a panel of both activists and office-holders. Once candidates have become approved following this process they are added to the list of approved candidates held by the state party which operates a Candidates Committee with, importantly, the "power of substitution" (Article 11.2).

The local party is required to select a candidate based on the approved list, from which it draw up a short-list of applicants, where a list of between two and four must include at least one member of each sex, and five or more must include two members of each sex and the local party are required to give 'due regard' to the representation of ethnic minorities (Article 11.5 (g)). A hustings is then convened by the local party and all members of that party are entitled to vote. Re-selection of a sitting MP requires endorsement by the local party and procedures are in place to remove a candidate in whom local party is thought to have lost confidence. Successful candidates then receive extensive training co-ordinated by the Candidates Officer at party Headquarters, and are encouraged to join the Parliamentary Candidates Association (PCA). This research revealed little or no interference from the party leadership on matters of candidate selection. Controversy has, however, arisen out of the party's gender-balance policies to ensure more women are selected (Evans 2008), and the procedures that allow for entirely different rules to come in to operation during a by-election (Article 11.8). These are considered more fully in Chapter 6 of this thesis. The party has stood candidates in every parliamentary seat at general elections since its launch, with the exception of that held by the Speaker (as is the tradition) and 1997 in Tatton, and 2001 and the Wyre Forest in 2001 and 2005.⁴²

vii) Officers

The party constitution sets out procedures for the election of other prominent office holders, namely the President, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer (for PPERA purposes), Treasurer (for fundraising purposes) and the appointment of the Chief Executive. The President is often portrayed as a 'dual' leader, and someone that represents the ordinary member's interests (described earlier). The formal role and remit of the Party President is set out in Article 12 of the Party Constitution entitled 'Officers' which also details the election and rules governing State Vice-Presidents, the Federal Party Treasurer, the Chief Executive and a Nominating Officer.⁴³

⁴² It was agreed that the party did not stand a candidate in Tatton when Martin Bell, former BBC journalist, agreed to stand as an independent in order to maximise the chances of removing the Conservative candidate. The party agreed not to stand candidates in the constituency of Wyre Forest (formerly Kidderminster) because the independent MP had a better chance of winning than that Lib Dem candidate.

⁴³ The role of the nominating officer is to ensure the Party's compliance with the 2000 Political Parties,

The President of the Liberal Democrats has become a hotly contested position, arguably second only to the Leader. The definition of this formal role explains that the President is ... "the principal public representative of the Party" (12.2). Potential candidates for the office require 50 signatures to be nominated, and are then elected by all party members for a 2 year term, and are limited to only 1 re-election (therefore can only hold the office for a maximum term of 4 years). The President's role is to represent the Party's ordinary members, and the only formal function is to Chair the Federal Executive. Other than this, the role is entirely open to interpretation, which has varied heavily depending on the individual. One party official described the role as having four different functions. Firstly, the President chairs the Federal Executive. In addition to this he or she advises the leader. A large part of the role involves doing the rounds at fundraising dinners and 'geeing up' the local parties, and finally they are often called upon to act as an alternative leader in formal situations or in the media.⁴⁴ It is a role very much open to individual interpretation, and will depend on the chemistry between the Leader, the President and the Chief Executive. It is also a role interpreted by some as passive and by others as active and examples of the individual tenures in this role are listed and described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Party Treasurer

The Liberal Democrats, in keeping with the PPERA legislation of 2000, have since then operated with two Treasurers. The first is the Chair of the party's Federal Finance and Accounts Committee, sometimes referred to as the Registered Treasurer, and is legally responsible for complying with PPERA and ensuring returns are made on time. The second Treasurer, more commonly known as the Party Treasurer, is an individual elected by the FE and acts as a figurehead fundraiser. They are usually well known throughout the party particularly for organising the party's annual flagship fundraising event, the Ball, and for making an appeal for funds traditionally ahead of the Leader's speech at federal conferences.⁴⁵ The role of the Federal Treasurer and the party's fundraising operation was the subject of close scrutiny and significant reform following the Bones Commission and this is explored in greater detail in Chapter 7.

viii) Associated Organisations, Specified Associated Organisations and party communications.

The Liberal Democrats allow for the recognition of various organisations that "have a common link of interest". These are separated into two categories, Associated Organisations (AOs) are those that it is established share the interests of the Party, and those Specified Associated Organisations (SAOs) are those who are already AOs but whose membership comprises entirely of Party members. New SAOs have to be proposed by the party's Federal Executive and approved by the federal conference.

Election and Referendums Act.

⁴⁴ One interviewee explained that the policy was to put the leader on television when a by-election was won, and the President on when it was lost.

⁴⁵ In recent years this traditional task has been carried out by comedians or celebrity supporters.

The SAOs are listed in the Party Constitution and currently comprise:

Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors,
 Association of Liberal Democrat Engineers and Scientists,
 DELGA (Liberal Democrats for Lesbian and Gay Action),
 Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats,
 Liberal Democrat Agents and Organisers Association,
 Liberal Democrat Youth and Students,
 Parliamentary Candidates' Association,
 Women Liberal Democrats
 Liberal Democrat Lawyers

Current AOs:

DAGGER (Democratic Action Group for Gaining Electoral Reform)
 Green Liberal Democrats
 Scottish Green Liberal Democrats
 Liberal Democrat Christian Forum
 Liberal Democrat European Group
 Liberal Democrats for Peace & Security
 Liberal International (British Group)
 Humanist & Secularist Liberal Democrats
 Liberal Democrat Disability Association
 Liberal Democrat Education Association
 Liberal Democrat Friends of Kashmir
 Liberal Democrat Friends of Pakistan
 Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine
 Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel

AOs and SAOs can be suspended by the FE and suspension revoked by a two-thirds majority at the next Federal Conference. The Party regularly reviews SAOs and AOs to ensure they satisfy the Party's criteria. While this power exists there have been no cases of SAOs or AOs being suspended, although informal involvement by Party HQ staff has occasionally been necessary in the resolving of internal disputes. The formal process would require a conference decision that "should be avoided at all costs".⁴⁶ Four 'types' of SAOs and AOs have been identified (Evans 2007):

- semi professional, such as the PCA, that is close to the leadership and works in co-operation with party officials
- centrally funded, such as LDYS and WLD, who work closely with the Federal Executive and campaigns department
- special interest groups, such as DAGGER, who provide specialist knowledge on

⁴⁶ Interview 2, 2009.

a particular issue, in this case electoral reform

- common interest organisations, such as Christian Liberal Democrats, who conduct politics together through meetings where they have a shared interest, rather than lobbying on behalf of that interest.

The function of SAOs and AOs had been the subject of some controversy, since some appeared to be largely dormant, but requiring consideration according to the constitution at various points in the policy making process. The list was streamlined following the Bones Commission. Of those that remain two received special mention by Russell & Fieldhouse and party staff confirm that only ALDC and LDYS (now Liberal Youth) represent a sufficiently strong organisation and membership base to be independently worthy of mention. This is based partly on these two obtaining funds from Headquarters and having their own full-time staff. This is also the case for the 'Gender Balance Task Force', a party body created in 2001 and not an AO or SAO. Offering a separate membership base, campaigning strategy and organisation sets these bodies apart, although their ability to influence decisions for example on matters of policy is said to be in overall decline.⁴⁷

In a recent re-design of the party website the section 'Who We Are' includes lists of the party's SAOs and AOs. Interestingly these are in a list that also combines the party's elected committees, such as the Federal Policy Committee, and entirely unconstituted bodies like Lib Dems Online and The Liberal Democrat History Group. This is a change from the party's original website that specified the organisation's constitutional status, and separated the party's managerial committees from other special interest groups as above. This suggests an attempt to appear less formal on the party's website while at the same time drawing attention to groupings with special interests that might appeal to the potential new member.⁴⁸ Again this move away from formal and constitutional, more traditional ways of encouraging party support and activity, is enshrined in the Bones Commission which is examined in closer detail in Chapter 7.

Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors

ALDC used to have the reputation in the Liberal Democrats for representing the party's 'vanguard'. It came in to being in 1988 as the new merged party was launched, and represented the merging of similar organisations in the predecessor parties, namely the 'Association of Liberal Councillors' (ALC) which was formed in 1965 and the 'Association of Social Democratic Councillors' (ASDC) formed in 1981 and performs an important function in the party. Of particular interest to this study on party organisational change are two things. Firstly, ADLC appears, in common with other alternative power-bases within the party, to have modernised. The website, for instance, offers a wide range of information for activists including legal and campaigning advice, leaflet and budget templates, and a strong support network for elected councillors.⁴⁹ Secondly, over the past 22 years its interests have come to be represented through the Parliamentary party, via councilor-turned-MPs, notably, Andrew Stunnell, David Howarth and John Barrett. For example in 2009 the

⁴⁷ Interview 10, , 2009.

⁴⁸ http://www.libdems.org.uk/party_organisations.aspx?pgNo=1 (accessed 06.10.10).

⁴⁹ <http://www.aldc.org/> (accessed 28.03.2011).

party elected councilor and former local government stalwart, Baroness Ros Scott, as its President, after Charles Kennedy rewarded her dedication to Suffolk County Council with a life peerage in 2000.

ALDC co-ordinates Liberal Democrat campaigns across England and Wales as a parallel but separate entity from the Party. It is historically considered to belong to a more radical wing on the party's political spectrum - radical at least in its passionate commitment to community politics and refusal to be bound by top-down decisions. In spite of being an often-used platform for warring factions, pro and anti-merger, the ALC and ASDC achieved a "pain-free" merger, and was renamed ASLDC with Bill le Breton and Andrew Stunnell at its head.⁵⁰ The party made its first major gains at local level in 1991 and has continued to be a strong force. ALDC's key role is to assist with campaigning by providing an election briefing service, 'Campaigner' magazine, advice and support, including on election law, it runs a well attended conference offering a wide range of training, providing a by-election and election results monitoring service and representing Liberal Democrat Councillors on Party and non-Party bodies. ALDC is a membership based organisation, with just under 3000 paid-up voluntary members in 2010, the majority of whom are current Liberal Democrat Councillors, although this is not a pre-requisite. Retired councillors and supporters of local government make up a small proportion of the membership, and membership of the Party is required. Approximately half of eligible (that is elected) Councillors join ALDC, although at more senior levels of local government membership is significantly greater, particularly within Metropolitan authorities.⁵¹

Unique among federal party bodies, ALDC is outside London, based in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. As well as testimony to the devolved principles that govern the Liberal Democrats organisational structure, this also gives it a bias with regard to political experience. As one party official put it; "People are more used to fighting Labour than the Tories. The staff all live up here – in gritty northern towns. That's where we are and its what we're used to".⁵² Russell and Fieldhouse (2005: p62) go so far as to say that it is ALDC that 'dilutes any centralising tendency in the Party', particularly since so many Liberal Democrat parliamentarians rose up through its ranks to their positions in the party elite. One interviewee argued that despite this many Liberal Democrat local government representatives see the local authority as an end in itself.⁵³ "They have a bigger role than they would as a backbencher".⁵⁴

ALDC primarily exists to offer campaigning support at the local government level. As an SAO it has the same rights as a local party in proposing motions to Federal Conference, but these are declining in frequency and the organisation is more "compliant", according to one insider. This, he argues, is more a consequence of having gained power and being engaged in the day to day running of local authorities, than it is any instruction from the party elite.

⁵⁰ ALDC Chief Executives: Tom Pickstone (2005 – present), Howard Sykes (1997-2005), Andrew Stunnell (1988-1997).

⁵¹ Interview 42 2009.

⁵² Interview 42, 2009.

⁵³ Interview 42, 2009.

⁵⁴ Interview 7, 2009.

Almost exclusively people that run big city councils are too busy to be involved in the organisation of the national party. You go to enough meetings, you're busy with public service or winning seats, or delivering leaflets. (Interview 42, 2009)

The 1997 creation of the Local Government Association, which offers extensive training for councillors, irrespective of party, as well as professional advice on 'best practice', has removed one of ALDC's primary functions, diluting its role to that of a campaigning and fundraising machine.⁵⁵ In addition the Bones Commission recommended the grant from the federal party to help finance ALDC be reduced, in response to this and as a reflection of the £36m earned each year by its Councillors. The Bones Commission also recommended all elected Lib Dem councillors be required to join ALDC to further increase its revenue. The role of activists and councillors is considered in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Liberal Youth

Another section of the party associated with its radical and 'red guard' are its youth movement. Described as "essential" in making the merger possible, the Young Liberals were cited by many interviewees as being critical to party survival of the 1960s and '70s (Pitchford and Greaves 1989; Crewe and King 1995). The Liberal Democrats in Parliament traditionally hold the record for consistently having the youngest MP in the House of Commons.⁵⁶ Holding the record for 14 out of 20 years for 'Baby of the House' bears testimony to a strong tradition of youth and activism. The only membership section of the Party that had been growing (at least until recently) was its youth and student organisation, re-branded in 2009 as 'Liberal Youth'.

Table 8. Membership of Liberal Youth (formerly LDYS) 2002-2009.⁵⁷

	Members	Income £
2002	2000	76,187
2003	2100	75,598
2004	2800	87,090
2005	2800	90,064
2006	2800	55,994
2007	2900	47,364
2008	2600	38,853
2009	3000	unknown

⁵⁵ Interview 46, 2009.

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baby_of_the_House#List_of_Babies_of_the_House_of_Commons accessed 01.07.2009.

⁵⁷ Interview 28, 2009.

The Liberal Democrats' Youth Organisation was formed in the early years of the new Party following an exceptionally lengthy and protracted set of negotiations between the YLDE (Youth, Liberal Democrats England) and Liberal Democrat Students. It was not until late in 1991 that these two movements successfully came together and formed LDYS, in part because the YLDE represented the Liberals and Liberal Democrat Students had a strong SDP heritage. The closely contested battle for its first Chair was seen by many to represent a closure of the tensions between the two merged parties, in which Sarah Gurling and Keiron Reid both ran strongly partisan campaigns on behalf of the SDP and Liberal tendencies respectively, Reid overwhelmingly secured the post.⁵⁸

Although the organisation has been steadily growing in number and as a proportion of overall party membership, its income has reduced significantly since ceasing to conduct its annual fundraiser 'Westminster Day'. This was a day-out organised across UK campuses including a tour of Parliament and meetings with MPs and Peers but was stopped following take-up on a scale far beyond the organisation's administrative capability. As well as receiving financial support, LDYS run a full-time staffed office at Party Headquarters and successfully propose more policy motions to the Federal Conference than any other Party body outside the Federal Policy Committee. The organisation continues to have a similar structure to that set up in the early 1990s, in which a Party member under the age of 26 or full-time student is eligible to join, and their full membership money paid to the Membership Department is returned by way of a levy.

Party communications

In common with other political parties, the Liberal Democrats communicate regularly with their ordinary membership in a variety of ways, through meetings, post and the internet. There is no one body that oversees this, but responsibility lies with individual teams. For example, membership services deal with online communications to members and donors, the campaigns department use online communication in key seats and during by-elections, the press team take care of the party website, and individual bodies like ADLC communicate to their own members (in this case elected councillors). The party operates a Campaigns and Communications Committee (CCC) but that is only concerned with the general election. The systematic use of email on a wide scale started in 2000 and due to cost savings is strongly encouraged by the party. Originally the communication was mainly by post, and the party continues to send twice yearly mailings to its membership. In its 22 year history the party has produced just one regular subscription based newspaper, Lib Dem News, that comes out weekly and contains regular updates from the parliamentary party, local by-election results, topical articles and a letters page. In pre-internet days it was *the* place for leaders to make announcements, and was where Ashdown chose to announce an end to equidistance in 1995.

The party has also been an enthusiastic, lively and in some respects ground-breaking in its extensive use of the internet through conferencing groups, in particular with the early and

⁵⁸ Interview 28, 2009.

extensive use of The Compulink Information Exchange, known as 'CIX'. This provides subscribing email users with a free conferencing service and was embraced by early internet users within the party. Thousands of party members joined topical conferences throughout the 1990s, enabling member-only discussions on matters of internal party business and policy. In particular CIX enables users to communicate with other grassroots members across the UK, and was used by party activists to mobilise around certain issues, in particular by Donnadhach McCarthy in organising the party's radical wing to propose motions to the FE. Prior to CIX this had to be done by physically collecting signatures by hand and by post. Although CIX has been through various changes to its technical base and corporate ownership, reduced in numbers to a few hundred, the 'threads' that form the basis for discussion among its members remain in use.

The party operates an interactive website, which is overhauled once per parliament and in 2010 launched 'huddle', a members-only interactive site, which allows members and the party to share files. In particular 'huddle' is aimed at encouraging members to interact with the party on matters of policy and to engage with one another on matters such as the party conference. It is widely used, has significant scope, and is described as a 'game-changer' in party communications.⁵⁹ Aside from email, by far the greatest recent innovation has been the party's active blogging community, brought together under Liberal Democrat Voice which started in August 2006. The blog has had 573 contributors, the majority writing single contributions but has well-known regular contributors such as Mark Park (2,722 contributions) and Stephen Tall (2,292 contributions) and attracts approximately 60,000 readers per month.⁶⁰ The party also operates a website "Flock Together" which attempts to collect information about 'social events, policy discussions, campaigning sessions, forthcoming conferences and by-elections' under one roof. This new interactive site, that includes facebook and twitter feeds, is run by a volunteer, Martin Tod, with some success particularly in advertising local party events.⁶¹ The impact of new media on party communications is considered in more detail in Chapter 6.

As well as communicating through various channels that are role-specific, the party, although described as under-factionalised (Grayson 2010), has, notably in the past decade, developed a small number of specific policy-driven or ideologically motivated groups. What follows is a brief summary of these groups which is important, particularly with regard to the evolution of different camps crudely divided between 'economic liberals' and 'social liberals', and their place within the dominant faction:

Liberator

Liberator magazine was first published in 1970 and states that it "acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none". It has out-lived other publications such as the Radical Press, Alliance, New Democrat and Reformer – all independent party magazines representing small groups prior to or around the time of merger. Liberator advertises links to the

⁵⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/yourbusiness/7899271/Huddle-used-by-Lib-Dems-to-improve-communications.html> (accessed 20.01.2011).

⁶⁰ Interview 65, 2010.

⁶¹ www.flocktogether.org.uk (accessed 30.3.2011).

party website, advertises the Liberal Democrat Conference, the popular 'Lord Bonkers Blog' and Liberator Song Book.⁶² Liberator has become the place to air grievances with the party bureaucracy and elite, and although it produces intelligent articles of a high standard is seen increasingly as a fringe activity for radical party supporters. Membership circulation is consistently between 450-650⁶³ and an annual subscription currently stands at £24 for 7-8 copies a year. It is organised by a "voluntary editorial collective" which comprises 17 named members⁶⁴ of which only one, Gareth Epps, is a former member of the Party's Federal Executive. Viewed with lasting affection by many in the party, the power of Liberator has dwindled in recent years. On long term activist stated bluntly: "It doesn't win us any seats so it's not important".⁶⁵

The Reformer

The Reformer was a short-lived journal whose founders claim it had lasting impact. Launched in September 1993 by a group of former SDP activists, the journal pushed specifically for then leader Paddy Ashdown to take a stronger line on ending equidistance. Following Ashdown's famous 'Chard' speech of 9th May 1992⁶⁶, and the formal end to equidistance, early editorials set out the case for closer co-operation with Labour. It's publication was the culmination of work by a group of activists, Justine McGuinness, Clive Parry, Mark Glover and John Dickie, who together with other former SDP members Tom McNally, Dick Newby and Ian Wigglesworth, had already fought for places on the party's Federal Executive, on an informal but widely understood 'pro-project' agenda. In addition to supporting closer co-operation with Labour, Reformer also recommended the party take a new approach, to looking more professional and better organised, and to promoting Charles Kennedy as the natural successor to Paddy Ashdown. As one former activist put it:

There was a feeling in the party that this was suits vs. sandals, and the people behind Reformer were definitely the suits.⁶⁷ (Interview 38, 2010)

The journal came out quarterly and its circulation figures were soon in the hundreds, accompanied by packed conference fringe meetings. To those that approved it offered a way in which prominent individuals could ally themselves with a particular view or party strategy. To others it appeared to re-draw old battle-lines. Liberator was for Liberals, and the London-based activist-professionals behind Reformer, looked very much like the SDP. As the initial excitement ebbed away, private funds from prominent supporters such as Richard Wainwright and Roy Jenkins, enabled it to

⁶² The Song Book is an irreverent set of lyrics to well-known tunes sung traditionally late in to the night at every Autumn Party Conference at a meeting of activists known informally as the 'Glee Club'.

⁶³ Data supplied by Mark Smulian 6.10.2009. No formal circulation tables are kept "since it has no advertising market to speak of".

⁶⁴ The Liberator Collective: Ralph Bancroft, Jonathon Calder, Richard Klein, Howard Cohen, Gareth Epps, Catherine Furlong, Peter Johnson, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Tim McNally, Stewart Rayment, Kiron Reid, Harriet Sherlock, Mark Smulian, Simon Titley, William Trnby, Chaire Wiggins, Nick Winch. Taken from Issue 335 September 2009.

⁶⁵ Interview 10, , 2009.

⁶⁶ The Chard speech can be accessed online (07.10.10.) at http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=82&item=history.

⁶⁷ Interview 38, former party activist, 2010. This quote became the title for an article about party professionalisation: Evans, E. and E. Sanderson-Nash (2011). "Sandals to Suits - Professionalisation, coalition and the Liberal Democrats." *British Journals of Politics and International Relations* 13(4).

switch its efforts to set up a new think-tank, the 'Centre for Reform'. This then became 'Centre Forum' and is described in more detail below. One interviewee claimed its legacy was significant :

It became a faction. It changed Liberator. It changed the Party. Had it not been for Reformer, the ideas, the network it produced, you'd probably not have Vince Cable. (Interview 38, 2010).

Liberal Future

Liberal Future marked the beginnings of the development of organisations specifically designed to generate debate about party ideology. It was set up in 2001, aimed at developing a free-market driven emphasis in Liberal Democrat policies. Many of its supporters were later associated with *The Orange Book*, including once leadership-hopeful former MP, Mark Oaten and the Chairman of its Advisory Board, Chris Fox, who went on to become the party's Chief Executive in 2009 under Nick Clegg. It was set up in response to what some in the party perceived to be a move away from "traditional liberal values", and growing overall hostility to private markets.⁶⁸ Although Mark Oaten was the only MP to be involved, Liberal Future's events often featured speakers such as Vince Cable and David Laws, while the interpretation of liberalism embodied in '*The Orange Book*' began to take shape. Organisationally Liberal Future was very informal, without a constitution, structure, funds or staff, holding meetings in pubs and at private addresses. It became the focus for much hostility at party conferences, activists singling out Oaten in particular, as representative of a shift to the right. The organisation was wound up in 2005. The 'young turks' may have had a false start with Liberal Future, but it appears to have marked the beginnings of a gentle kind of factionalism, later to include The Beveridge Group and Social Liberal Forum, broadly speaking on the left, and Centre Forum, Progressive Vision and Liberal Vision, on the right.

The Beveridge Group

In 2001 Alistair Carmichael MP, Paul Holmes MP, John Barrett MP and John Pugh MP, set up The Beveridge Group in response to the growing shift toward economic liberalism espoused by Vince Cable and Mark Oaten and those associated with Liberal Future.⁶⁹ Listing a membership of over half the parliamentary party, the Beveridge Group failed to build on this, and failed to take off. Although the Group has not been formally disbanded, it appears to be dormant, and is cited by those that espouse the realignment of the left as a strong indication of the success of the 'Orange Bookers'.⁷⁰ Indeed only 3 of its 28 members (all of whom are MPs) have achieved government posts in the coalition – possibly because many associate it and its founders with the left of the party (Smith 2010). Its inactivity does not mean, however, a complete lack of opposition to *The Orange Book* however, but a shift in the organisation of that view, replaced with the Social Liberal Forum, which includes both activists *and* parliamentarians.

⁶⁸ Interview 71, June 2011.

⁶⁹ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beveridge_Group) (accessed 07.10.10).

⁷⁰ (<http://leftwingpolemics.blogspot.com/2010/05/right-wing-entryism-and-neo-liberals.html>) (accessed 28/03/2011)

Social Liberal Forum

The Social Liberal Forum exists to foster debate within and beyond the Liberal Democrats, with the aim of developing social liberal solutions and approaches which reflect these principles and which find popular support.⁷¹

In February 2009 Social Liberal Forum formally launched its website (<http://socialliberal.net/>) as a place for members of the Liberal Democrats that broadly supported the publication “Reinventing the State” to share ideas and discuss policy. One insider described this particular move as “the beginning of factionalisation”.⁷² Reliant on people both inside and outside the party it has effectively replaced the MP-driven Beveridge Group and operates a free membership to those already in the party. Self-funded on a volunteer basis, the SLF has a governing board and an advisory board, and has become identified as a left-leaning faction within the party, listing Lynne Featherstone MP, and ex-MPs Evan Harris and Sandra Gidley on its advisory board. The website lists links to relevant publications, which include Liberator and the New Statesman, and The Guardian site Comment is Free. It also lists links to Liberal Democrat AOs and SAOs, and links to The Equality Trust think-tank, but not to Centre Forum.⁷³

Progressive Vision and Liberal Vision

In contrast Progressive Vision and Liberal Vision exist to draw together supporters inside and outside the party with a more libertarian position. Progressive Vision was founded by former party Director of Communications, Mark Littlewood, in 2007 as a small campaigning organisation to bring conservative and liberal thinkers together. Progressive Vision describes itself as an independent and campaigning think-tank for classical liberals, which stresses that it intends to ‘reclaim’ the term ‘progressive’ and that is not connected to any political party.⁷⁴

A more mainstream off-shoot from this, Liberal Vision, then launched shortly behind Social Liberal Forum, in March 2009, and invites supporters and members to join in a series of threads about party policy and its shared political philosophy. Its ‘vision’ lists three priorities: ‘Smaller state, lower tax and personal freedom’ and its ‘about-us’ section directly tackles the party’s traditional love of procedure:

It is an unincorporated association which is run as a “benign dictatorship”. If you expect internal democratic elections, AGMs, committee meetings and minute taking, this may not be the organisation for you. (<http://www.liberal-vision.org/vision/>).

Its mission states that it is set up ‘for Liberal Democrats’ and exists as a ‘group blog’ of like-minded people.⁷⁵

⁷¹ <http://socialliberal.net/> (accessed May 2011)

⁷² Interview 10, 2010.

⁷³ SLF did not respond to requests for data about its operation.

⁷⁴ <http://www.progressive-vision.org/general/faq.htm> (accessed 20.01.2011)

⁷⁵ Liberal Vision did not respond to a request for data about its operation.

Centre Forum

By 2005 the Centre for Reform had become what was described as one insider as “little more than a vanity publishing house for Lib Dem MPs who wanted to get their thoughts out there”.⁷⁶ It was transformed when co-editor of *The Orange Book*, Paul Marshall donated £1m to set up an explicitly liberal think-tank, and one explicitly independent of the party. Centre Forum was then launched with Julian Astle as its Director, Paul Marshall as Chairman and David Laws MP as Chair of its Advisory Board. Astle is a former member of party staff, having worked as Research Assistant to Nick Harvey and Archy Kirkwood, for the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence, then with Paddy Ashdown as advisor in Bosnia & Herzegovina. It sets out its aims as “seeking solutions”, and with no explicit mention of the party, although it has a website dominated by photographs of senior Lib Dems. Centre Forum produces pamphlets on various policies with an economic bias, organises events and discussions and is thought to have played a significant role in the shaping of the party's pro-market agenda.⁷⁷ Astle has been clear in his view that the difference between social and economic liberals is real and should be acknowledged by those in the party that deny such divisions exist.⁷⁸ He has also co-authored the follow up to *The Orange Book* in 2006 with Paul Marshall and David Laws *Britain after Blair* (Astle, Laws et al. 2006). The role of Centre Forum is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

ix) Conclusion

The Liberal Democrats operate as an institution governed by a formal constitution, and at the same time are evolving a number of less formal committees, communications tools and changes to its culture that can be broadly described as modernisation. The constitution sets out three key elements of party organisation. Firstly the party is organised with a federal structure. Secondly it gives preference to important internal committees that are elected by the party membership and finally it operates a twin-track leadership with a prominent role for the Presidents as well as the Leader. This prompted academic sources to suggest:

It is possible to see the dispersal of power that is designed into the structure of the party. On the other hand the influence of the leadership and bureaucratic elite is evident in many of the federal institutions of the party. (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005, p53).

When Russell and Fieldhouse wrote this in 2005 they painted a picture of a party disinclined to move away from its formal democratic structures and yet, in common with other parties, also one where leadership exploits and makes best use of various mechanisms within the formal structure. It is evident from this chapter that the party has in place a relatively unchanged constitution that was designed to build democratic processes in to the fabric of the party. In spite of the constitution remaining the same, we can draw some conclusions from this assessment about the way in which the party is evolving.

⁷⁶ Interview 4, 2010.

⁷⁷ Interview 4, 2010.

⁷⁸ <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-events/59/the-future-of-liberal-democrat-thinking> (accessed 20.01.2011).

Firstly, the Bones Commission specifically set out to introduce changes to the party bureaucracy without recourse to the constitution. Whether that remains the case is not yet clear, but it is important to point out that given the constraints on amending this party document (which requires a vote in support by two thirds of conference representatives), much activity that influences the real day-to-day work of the party is likely to be conducted outside its confines. Secondly it is interesting to see that on the parliamentary party and the party leader, the constitution is deliberately vague. The document therefore enables flexibility and, as we see elsewhere in this thesis, enables growth in the authority and autonomy in both these areas potentially at the expense of those aspects of party life more closely constitutionally defined. Thirdly, in recent years new activity has grown up around the party involving new technologies, and groups, which although resisting the label of factions, are coming to represent different views on policy and different ideological traditions. The party's once radical Councillors' organisation ALDC, has changed in character since the launching of the Local Government Association in 1997, which offered training and support to elected officials, reducing its role and significance within the party, for instance. At the same time it is possible to track the development of the two strands of ideological thought from the old Liberal Party, through Liberator representing its radical wing, to The Beveridge Group and finally Social Liberal Forum. Equally it could be argued that the old SDP thread ran clearly through The Reformer magazine and was taken up by organisations such as Liberal Future and Centre Forum.

On balance then, the constitution was designed to establish democratically elected committees, an elected party president to represent the party's ordinary members and a body of associated organisations to enable interests to organise and lobby. With regard to this it is successful. It often frustrates the party elite. As this thesis will demonstrate, however, there are ways around it.

Chapter 5 Making Policy

i) Introduction

This chapter examines Liberal Democrat policy. Those moments where the policy priorities of the leader and the membership are at odds, and how those tensions are resolved, can provide a strong sense of who is winning in an overall struggle for power. The formal rules that govern the policy-making process are set out in Chapter 4. In this chapter, drawing on data collected in interviews with party staff, politicians and party officers we take a more in-depth look at how the process works in practice, as well as assessing, briefly, the content of key policy pronouncements and general election manifestos. This chapter aims at identifying whether the leader can exercise greater control over policy than was enjoyed by his predecessors, and whether the process has become more professional. In keeping with the definition of professionalism set out on page 31, it would be reasonable to expect to see changes within the organisation, such as the employment of experts (as opposed to party bureaucrats and long-term party members), in the policy-making process. It would also be relevant to examine other indicators such as the extent to which those engaged in the policy-making process are able to exercise autonomy in what they do, and whether they are able to enjoy some mobility within the work-force (for instance finding work outside the party). Finally two further characteristics of professionalism, as defined, would involve assessing the extent to which the employee is able to exercise self-regulation, and whether they are expected to demonstrate a higher than usual degree of commitment to the tasks undertaken (Webb and Fisher 2003). It is important to note that the characteristics of professionalism used here look specifically at party employees, although an overall understanding of the professionalisation of the party might also include looking at the work undertaken on a voluntary basis, such as by committee members and activists. In this respect the characteristics set out by Webb and Fisher are not strictly applicable and may instead reflect a less rigorous, or so-called “soft” interpretation of professionalism, involving assessments of “commitment and effectiveness” in each aspect of party activity (Webb and Fisher 2003).

Policy-making involves the complex interaction of five parts of the party; the party leader, the parliamentary party, federal policy committee (FPC) and its policy working groups, federal conference committee (FCC) and the federal conference (Brack 1996), each with interests of their own. In order to understand intra-party power we examine the shifting balance of power among these five groups.⁷⁹ This chapter begins with the formal process, and an assessment of where policy originates and how the federal conference has evolved over the years. The clearest statement of a party's aims and intentions is set out in the general election manifestos and next in this chapter we look at each manifesto in turn as well as other policy themes associated with each leader. We look at *The Orange Book* and *Reinventing the State* (Marshall and Laws 2004; Brack, Grayson et al. 2007) - two publications that have been formative in setting out the ideological differences between, as we have already seen, the increasingly factionalised sections of the party, loosely divided into ‘economic’ or ‘social’ liberals. In each case we are interested in evidence of

⁷⁹ Article 5.1 of the Federal constitution of the Liberal Democrats states “the federal party shall determine the policy of the party”. Federal conference is frequently referred to as the party's ‘sovereign body’.

one policy taking precedence over another, and to whom these ideas belong, rather than analysis of the content of the policy itself.

The next section of this chapter contains two detailed case-studies examining the party's opposition to the Iraq War, and secondly the party's internal struggle over its policy on the abolition of university tuition fees. These issues were selected because they demonstrate two areas where tensions existed between the leadership and the party on the ground. Although the party was widely in agreement over the decision to oppose the war in Iraq, how to proceed in opposition became the subject of an internal battle of wills between the leader, Charles Kennedy, (and those representatives associated with the leader or party establishment), and radical grassroots activists led by Donnachadh McCarthy. More widely known are the party's difficulties over policy on university tuition fees, and the division this has caused between the Clegg leadership and the grassroots. This case-study looks at the process by which party policy was developed on this issue, rather than the content of the policy itself, and shows that the grassroots policy-making process set out in the constitution, continues to take precedence. The extent to which this actually constrains the leader is, however, a moot point; Clegg was able to enter into a coalition that trebled university tuition fees and he did so in clear contravention of the policy of his own party. The consequences of this are discussed in Chapter 9.

Having examined how the party makes policy, what policy it has come up with and how it communicates that policy, we then consider what it does in practice. In particular we are interested in the activity of the parliamentary party and the party's voting record. Does the party on the ground, the policy-making conference, guide the parliamentary party in its legislative activity or is the reverse true? Does the agenda of parliamentary party guide the policy preferences of the wider party and Federal Conference Committee (FCC)? The parliamentary party has experienced a number of changes in size and character and here these, together with its voting record, are considered in more detail. An examination of these different strata within the process enables us to build a picture of a shift in influence from the Federal Policy Committee (FPC), FCC and the federal conference toward the parliamentary party and the leader. These shifts are subtle and gradual, and crucially appears to have the support of the party at large. Party members, while being given an opportunity to exercise their democratic right in the process of policy-making, increasingly seem to acknowledge that this must be undertaken in such a way as to maximise the party's primary goal – away from 'policy for the sake of policy', toward policy as part of the pursuit of votes and/or office (Harmel and Janda 1994).

ii) The origin of policy

Since the constitutional review of 1992-1993, there have been few alterations to the formal process. The party continues to produce a number of policy papers and follow the procedures set out formally in the constitution, which are described in detail in Chapter 4, and illustrated in Appendix E.⁸⁰ What is of interest to this study is that the source from which policy originates and

⁸⁰ It is worth mentioning again that the party operates a federal structure in policy making, so the Scottish party make policy on issues that would fall under the remit of the Scottish parliament, for instance.

the status of formal policy appears to have changed with the emphasis now on papers by spokesmen. According to the constitution, the party makes policy based on motions coming to conference from two sources. The first is motions coming from party members through their local parties or SAOs, or through any ten conference representatives, in a motion to conference. The second is from FPC, which undertakes research that, aided by staff in the Policy Unit, develops into a policy paper. In both cases motions are formally submitted, redrafted by FCC and the Policy Unit if necessary and are debated in full at the federal conference before being put to a vote (often with amendments) of conference representatives. Anything passed becomes formal policy. The agenda is decided by the party's elected FCC, increasingly in close co-operation with the leader's office and portfolio spokesmen.⁸¹ In general the debate in conference is about policy papers although more often over amendments brought to these papers – the essentially reactive means by which, more often than not, local parties and activists, since they are not as proactive as is commonly assumed, have their say. As one elected official interviewed notes,

There's a caricature that really radical and controversial ideas come from the grass roots and the Stalinists on FCC spend all their time weeding them out to avoid causing offence to the leadership. I only wish that was true. We don't get radical exciting ideas from the grass roots and I'm not sure if we ever actually did. (Interview 10, 2009).

A third but less formal way by which the party arrives at policy is through a relatively new initiative referred to as 'spokesmen papers'.⁸² This process is not constitutionally recognised by the party and is delivered, typically, through press releases to the media. This occurred initially on subjects where the need for a rapid response to fast-moving issues was always understood, such as on foreign affairs, but increasingly across the full spectrum of parliamentary portfolios and is, therefore, a much more 'top-down' process. Interviewees explained that in recent years and in order to avoid contradictions or conflicting opinions emerging from this three-way method for arriving at policy, the conference has become a way in which they are drawn together and reconciled. One party insider explained:

The reality is that increasingly spokesmen are adopting a similar approach to their parliamentary portfolios leaving the conference as more of a 'washing up' exercise that brings parliamentarians' statements and written policy together. (Interview 39, 2009).

While policy generated in this way has increased, the number of motions put forward by local parties has roughly halved in 20 years. At the same time FPC and FCC have "become more alive to handing ammunition to the other parties" and consider the consequences of motions from local parties with this in mind.⁸³

Turning first to the formal process, there have been two important developments in the production of policy that have modernised and professionalised the process. Firstly, in 1992 the Policy Unit

⁸¹ Interview 39, 2009.

⁸² The party has always had a system whereby spokesmen were able to raise issues through less formal 'topical papers', although these have increased in significance over the years.

⁸³ Interview 59, 2009.

produced the party's first fully costed manifesto, shortly followed by a costed alternative budget.⁸⁴ Providing costings for policies came in response to criticisms that the party produced idealistic policy that lacked financial rigour, and was intended to make the party appear more business-like and economically aware. Secondly, in 1993 the party abandoned its two-part consultation process, involving 'green' and 'white' papers, which was considered too time-consuming and confusing, as part of an attempt to streamline the process. It is also suggested that this process to modernise policy making, which began in the early 1990s, meant that those party members with a particular interest in policy, who had once put motions to conference through their local parties, were now usefully connected to the party through working groups instead. In this way differences of opinion were ironed out at the working-group level, rather than on the conference floor, behind closed doors.

The federal conference

Although the formal process at the level of policy initiated through the Policy Unit, working groups and FPC has changed very little, the purpose of the federal conference has. Policy papers continue to dominate the conference agenda, but no longer represent the central purpose of the event for many attendees. Creating an impression on the world outside has become more important as time has gone on as this politician noted:

Years ago it didn't matter if you defeated the Leader at Conference. It was actually quite good sport. (Interview 7, 2009).

Ridiculed for debates on subjects the media caricatured as, for example, banning goldfish (1992), legalising cannabis (1994) and abolishing the monarchy (1994), FCC soon became aware of the potential the mass media presented for damage to its image as a serious political party.⁸⁵ As recently as 2005 Liberal Democrat spokesman for Trade and Industry Norman Lamb, was defeated by delegates on a proposal to sell off two-thirds of the Post Office delivery service.⁸⁶ This was, by this time, an unusual occurrence and since then no front-bench spokesmen have been defeated in a federal conference vote. One veteran conference goer and politician summed it up:

Conference ... is a lot more professional. There are more MPs and full-time advisors and that hasn't shifted the balance of power, but it has shifted the balance of influence. (Interview 14, 2010).

In part as a reflection of this changing culture, the party in 2003, conducted a comprehensive review of the party's federal conference by FCC⁸⁷ that aimed to see if the twice yearly federal conference "still meets effectively the demands of a modern, dynamic political party" (FCC 2003). It focused on participation and access, marketing and communication, and briefly on

⁸⁴ Interview 10, 2009

⁸⁵ <http://blogs.ft.com/westminster/2010/09/top-ten-lib-dem-conference-moments-ever/> (accessed 25.01.2011).

⁸⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/sep/21/liberaldemocrats.libdems20051> (accessed 25.01.2011).

⁸⁷ The author of this thesis was employed as party staff to conduct and report back on the 2003 review of federal conference.

Policy.⁸⁸ It acknowledged that networking, training, fringe meetings and the exhibition had grown significantly, particularly the fringe, firstly in 1992 - 'when it became clear the party had survived' - then again in 1997⁸⁹ and steadily ever since.

The Review proposed no fewer than 137 recommendations which when considered in detail give a revealing insight into the priorities of FCC. The overall recommendations fell in to two broad categories that would satisfy party modernisers and continue to demonstrate internal democracy; professionalising the event, and encouraging participation. Firstly a number of recommendations specifically referred to the party's need to be more 'professional'. This included reference to material produced by the Conference Office, and "background information on the party itself and its recent achievements in government at all levels should also be produced and presented professionally" (p53 (3.7)). An increase in professionalism was also encouraged with regard to the Conference Marketing Group's strategy, to be pro-active in encouraging the event raised significant funds (p133 (6.7)), and the conference stewards (p128 (6.30)) in helping to create a more professional-looking event. Secondly the review recommended the party make increased use of celebrities (p110 (4.18)), as well as a proposal to reduce the amount of time available for policy debate (p108 (4.6)). It acknowledged the growth in importance of the fringe (p115, (4.3)) while also proposing that the committee consider ways of "encouraging people to spend more time in the hall" (p121 (4.25)).

Using conference agendas it has been possible to calculate the time spent in the main hall divided in to keynote speeches (which include Questions & Answer sessions), and policy (which excludes debates on emergency motions). It is worth bearing in mind that although television interviews are often conducted outside the hall, an empty hall or poorly attended debate projects an image the party seek to avoid. Table 9 shows two clear patterns. First, that as a general election approaches, unsurprisingly, the party gives its politicians a platform, making the best use of media coverage, and that the further away the party is from a general election, the more inclined it is to allow policy debates to dominate. Second, overall there is, other than in response to approaching general elections, a small decline in time given to policy, but a consistent gradual increase in the time given to keynote speeches, both of which are conducted in the main hall.

⁸⁸ The review recommended the FCC and Conference Office staff carefully review the applicability of hybrid and state vs federal policy, since devolution in 1999 had created some confusion. With this exception other mentions of changes to policy procedures were confined to changing process deadlines and comments advising ways to encourage and facilitate an improvement in the standard of motion drafting.

⁸⁹ Interview 10, 2009.

Table 9. Conference Keynote speeches & Policy Motion time allocation 1995-2008.⁹⁰

Year	Venue	Keynote Hrs & mins	Policy Hrs & mins	Total Hrs & mins.⁹¹	Years from general election
2008	Bournemouth	7.50	14.40	22.30	-2
2007	Brighton	8.35	13.30	22.05	-3
2006	Brighton	4.50	15.25	20.15	-4
2005	Blackpool	7.10	11.30	18.40	0
2004	Bournemouth	4.00	19.25	23.25	-1
. 2003	Brighton	4.00	18.45	22.45	-2
2002	Brighton	3.30	16.00	19.30	-3
2001	Bournemouth	3.05	14.30	17.35	0
2000	Bournemouth	3.15	21.00	24.15	-1
1999	Harrogate	3.00	15.35	18.35	-2
1998	Brighton	3.55	21.45	25.40	-3
1997	Eastbourne	2.10	10.30	12.40	0
1996	Brighton	5.45	15.30	21.15	-1
1995	Glasgow	3.00	20.35	23.35	-2

A note dated November 2008, prepared for FCC based on the party's own calculations, confirms this trend, and breaks this down in more detail, between Q&A and debating policy papers for instance, for the three years between 2006 and 2008. In conclusion Table 9 demonstrates a preference toward key-note speeches by senior politicians, namely front bench spokesmen.

This can be seen in greater detail in Table 10, data taken from the party's own analysis, and shows the gradual increase in Q&As and keynote speeches from 26% to 30%, and a decrease in the time allocated for policy papers from 27% to 20%. This, the paper points out, is according to conference representatives who complete a post-conference questionnaire, a welcome move. It is fair to say that this represents not a move away from policy per se, but a shift in emphasis towards policy that is communicated by parliamentary party spokesmen and draws bigger audiences.

⁹⁰ The tables contained in this table were collected from data produced in the party's Agenda which contains the full timetable for all items discussed in the main conference hall.

⁹¹ This omits 'party business' items.

Table 10. Conference key-note speeches and policy motion time allocation breakdown 2006-2008.⁹²

Minutes and % of total spent on:	Autumn 2006	Autumn 2007	Autumn 2008
Non-debate items (speeches, presentations, Q&As, etc.)	435 (26%)	590 (33%)	525 (30%)
Party business (reports, business motions)	250 (15%)	145 (8%)	280 (16%)
Policy papers	450 (27%)	410 (23%)	345 (20%)
Emergency motions, urgent issues	130 (8%)	125 (7%)	130 (7%)
Other policy debates	430 (25%)	495 (28%)	460 (26%)
Total	1695	1765	1740

With regard to the origin of policy motions a note to FCC dated November 2007 highlights their ongoing decline (from 126 in 1996, to 62 in 2006, and 54 in 2007). Of greater interest is the overall division in the origin of motions that appeared on the Final Agenda - an increase in the number of motions originating from FPC or the parliamentary of party, and a decrease in those coming from other sources (such as SAOs and local parties), shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Origin of motions appearing on Final Agenda 2002-2007

Conference	Motions	FPC (%)	Parly Party (%)	Other (%)
Autumn 02	21	24	43	33
Autumn 03	22	32	41	27
Autumn 04	27	41	44	15
Autumn 05	16	12	62	25
Autumn 06	17	29	53	18
Autumn 07	17	29	59	12
Average	20	28	50	22

Notes to FCC repeatedly stress the committee's commitment to encourage more speakers, particularly new speakers, and an improvement in the diversity of the origin of motions, with various initiatives coming forward to help with drafting and making submission and deadlines easy and achievable. It has had little success. There was no significant change in the number of speaker cards being put to the Chair, with an average between 2006 and 2008 of 21.5 cards put forward per motion, and an average of 11.5 speakers being called. Table 11 clearly shows the prominence of the Parliamentary party in getting motions on the Agenda.

In summary, there have been some significant shifts that reflect some new thinking by FCC, and a number of recommendations to reform the Liberal Democrat's federal conference. Firstly the 2003

⁹² Report to FCC, 'Conference Agenda: Motions, Timing and Overall Balance'. Duncan Brack, November 2008.

review reflected FCC's desire to professionalise the conference. This resulted in a change of personnel in the Conference office with the replacement of long-term staff (Penny McCormac had run the office for over a decade), by an individual hired after consultation with professional recruitment specialists.⁹³ Secondly, in terms of process the use of spokesmen papers and policy originating from the parliamentary party is increasing, in what could be seen as a centralising move giving greater power to the parliamentary party to use this important platform. Thirdly, moves to encourage participation in policy have shifted away from debating policy papers toward Q&A sessions or presentations. Finally, FCC acknowledged the growing potential for conference as a campaigning workshop, with increased training opportunities and greater emphasis on networking to the benefit of party candidates. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 on 'resources'. The conference has, since 2003, been recognised as an important campaigning, fundraising and media event at the same time as fulfilling its traditional policy and debate function, which draws increasingly from the parliamentary party to please the crowd (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2010).

iii) Leaders, policy papers and manifestos

Ashdown – *Our Different Vision*

The spring conference of 1989 was the party's first attempt at setting out its overall policy direction, in a federal 'green' paper entitled "*Our Different Vision*". This document stressed the importance of 'liberty, equality and community', drawing closely on the preamble to the party constitution and particularly emphasising the party's commitment to community (Jones 1996). Through FPC and conference, the party continued to add to this body of papers in order to bring together former SDP and Liberal party members by producing philosophy-driven 'theme' papers over coming years. At the same time it produced an increasingly detailed set of papers drawn up by researchers and working groups, for instance "*Energy and the Living World*"⁹⁴ in 1990, setting out the party's environmental agenda and a connection between portfolios, theme papers and specialist researchers which worked well and evolved in to the 'shadow cabinet'.⁹⁵

These papers were carefully constructed and increasingly slick in presentation, drawing on the expertise of NGOs and charities and making best use of the party's policy unit and working groups as well as giving the members a body of text upon which to conduct debates at the federal conference. They also demonstrated the beginning of a closer relationship between the parliamentary party and policy process as the growing number of specialist researchers began playing an important role in policy development. This worked well in bringing the party itself

⁹³ Interview 54 (ii), 2010.

⁹⁴ This paper was produced by Norman Baker, then Research Assistant to the party's environment spokesman, Simon Hughes MP. The author of this paper was at that time Parliamentary Assistant to Simon Hughes.

⁹⁵ Other specialist policy papers include:
 1991 Economics for the future,
 1995 Investment, partnership, sustainability.
 1995 Transporting people, tackling pollution
 1998 Moving ahead, towards a citizens Britain
 2000 Reforming governance
 2000 Strategy for sustainability
 2000 Global response to global problems.

together but had a less positive impact on the media and electorate and was notoriously long-winded. The constitution adopted at merger contained a commitment to conduct a review of policy-making procedures in five years, hitherto described as “the blind leading the blind” (Titley 1991). The party was criticised for misunderstanding the difference between ‘expert opinions’ and ‘political decisions’ and the review concluded that the process should be streamlined, and Green papers abandoned. One source pointed out that the party at that time often failed to bring together the different priorities of “policy-makers, campaigners and communicators” sometimes leading to a disjuncture between the party’s policies and its campaigning. ‘*Our Different Vision*’ however, successfully served three purposes: i) to form the basis of the 1992 general election manifesto; ii) to establish Ashdown as a leader iii); and to establish the Liberal Democrats as a realistic political force (MacIver 1996).

1992 manifesto - *Changing Britain for Good*

The first manifesto of the new party, “*Changing Britain for Good*”, was produced by Paddy Ashdown and agreed by FPC, and in no way looked to the wider party or its institutions for guidance, let alone sought its approval.⁹⁶ In both 1992 and 1997 Ashdown prepared a draft then took this draft to FPC and sought their support,⁹⁷ a process which in the event produced few, if any, real obstacles. The pre-election manifesto was privately circulated among the party’s ‘Equal Opportunities Audit Group’ in order to ensure the party steered clear of prejudice, but in general its contents were a closely-guarded secret.⁹⁸ Richard Holme and Duncan Brack produced and discussed drafts with the parliamentary party and the FPC at regular intervals throughout the process. In the spirit of equidistance and the first real test of the new party, the somewhat bland 1992 manifesto ran to almost 17,500 words, and drew together five key themes, known inside the party as the “5 Es”; economy, environment, education, Europe and electoral reform.

The manifesto detailed party policy on each of these subjects and successfully established Ashdown as a credible leader of a credible third party, following the damaging Alliance, merger and difficult post-merger years. The document was fully costed for the first time, and the party benefited from the much-publicised ‘penny on income tax’ to fund its policy on education (Curtice 1996). The 1992 manifesto has been described as ‘classic liberalism’ (Hickson 2010) but failed, however, to seize upon any single issue that the electorate found exciting or distinct. The party suffered a net loss of 2 seats (Butler and Kavanagh 1992). The game-changer came with the Labour party’s election of Tony Blair in 1994, turning Ashdown’s attention toward talks with Labour, and the party’s policy-makers facing the prospect of a somewhat crowded ideological centre (Curtice 1996). The party had been until now only easily differentiated from the two other parties by its policies for electoral reform, and being pro-European (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). The period that followed saw the federal conference debate motions to elect the head of state and consider legalising cannabis at conference, while behind the scenes leader Paddy Ashdown

⁹⁶ Interview 3, 2009.

⁹⁷ Interview 3, 2009.

⁹⁸ The author of this thesis was a former member of the party’s Equal Opportunities Audit Group.

conducted protracted talks with the Labour leadership.⁹⁹

1997 manifesto - *Make The Difference*

The 1997 election was a very different general election for the party, in particular facing a now deeply unpopular Conservative government, and having formally abandoned equidistance. In Chapter 6 we look more closely at the strategy employed by the party against this backdrop. The policies upon which it based its manifesto were known inside the party as ‘CHEESE’: crime, health, education, the economy, sleaze and the environment¹⁰⁰; this was similar to the ‘5 Es’ of 1992, but played down the party’s policy on Europe. In response to positive feedback that the party was most closely associated with its policy on education, and on its media-friendly penny on income-tax to pay for it, the Lib Dems adopted taxation and fairness as its key policy theme (Holme and Holmes 1998). The leader and his advisors had realised it was necessary to cost the manifesto with sufficient attention to detail that it was able to withstand rigorous scrutiny, “rather than produce a wish-list and have to whittle it down”¹⁰¹, but it remained the work of the leader and his team. “*Make the Difference*” at 14,429 words was shorter and more concise than the 1992 publication, but not much.¹⁰² This election owed much more to a clever targeting strategy, and coupled with a popular campaign saw the party more than double its number of MPs – its overall share of the vote, however, was marginally down.

Kennedy – *It’s About Freedom* and *Meeting the Challenge*

With regard to policy there are three things worthy of note during Charles Kennedy’s period of leadership. The first is that he is criticised for showing little or no interest in it (Brack 2007). A popular leader with the public, nicknamed ‘chat-show Charlie’, Kennedy was relaxed and non-confrontational, which some have suggested shows the beginnings of the ‘cult of personality’ in the third party. The second is that the party continued to produce a regular stream of lengthy and detailed policy papers (Grayson 2007). Kennedy was thought to be pro-Europe, and keen on the environment and the 20,000-word pre-manifesto he put to the Harrogate conference in September 2000 emphasised these things (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). More often than not, however, questions on policy suggested the party at that time failed to carve out anything particularly distinct. The third is that he led a parliamentary party that turned from voting mostly with the Labour government to voting mostly against it (Cowley and Stuart 2006; Cowley 2009) – this in spite of the fact that the party on the ground appeared to be moving not only to the left, but to the left of Labour (Quinn and Clements 2010). Kennedy’s period as leader was perhaps lacking in direction on the formal policy pronouncements associated with Paddy Ashdown, which may in part be due to the events of 11th September 2001, which required policy to be made ‘on the hoof’ in reaction to a rapidly changing international situation. He was closely associated with policy to oppose the war on Iraq, and he voiced clear opposition to aspects of the anti-terrorism laws, such

⁹⁹ Even though the conference debated more serious motions on the usual topics it was these that became the caricature.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 44, 2009.

¹⁰¹ Interview 39, 2009.

¹⁰² Interviewees differed on recollection of the costings of the party manifesto. Each manifesto has been appended by a costing, although this has become more substantial and detailed, notably in 1992.

as control orders. In 2000 FPC established a working group to set out his main themes. The outcome, *'Its About Freedom'* explained the Liberal Democrat's commitment to civil liberties, with public services, particularly the NHS, at its centre. The paper also established the party's commitment to political reform, the environment and internationalism. It received a lukewarm response. Three years later Kennedy tried again. In order to rectify criticism of his domestic policy record, and in part responding to what for many was a missed opportunity in the 2005 general election, FPC set up a policy review, *'Meeting the Challenge'*. The outcome was 'Trust in People – Make Britain fair, free and green' in July 2006, a review of existing policy and a guide as to how and where it should be developed. This was too little too late, and was launched by a beleaguered leader (Hurst 2006). It was however, well received by the party who endorsed it at the Autumn conference, but again was criticised elsewhere for failing to make specific policy pledges (Dorey and Denham 2007).

2001 manifesto - *Freedom, Justice, Honesty*

From 2001¹⁰³ onwards the party has published the pre-election manifesto for debate at the federal conference prior to the election being anticipated. These pre-election manifestos have been approximately half as long as their predecessors. One interviewee suggested that one reason for this is that the pre-manifesto is sent to the Scottish and Welsh parties, so that parts of it that do not apply can be taken out and bits that are state-specific can be added in. It is "Scottified".¹⁰⁴ In 2001 a nominal board of advisors close to the leader were drawn together in the 'manifesto group'. When the 2001 general election manifesto, *"Freedom, Justice, Honesty"*, was published it was longer than ever, at 21,332 words, and reflected the more wide-ranging consultative approach taken by Matthew Taylor, who was charged with bringing issues forward and creating the early draft (Bentham 2007).

2005 manifesto - *The Real Alternative*

By contrast, the 2005 manifesto *"The Real Alternative"* was half the length, and much more leadership-driven, Matthew Taylor again taking the lead this time producing a first draft from which the final version apparently deviated very little (Bentham 2007). In contrast with previous years, the leader convened a new sub-group headed by Taylor to co-ordinate the various parts of the party in bringing forward early manifesto drafts. This process is described by one interviewee as being a response to the enlarged parliamentary party and the range of expertise that the new intake of MPs represented, in particular those who were former councillors. One insider stressed that the pre-manifesto document, far from having policy input by the enlarged team working on it, became a poorer quality document - "full of soundbites" - with greater emphasis on individual issues with which the party was closely associated. Another described it as "picking up policies in a vacuum".¹⁰⁵ One interviewee described how the original title of the pre-election manifesto, *"Freedom, Fairness, Trust"*, designed to provide 'ideological coherence', was changed without

¹⁰³ A pre-election manifesto was also produced in 1990 but not in intervening years.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 6, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 18, 2009.

discussion to '*The Real Alternative*'. Opposing the council tax, opposing the Iraq War, and proposing free personal care for the elderly were popular campaigning points but failed to come together in a document that reflected the party's wider policy themes.

Campbell – *The Green Switch*

To an extent the short and relatively uneventful leadership of Ming Campbell had more to do with "steadyding the ship" following the departure of Charles Kennedy and the trauma of the leadership contest (described in Chapter 3), than with any particular policy initiative. Campbell was, however, strongly associated with the foreign affairs portfolio, and a firm stance in opposing the Iraq War. Campbell, reportedly authoritarian in style, but more to the left than Kennedy in his political leanings, was well respected for his views on internationalism and social justice.¹⁰⁶ He was, however, described by some as a leader who took little interest in policy, and who showed little respect for the party's democratic institutions, including FPC.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, his inability to transfer the skills demonstrated as foreign affairs spokesmen were cited by two interviewees as the cause of his demise¹⁰⁸, while others found his style with colleagues, described as "paternal and distant"¹⁰⁹, difficult and unappealing. The 2006 federal conference was Campbell's first serious test at which Vince Cable proposed changes to the party's policy on taxation, including getting rid of the 50p tax-band commitment. Campbell's appearance on the platform is thought to have helped the vote, which resoundingly backed the policy (Campbell 2006) and signalled an important change, combining the party's thinking on taxation and in the leadership loyalty of the conference. The same policy paper also proposed a cut in the basic rate of income tax from 20% to 16%, the closing of loopholes for high-earners,¹¹⁰ and shifting the tax burden to polluters. It formed part of a wider campaign called 'the green switch' which was popular but somewhat indistinct. The second and last federal conference during which Campbell, in 2007, focused again on environmental policy, but the conference was largely overshadowed by speculation about a snap general election, and in the event that one was not called, speculation about Campbell's imminent resignation.

The Orange Book and its critics

Quite apart from the party's formal pronouncements on policy there are, of course, occasional publications that enable a narrative to develop around certain issues, and in the case of *The Orange Book*, generate debate about a host of policies which its supporters claim was lacking during the latter stages of the Kennedy leadership. Publication of *The Orange Book* marked a new phase of ideological development for the party in which its authors aimed to 'reclaim' the party's classic liberal roots. Although it is a collection of essays, and in no way forms any part of the party's formal policy, it has re-ignited a lively discussion within the party and beyond about classic or economic and social liberalism, and what these things mean in the context of the Liberal

¹⁰⁶ Interview 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, 39, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 40 and 16, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 5, , 2010.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/campbell-wins-battle-to-scrap-50p-tax-pledge-416725.html> (accessed 07.02.2011).

Democrats.¹¹¹ Contributors to the book are, with the exception of co-editor Paul Marshall, and Jo Holland, all Liberal Democrat politicians.¹¹² It includes a powerful introduction by David Laws, setting out explicitly small-state economic liberalism, citing the NHS, prisons and pensions systems as ‘failures’ in need of market driven solutions. The remaining chapters are less controversial but the choice of contributors leaves no doubt about the Marshall and Laws’ cohort. They are experienced city professionals and the book was a challenge to the left-leaning approach to public services that had been adopted by the Kennedy leadership.¹¹³

The publication was played down by Kennedy, who had hoped to unite the party, but was faced with a proportion of his parliamentary party apparently at odds with each other and the party’s activist base (Garnett 2010). Both MPs that fought the 2008 leadership contest had contributed to the volume, indeed Clegg and Huhne also contributed to the 2007 publication that aimed to reclaim social liberalism – arguing that it was possible to embrace both (Brack, Grayson et al. 2007). What is important to this thesis is not so much the content of these books, but the impact they have had on the party. They represent the beginnings of factionalism, naturally played down by those within the party who prefer instead to suggest the aims of both groups are potentially compatible. The publications were, however, followed by the development of two corresponding movements within the party, The Social Liberal Forum and Progressive Vision (see Chapter 3). Even though Clegg and Huhne hedged their bets in writing chapters for both, other contributors to each volume can be seen to clearly belong to one or the other camp. It is interesting to note that since entering government in 2010 every contributor to *The Orange Book* that is a Member of Parliament has been given a job in government.¹¹⁴ Contributors to *Reinventing the State*, less than one quarter of whom were MPs, include some of those more critical of the coalition including Tim Farron and David Howarth, and who remain without government posts.

The ‘Orange Bookers’ intended to launch the volume on the eve of the party’s 2004 federal conference, but its launch was cancelled following some frantic negotiating between Marshall, Laws and the Kennedy office and took place with a minimum of publicity. There was, it seems, no deliberately destabilising intent on the part of its authors, nor a plot to take over the party elite – although that is what followed. *The Orange Book* was intended to generate discussion and challenge the status quo at a time when policy pronouncements were bland, uninspiring and produced with the purpose of campaigning against both Labour and the Tories, in mind.

¹¹¹ Definitions of various schools of thought within the liberal tradition can be found in Brack, D and E. Randall (2007) *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (Methuen)

¹¹² Paul Marshall is Chairman of Marshall-Wace hedge fund and city financier. Jo Holland is Research Assistant to Steve Webb MP.

¹¹³ A breakdown of the jobs held by Orange Book contributors prior to their election to parliament is contained in Quinn, T. and B. Clements (2010). *Realignment in the centre - the Liberal Democrats. Britain at the Polls 2010*. N. Allen and J. Bartle, Sage publications Ltd.

¹¹⁴ David Laws, Edward Davey, Christopher Huhne, Vince Cable, and Steve Webb were all given posts in government. Paul Marshall and Jo Holland are not MPs, and Mark Oaten and Susan Kramer no longer hold their seats.

Clegg – *Make it Happen*

The first significant policy paper to emerge under Clegg's leadership was '*Make it Happen*', produced in 2008, and which proposed radical revision to economic policy, proposing tax cuts, particularly for the low to middle earners. Described as coming "out of nowhere"¹¹⁵, it represented a continuation of Campbell's theme and a decisive shift away from any tax and spend philosophy, but nonetheless received strong backing from the party conference¹¹⁶. *Make It Happen* embedded tax cuts at the centre of the party's fiscal policy and generated one of the widest ranging, longest and liveliest policy sessions at federal conference for many years, with over 100 speaker cards put forward. Although a number of prominent parliamentarians and popular party figures spoke in favour of the amendment that rejected tax cuts, the vote showed strong support for the leader. As one blogger recorded the event live, "Vince Cable gets up.... A conference hall swoons...."¹¹⁷, and the party conference united behind Clegg and his team, voted for the policy, seemingly irrespective of the shifting centre of political gravity that accompanied them.¹¹⁸ The new breed of MPs were taken seriously by the media and the other parties, and therefore adored by campaigns-driven conference representatives.

Delegates to that same conference would have been eligible to vote in the two-yearly raft of internal committee elections, and a closer look at this reveals an interesting development in their thinking. Elections that year were held for FCC, FE, FPC, IRC, ELDR and the interim peers list. A significantly higher number of applicants applied for all the positions on offer, with 40 party members putting their names forward for FPC in 2008, compared with just 21 in the previous election in 2006. The party switched from annual to two-yearly elections, which may have contributed to the rise in applications, although a reading of the party blogs suggests an enlivened interest in internal committees generated both by changes to party procedures proposed in the Bones Commission, and by Clegg's rightward shift (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2009). There are strong denials of a 'slate' or factionalism along the lines of those associated with Social Liberal Forum, Reinventing the State or any other groupings that might be seen as hostile to the leader. There is no doubt, however, that individuals such as Duncan Brack, (associated with the party's left or at least having a reputation for curbing leadership moves to the right) triumphed in 2008, with Brack achieving a significantly higher number of first preferences than any other candidate. As one member of staff put it;

At the last set of committee elections, Nick was seen as right wing, they attracted an oppositionist group on to FPC. For the first time in a while, they see themselves as self consciously stopping the leader going off taking the party to the right. (Interview 39, 2009).

¹¹⁵ Interview 19, politician, 2009.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2008/jul/17/cancleggmakethappen> (accessed 02.02.2011).

¹¹⁷ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/conference-make-it-happen-debate-the-liveblog-3900.html> (accessed 07.02.2011).

¹¹⁸ Former policy director Richard Grayson suggests it is in part due to the trauma of Kennedy's demise, the short-lived leadership of Campbell, and the scandal surrounding Mark Oaten, to a lesser extent Simon Hughes, that has produced a leadership-loyal conference
Grayson, R. (2010) *The Liberal Democrat Journey to a Lib-Con Coalition*.

This may be so but it is interesting to note that the preferred place for anti-leader sentiment is behind the closed doors of the party committees, in preference to the conference floor in front of the television cameras. Described by one interviewee as “something of a coup, through the committee system, by the left”¹¹⁹, FPC then became the place, rather than within the parliamentary party, federal conference or even the party’s FE, that anyone with an interest in restraining the leader, would operate. The new FPC also impacted on the tuition fees debate, resulting in success for those that supported their abolition. The leader through FPC, however, continued with theme papers¹²⁰ and more portfolio-specific policy papers¹²¹ and in June 2009 predicted that “savage cuts” would be necessary in the public spending budget in order to address the financial crisis. The role for Vice Chairs of FPC increased in significance at the same time, now meeting ahead of full FPC meetings in order to prepare strategies for resolving potential conflict beforehand.¹²² The FPC elections in 2010 reinforced this trend, this time with 53 individuals putting themselves forward for the usual 15 positions, with Duncan Brack and this time former MP Evan Harris topping the ballot of first preferences.¹²³ One insider explained the leadership’s response to this apparent challenge. In order to avoid head-on collisions with the new and left-leaning FPC, Clegg and his closest colleagues would argue, privately, that policy, as passed at conference, was insignificant.¹²⁴ One source close to the leadership made the emphasis very clear; “Policy is just that – it’s manifestos that matter”.¹²⁵

2010 general election manifesto - *Change That Works For You*

By 2010, the pre-election manifesto group had become a sub-committee of FPC, which comprised individuals appointed by FPC Chair (the party leader). Danny Alexander was chief, and the group also included Nick Clegg, two other FPC Vice-Chairmen, Richard Grayson and Jeremy Hargreaves, Vince Cable (Shadow Chancellor), Ed Davey (Chair of Campaigns and Communications Committee), Steve Webb, David Laws and Susan Kramer, with three members of staff from the policy unit, leader’s office and the party’s treasury advisor. It began as a broad ‘themes’ document prepared by Clegg’s office, which was then worked on collectively by a team of advisors, including people preparing the detailed costings appendix.

The pre-election manifesto produced by Danny Alexander caused some difficulty for some party activists, many of whom had become aware of the disconnect between the leadership and the party’s instinctive policy positions. FPC had collected policy papers passed at conference, that offered a significant package, including tax cuts for the worst-off, abolishing tuition fees, scrapping ID cards, free personal health care for the elderly, an improvement in pensions and increasing the

¹¹⁹ Interview 49, 2009.

¹²⁰ A Fresh Start for Britain” July 2009 focusing on the economy and constitutional reform.

¹²¹ In particular:

Our Natural Heritage – July 2009 – the environment

Real Women – August 2009 – equality and discrimination

Are We Being Served? Policies on Accessing Good and Services – Sept 2009 – consumer rights.

Zero Carbon Britain – Taking a Global Lead – Sept 2009 – environment

Thriving in a Globalize World – A Strategy for Britain – October 2009 – globalization

Free to be Young – March 2010 – youth policy.

http://www.libdems.org.uk/policy_papers.aspx (accessed 03.02.2011).

¹²² Interview 39, 2009.

¹²³ <http://www.cix.co.uk/~rosenstiel/lelections/10fpc.htm> (accessed 07.02.2011).

¹²⁴ Interview 49, 2009.

¹²⁵ Interview 49, 2009.

number of police on the beat.¹²⁶ The pre-manifesto, however, drafted against the backdrop of recession, removed a number of these pledges and opened up a fierce debate within FPC about which pledges should be dropped, which should become aspirations and which were non-negotiable. It appeared to have been based instead on the 2008 FPC document '*Make it Happen*', and although a departure from existing policy on a number of issues, was nonetheless, once again enthusiastically received by the membership. They appeared, for the time-being at least, to have swallowed the leadership line, not least as it faced a general election widely predicted to result in a hung parliament, and the first ever realistic opportunity for the party to influence government.

The Manifestos - a summary

In summary then, Ashdown was interested in policy, and believed he could push his own agenda by privately winning over those that might stand in his way, and push the rest through by sheer force of personality.¹²⁷ His period in office was more concerned with uniting the new party and getting the Liberal Democrats and himself better known among the electorate. Kennedy was considered to be good at straddling the different interests within the party but often criticised for avoiding confrontation and failing to take a strong lead on policy matters. His legacy was to have enjoyed the party's greatest electoral gains against both parties, while enabling some divisions to have deepened and grown in to factional groups- 'Orange Bookers' and their opponents. Campbell was unable to establish a distinctive policy position during his short period in office, and again was, according to insiders, more concerned with uniting a divided party and making progress on internal business. Clegg, however, took the party into a completely new situation in which the leader appears to have persuaded his parliamentary party to back him on issues quite counter-intuitive to them, and then used this as a way to achieve the backing of conference.

This section demonstrates the different priorities in each manifesto, and that their production is a much more leadership-led activity than the production of regular party policy. The manifestos draw on existing priorities and while there is no evidence that leaders add new commitments, they naturally leave some out and that the design of the document can be used to stress their own priorities. On balance the Liberal Democrats allow their leaders a significant degree of autonomy over the production of manifestos. Ashdown was committed to the democratic policy-making process. Indeed his biographies suggest he relished an opportunity to discuss policy detail. In contrast Kennedy lacked enthusiasm for the minutiae, and presided over a period in the party's history where policy appears to have been somewhat neglected. David Laws and Paul Marshall filled this void and the views they espouse were then carried in to office by Nick Clegg.

One feature of combining 'policy-maximising' with 'vote-maximising', the Liberal Democrats have been required to frame policy positions in light of electoral competition, specifically taking in to account those of their two major rivals. For a third party whose most realistic opportunity to form a government would come with a hung parliament and potentially doing a deal with Labour or the

¹²⁶ Interview 49, 2009.
¹²⁷ Interview 3, 2009.

Conservatives, it is clear that its proximity to the other two plays a key role in both the party's strategy and the perception of it by voters and members. This thesis has, thus far, argued that the party has become increasingly top-down and the area of policy-making is no exception. Although the formal processes remain intact, the constitution stipulates that conference is sovereign with regard to policy, and policy debates continue to happen, and continue to be voted upon.

It has however, demonstrated that the leader has significant autonomy in the area of manifestos, and that this has always been the case but only recently has this mattered. Recent developments show that policy debates at conference now compete with training, media and fundraising for time and emphasis. There is also recent evidence that the status of policy is shifting, (at least that is what the leadership would like to achieve), toward policy ambitions or aspirations in a further move that supports 'office-maximising'. If the party and the leadership are of one mind in terms of policy, this should present no difficulty. However, when the party activists and leader take opposing views, such as over the policy to abolish university tuition fees, the constraints on leadership can be seen. There is no evidence that the argument for economic liberalism was won, or that the grassroots have shifted to the right. There is, however, evidence that the grassroots have learned to discuss these matters behind closed doors, in FPC meetings, to support the leader in public and to do whatever it takes to give the party an opportunity to hold office.

Based on BES data from 1992, John Curtice was able to position relatively easily the Lib-Dem voter to the left of centre (Curtice 1996). In their survey of members from 1997, Whiteley, Seyd and Billingham were also able to show that at that time the party membership had a general inclination toward the left (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006). The next substantial assessment of the party and the electorate was Andrew Russell and Edward Fieldhouse's 2005 publication on the Liberal Democrats which found the party, both its membership and its voters, less easy to position. They argue that the party represents a paradox by attempting to win support from both Labour and the Conservatives, and has been engaged in a battle to reconcile centre-left policy instincts with the need to target, particularly in 1997 and 2001, mostly Conservative-held seats (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005). Similarly they argue that Liberal Democrat voters do not demonstrate a clear or consistent understanding of Liberal Democrat policies, in a pattern than it is argued masks a complex and volatile pattern of 'defection' from the other two parties (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005).

The third party is more inclined to reflect single issues with which it is strongly associated, and under Kennedy this would have been the Iraq War and overall opposition to an illiberal Labour government. It suggests a centre of gravity that pulls the leadership and parliamentary party gradually away from the party in power, a pattern which helps to explain the closer proximity of the party under Nick Clegg towards the Conservatives in 2010. The question is whether he has brought the party's activists with him. Rather than a shift from the left to the right, this chapter suggests a shift by the party on the ground, away from ideology and toward pragmatism (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2010). The relentless vote-maximising tactics employed in the build-up to the party's high-water-mark of 2005 appears to have been at the cost of a cohesive and coherent

ideological framework. Instead the party were encouraged to be all things to all voters. The case-studies that follow aim to explain the impact of this mis-match both with regard to the actions of the leader in taking a policy position, in this case on the war in Iraq, and to the difficulties caused when the leader has a policy position at odds with that of the wider party.

iv) Case study – Opposing the War on Iraq

Private polling conducted by the party suggests that in the build-up to the 2005 the party was strongly identified with a single policy - opposition to the Iraq War¹²⁸ (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006). The decision owes more to the party's internationalist heritage, one strongly associated with then leader, Charles Kennedy, than to any tactical left-right positioning (Hickson 2010). What is of interest in this case-study is both the decision to oppose the war, but perhaps more importantly the decision by Kennedy to address the one million marchers on the Stop the War Coalition rally in Hyde Park in February 2003.¹²⁹ Although the decision was widely publicised, Kennedy being the only major party leader to address the demonstration, the behind-the-scenes events reveal some interesting tensions between the leadership and the party's elected Federal Executive. The Stop the War Coalition created strange bed-fellows for the party, sharing a platform with Jesse Jackson, Tariq Ali, George Galloway and Vanessa Redgrave, cited by some as the party's main reluctance to join the march.¹³⁰ By the time the vote in Parliament came, the party had conclusively agreed to oppose military action and all 52 Liberal Democrat MPs voted against the resolution to declare war on Iraq on 18th March 2003.¹³¹

Accounts of the build-up to this decision vary although none on the inside would deny this was an interesting and perhaps pivotal moment for the party's FE. The party's FE was at that time Chaired by party president Navnit Dholakia, and procedures were somewhat dominated by elected members and in particular activists Donnadhach McCarthy and Tony Greaves. McCarthy was elected to the FE in 1996, as a purely independent and non-aligned individual, indeed he had only recently been recruited to the party. He began by raising a series of questions that challenged the potential clash of interests of Richard Holme, who as a peer was a member of the parliamentary party, at the same time as being Executive Director for Rio Tinto Zinc, a mineral resources multi-national corporation. McCarthy was active and vocal within the party, proposing motions at FE and conference and stimulating discussion on CIX¹³² and outside the party writing articles and generating debate on the internet, about the questions raised by parliamentarians lobbying on behalf of companies in which they have a financial interest. He became Deputy Chairman of the FE in 2002 and was by this time well-known within the party. On the FE he constantly challenged the party leadership and questioned decisions by the party elite.

Although McCarthy was unsuccessful in his campaign to force Peers to declare private business interests, he became strongly associated with the party's activist left, making the most of every

¹²⁸ Interview 10, 2010.

¹²⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/2765041.stm> (accessed 25.01.2011).

¹³⁰ Interview 30, 2010.

¹³¹ <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2003-03-18&number=118> (accessed 25.01.2011).

¹³² Compulink Information Exchange (see description in Chapter 4)

opportunity to organise at the grassroots level, in particular by using CIX and the internet as an activist tool. He was one of the first to put the new technology to great effect in the collecting of signatures and support to bring forward motions to conference, for instance. McCarthy was vocal in his opposition to military action against Iraq and, as the FE minutes testify, the party was aware of the potential damage this might cause. The minutes of the FE meeting of 12th September 2002 state that action on the recall of Parliament during recess to discuss Iraq include: 'Press Office to provide regular briefings and updates to avoid potentially damaging 'activists defeat leadership' stories in the media' (4.1.3).

Although the gradual shift from Kennedy being 'unconvinced' to fully opposing the war appeared to be a decision reached as a result of the usual combination of formal and informal discussions involving close advisors, Anna Werrin and Tim Clement-Jones, to the Foreign Affairs Team including Ming Campbell and Shirley Williams, the minutes from the FE reveal a strong internal campaign. The FE minutes of January 2003 state that the FE noted the party position was that "there is no compelling argument for military action to be taken against Iraq at the present time" (4.2.3 (2)) and went on to request that the parliamentary party send one of their number to speak at the rally on behalf of the federal party (4.2.3 (8)). The impetus, according to some, came from below: "There was genuine grassroots pressure from the party at large that Iraq was such a defining issue the leadership had to take notice".¹³³

The leader, then, took the decision to oppose the war, whether driven by the advice of parliamentary colleagues, based on intelligence provided to him by the government, political opportunism or the will of the party's Federal Executive. What became controversial was the decision to speak at the proposed 'Stop the War' rally and what is important to this study is that this appears to have been an instruction delivered by the FE to the parliamentary party. There is also anecdotal evidence that Kennedy attended a Guardian newspaper lunch just before the march at which plans to be absent from the platform were criticised. Against the backdrop of a passionate and powerful activist discussion on CIX¹³⁴, one source describes the inconsistency of holding that position and then not attending the rally as the turning point for Kennedy.¹³⁵ The decision was one that set the party apart from Labour and the Conservatives and created for Charles Kennedy a distinct platform from which to continue the party's attack on the Blair government. In the days leading up to the demonstration McCarthy began a campaign within the party to produce banners with the slogan 'Lib Dems say NO to war', against the less party-orientated 'Give peace a chance', the preference of the leadership. Although accounts vary, McCarthy's dogged campaigning style appears to have bounced the leadership into a position of little choice but to agree, since he had already begun production of the banners.¹³⁶ McCarthy's claims to success on this, and other issues, resulted in an even more strident approach to his campaign on reform of the lobbying system. He continued to dominate and increasingly disrupt FE meetings which eventually led to the request by Lord Dholakia that McCarthy resign as Deputy Chair of FE, followed by McCarthy's resignation from this post, and then from the party in 2005, to

¹³³ Interview 18, 2009.

¹³⁴ Interview 63, 2009.

¹³⁵ Interview 43, 2010.

¹³⁶ Interview 36, 2009.

the relief of many.

This case study briefly demonstrates two interesting elements of party life. The first is the potential that exists within the party structure to enable grassroots members of the party to rise quickly through its ranks to hold office, to campaign and to influence decisions. What followed was a shift in perception from McCarthy as the activists' hero to that of an isolated extremist and a hindrance to party progress, a consequence according to some of his 'obsession' with attacking the leadership. What is clear is that the party elite will tolerate grassroots activists so long as they remain outward-looking, focusing on campaigns to further the party's electoral progress, but are less inclined to support activity that openly criticises its own internal procedures and personalities.¹³⁷ The period of time during which McCarthy was at his most active is something of a legend among activists. It is, perhaps, a story told as a warning, that despite his good intentions and laudable principles, his methods, tenacity and lack of respect for party hierarchy eventually led to his downfall. Those that have taken over the radical mantle from McCarthy, in particular Gareth Epps on the FE, have done so from a more conformist position, as an experienced local councilor and PPC, and sharing in the office-maximising goal of the party elite.

Secondly, it reveals a Federal Executive that can make recommendations to the parliamentary party, and which it can rightfully expect to be carried out.

Case study – Abolishing University Tuition Fees

Differences of opinion over the Liberal Democrat policy on the funding of higher education have been evident since the party's beginnings. In 1994, well before the Dearing Report that triggered a system of means-tested tuition fees paid for by loans to students, Don Foster, Liberal Democrat MP for Bath and then Education Spokesman, produced a policy paper "The Key to Lifelong Learning" that proposed the introduction of a 'Learning Bank' from which students would obtain a 'student mortgage'. The paper's overall emphasis was on students paying for higher education on a loan basis, administered through the national insurance system. It was unpopular within the party, and criticised for being "illiberal, incoherent and indefensible" (Ross 1994) and defeated after a heated conference debate at the party's federal conference in Nottingham that year, but also attracted some cautious support (Woods 1994).

Labour's 'Teaching and Higher Education Act' of 1998 then introduced tuition fees, which were increased with top-up fees under the 2004 Higher Education Bill, and both pieces of legislation were voted against by the Liberal Democrats in Parliament. In 2008, however, Centre Forum, the revived think-tank, founded by *Orange Book* co-author Paul Marshall, produced a paper recommending the party drop its opposition to tuition fees, as the policy was too expensive (Astle 2008). As the party began to gear up toward an election, tension inside the party over differences of opinion on tuition fees began to intensify, with those on FPC wishing to assert their constitutional right to make policy, and the leader wishing to assert his position particularly with

¹³⁷

McCarthy continues to campaign on the environment and the reform of political lobbying

regard to what went in the manifesto.

The party had always been due to debate education and in March 2009 produced “*Investing in talent: Building the economy*”. This policy paper, looking specifically at adult, further and higher education, committed the party to the abolition of university tuition fees and was passed at the spring conference that followed. It has since been preserved by FPC and yet the party’s leader Nick Clegg made it clear privately, and at FPC, that his personal view was that the policy was too expensive and unworkable.¹³⁸ The 2009 Spring Conference, overwhelmingly supporting the policy to abolish tuition fees. During the summer of 2009 the party’s Federal Executive debated the order of priorities for the pre-manifesto, and this particular policy was written in a way that some on FPC felt downgraded it. Clegg then conducted a series of national media interviews that committed the party to three key policy areas (small class sizes, a green economy and political reform). The remainder, including the commitment to abolishing university tuition fees, being now referred to as ‘aspirations’.¹³⁹ On 23rd September 2009 18 of the 29 voting representatives on FPC had a letter published in The Guardian, explicitly stating that:

Our party makes policy in an open and democratic way and those policies cannot be changed merely by assertion to the contrary. Scrapping tuition fees is our policy – reaffirmed at our conference this March – and the conference has not voted to change it.

140

In response to this now explicit difference of opinion between leadership and FPC, a deal on higher education policy was proposed by Phil Willis MP and Stephen Williams MP, who were asked to come up with a compromise between the leadership and those who opposed him - what one former member of staff described as the ‘true believers’ (those in the party committed to free higher education as a core part of party ideology) and the ‘pragmatic activist’ (those in the party committed to free higher education in the interests of electoral gain).¹⁴¹ After serious commitment to drawing up appropriate comparative costings and having prepared detailed proposals, Williams outlined the ideas for a ‘graduate contribution’ to replace top-up fees at a meeting of the party’s Federal Policy Committee in November of that year. This was also rejected, the leader’s position was unchanged and the difference of opinion between him and FPC remained clear. Nick Clegg was faced with leading a party with a policy he did not support and a powerful internal committee digging its heels in. Even his opponents, however, had some sympathy with him: one parliamentarian interviewed in October 2009 summarised the position:

I don’t think Nick’s position is unreasonable, I think it is wrong, but I don’t think it is unreasonable given he is leader of the party going into an election where he wants to keep options open at this point. (Interview 19, 2009).

¹³⁸ Interview 10, 2009.

¹³⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/nick-clegg-you-cant-promise-the-same-menu-of-goodies-its-just-not-plausible-1755885.html> (accessed 28.01.2011).

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/sep/23/liberal-democrat-conference-tuition-fees> (accessed 28.01.2011).

¹⁴¹ Interview 49, 2009.

Against the backdrop of recession Nick Clegg succeeded in persuading his parliamentary party to prioritise the economy and to play-down the policy on university tuition fees. In spite of misreporting and misunderstanding, the policy, however, remained in the party manifesto (Liberal-Democrats 2010).¹⁴² Some of those interviewed regarded this simply as a case of poor judgment by the leader, who should have sounded out and won over¹⁴³ individual members of FPC before asking the party to commit to a particular policy¹⁴⁴. It is doubtful that he would have won sufficient support to have succeeded at conference, but most of those interviewed accept the differences of opinion were polarised by the mishandling of the topic. Others argue that it marks a point in the party's history where the factionalisation of those calling themselves 'social liberals' and others 'economic liberals' came to the fore.¹⁴⁵ This is, again, debatable; one insider explained that a number of those calling themselves 'economic liberals' supported the policy particularly since it was such an effective vote-winner. One interviewee explained it had little to do with the policy itself, and was simply a case of the new leader failing to understand that he needed to acknowledge that activists on party committees *believe* they are making policy, and his mishandling of the situation led to individuals being antagonised.¹⁴⁶ These differences are important since they highlight that not only did the party demonstrate different views, the majority opposing fees, the minority including the leader supporting them, but that the party also demonstrated different priorities, some policy-maximising, some vote-maximising, some office-maximising, and all came to the fore on this issue.

The coalition document that was agreed and published on 12th May 2010 reflected a significant number of Liberal Democrat policy commitments (Quinn, Bara et al. 2010), but none to abolish university tuition fees. The text instead committed both parties to await the outcome of the Browne Report, and included a caveat to enable Lib Dems to abstain on any vote on this issue that they found unacceptable in a clear acknowledgement of the likelihood that legislation may conflict with their agreed policy. The Browne Report concluded in October 2010 recommending universities charge fees on an individual basis, resulting in a significant rise of up to £9,000 per year per student – a measure then brought in by the government and in complete contradiction to the policy stated in the Lib Dem manifesto. Clegg had already been able to appoint 19 of his 62 parliamentary colleagues to government posts, with an option to resign and vote against or abstain, and an equally uncomfortable set of options facing his backbenchers. Lib Dem Voice, the website for party bloggers conducted a poll to which 567 members replied, asking what they thought Lib Dem MP should do.¹⁴⁷ 51% believed the MPs should vote against, 41% thought they should abstain and 7% said they should vote in favour. In the event of the vote the parliamentary party did the reverse of what its activists hoped for as 49% of the parliamentary party voted with the government, 37% voted against with 14% absent or abstaining.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² <http://www.libdemvoice.org/the-guardians-approving-verdict-on-the-lib-dems-manifesto-principles-is- correct-but-for-the-wrong-reasons-17525.html> (accessed 28.01.2011).

¹⁴³ In the course of conducting interviews for this thesis the author was invited by senior parliamentarians to attend FPC meetings to observe ongoing discussions on the issue of tuition fees. The invitation was later withdrawn.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 49, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 24, 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Interview 63, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/tuition-fees-what-party-members-believe-lib-dem-mps-should-do-21647.html> (accessed 28.01.2011).

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11964669> (accessed 28.01.2011).

Clegg failed to win the argument within the party, and yet in coalition voted conclusively against party policy, against his election pledge and against the wishes of thousands of voters in university seats that had supported his party for precisely this reason. This highlights that even though the leader is able to *vote* however he chooses, the party policy is not in his gift. It remains with the FPC and conference, and Clegg has failed to bring them with him on this issue. Whether that matters or not is a question for future research. One former member of staff explained: "There's little FPC as a body can do about the leadership not following policy other than saying that's not our policy". (Interview 23, 2009).

Conclusion

These case-studies demonstrate the reality of the policy-making process. On the Iraq war it demonstrates that the grassroots can bring pressure to bear on the leader to act as the party's figure-head, in this case leading to Kennedy's address to the Stop the War coalition. It also shows that the party only welcomes radical grassroots members to its Federal Executive if they share the party's primary goal of vote and seat-maximising. It is hard to separate the policy-maximising and vote-maximising preferences of the party's stance on the abolition of university tuition fees, since it represents a combination of the two. It is, however, conclusively one area where the leadership has been unable to restrain internal party committees and that, where the party opposes the leader on specific issues it is not afraid to voice its concerns. At the first opportunity to exercise a vote and reflect this, the party elected Tim Farron its new President, an MP who voted against the government on this issue and described it as "the poll tax of our generation,"¹⁴⁹ sending the strong message to the leadership that the membership remain very strongly in favour of abolishing tuition fees.

vi) Ideology and power – what they say and what they do

As already discussed in this thesis (see p69), the parliamentary party has changed in three significant ways; increased in number; politically shifted from anti-Conservative to anti-Labour; and changed in character. The role of the parliamentary party in the policy making process, however, remains ambiguous and undefined (Russell, Fieldhouse et al. 2007). The parliamentary intake of the 1997 general election changed the parliamentary party, not only by more than doubling in numbers from 18 to 46, but that new intake included a significant number of former councillors¹⁵⁰, and for the first time a number of individuals with former careers in finance. By 2005 the percentage of Lib Dem MPs with former business careers had risen to 29%, close to the Conservatives (38%) and dramatically higher than Labour (7%) (Cracknell 2009). Under the leadership of Charles Kennedy however, this new, enlarged, experienced and more city-orientated parliamentary party represented a significant change from that which faced his predecessor. The parliamentary party was the least divided in Westminster, obeying the whip while at the same time during that period switching to voting consistently with Labour, to voting consistently against.

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/11/tuition-fees-poll-tax-our-generation> (accessed 28.01.2011).

¹⁵⁰ A brief read of MPs biographies reveals that over 50% of Lib Dem MPs in the 2005 intake had previous experience as elected local councilors.

The data collected by Cowley and Stuart, reproduced earlier in Table 8 (p78), is particularly interesting and demonstrates a trend by the party to gradually move away from the Labour party. Since 1999 when the party crossed over to vote more consistently against Labour, the trend has continued under Ming Campbell and intensified again under Nick Clegg. As they point out these voting records cannot explain causal factors but they do provide a useful contrast for this study between the behaviour of the parliamentary party, apparently shifting its voting pattern in parliament against Labour, and the behaviour of the wider party retaining a broadly centre-left policy bias. There are some more revealing indications of the parliamentary party's collective thinking on issues where the whip is removed, where the party divides more consistently than its rivals in to two camps (Russell, Fieldhouse et al. 2007). As one insider explained:

The Parliamentary party wants a consensus position, so they discuss at Parliamentary party meeting and Shadow Cabinet to achieve a position that commands maximum support with very few rebels – we don't coerce through the lobbies – we have nothing to offer like to remove or give favours, not like the other parties can . (Interview 59, 2009).

This will, of course, have changed as the party entered government in May 2010, giving the leadership precisely this bargaining power. Clegg's leadership over policy, however, did not begin particularly well with the parliamentary party and his decision in March 2008 to instruct his colleagues to abstain on the Lisbon Treaty led to the resignation of three of his front-bench spokesmen. He recovered well however, and was described in interview by one close colleague as "engaging"¹⁵¹, by his critics as "passionate and a fighter"¹⁵² and by another, with a general election approaching, as having the parliamentary party, "eating out of his hand".¹⁵³ The party's political centre of gravity, however, cannot be measured by parliamentary voting patterns, since opposing Labour does not equate to agreeing with Conservatives. It does, though, suggest that in the build-up to the general election Clegg led an ambitious, united and compliant parliamentary party, even though recent studies show a reverse in this trend. This is discussed further in Chapter 9.

vi) Conclusions

This chapter explains the party's policy-making process and demonstrates that although the constitution has not been changed, subtle shifts in emphasis and influence have occurred. Firstly, conference has professionalised. It now serves as an important training, networking and fundraising event, as well as providing a platform upon which to debate and vote on policy. This honing of expertise represents one of the central characteristics of the definition of professionalism already set out. The conference platform is increasingly dominated by Q&A sessions or key-note speeches by parliamentarians and target-seat candidates in the build-up to a general election particularly, in a further indication of the use of expertise. It would be wrong to suggest this

¹⁵¹ Interview 5, 2010.

¹⁵² Interview 19, 2009.

¹⁵³ Interview 29, 2009.

change has come directly from the leadership, or even from the party elite, in a desire to quash potential critics or to stifle debate. This supports the case for professionalisation but not centralisation. Instead it represents more effective management and a realistic awareness of the media opportunity the event provides. The conference office itself is one area where the party has shown willingness to employ professionals from outside its own ranks and where those employees are able to demonstrate autonomy and mobility. Secondly, policy is increasingly generated by the parliamentary party, or at least combined with papers produced by the policy unit, in a coming together of efforts. Small steps have been made to streamline the process in the abandoning of green papers and the increasingly professional fully-costed manifestos and alternative budgets. Once again this represents an increasing dependency on the expertise of spokesmen and specialist staff.

Thirdly, and most importantly, in spite of the streamlining of the process to produce policy – the leader continues to be somewhat constrained. Even though the policy-making process has changed, it cannot be described as having centralized when a body elected by ordinary members, the Federal Policy Committee, continue to have the final say. In response to this, the Clegg administration attempted to make use of the significant autonomy the party leader enjoys over the production of the party manifesto. In the final analysis, however, it was the FPC that were able to insist on the policy to abolish tuition fees remaining in the document in spite of the leader's open difference of opinion. There is no evidence that the argument for economic liberalism was won, or that the grassroots have shifted to the right. It is likely, particularly as the party experience the reality of government, that this constraint on the leadership will cause tensions in future and the consequences of this are considered more thoroughly in Chapter 9.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that even though they began by representing a minority interest, *The Orange Book* contributors were almost all members of the Parliamentary party, and a group that have become dominant in recent years. This has been met with some opposition, notably on FPC, which has become the focal point for opposition. One observer noted "It's one thing for the party to make policy – it's another to tell the leadership how much to spend on each item. That's overstretching the constitution".¹⁵⁴ This shows the beginnings of a move to re-interpret the constitution and to make policy commitments on the one hand, and spending commitments on the other, in what appears to be a more aspiration status for the party's formal policy pronouncements, giving maximum flexibility to the leader. For centralization to be apparent we would expect to see, for example, an amendment to the party constitution removing sovereign policy-making power from FPC and the Conference, downgrading its role to 'advisory' or 'aspirational'. While this would be seen as many to represent a fundamental and controversial shift in intra-party power, the leadership may be able to achieve something similar without constitutional change, and the gap between formal policy and the party's next general election manifesto will provide an indication of the extent to which this process is under way. These fundamental amendments to the constitution have not been made.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 4, 2010.

Overall then, this chapter fails to support H1, but supports H2. In terms of policy-making, the changes described represent a process of gradual professionalisation rather than centralisation, and crucially, that in spite of these modernising changes, the party's elected conference remain its sovereign policy-making body.

Chapter 6 Campaigns

i) Introduction

The Lib Dems have traditionally been heavily dependent on activity on the ground where ordinary members attend meetings, hold office, find candidates, raise funds and distribute campaign literature. Combined with a democratic constitution giving the grassroots policy-making powers, and demonstrating a strong commitment to ideology, the party in this respect displays the characteristics of Duverger's 'mass party' (Duverger 1954).¹⁵⁵ During the mid-1990s when the party expanded in local government, party membership was in overall decline. In spite of this, it has a 'strong' membership (Scarrow 2002) with a high ratio of activists to ordinary members. One interviewee said that in his local party 1 in 14 members was an elected Councillor¹⁵⁶ but that the 'record' was held by the party in Liverpool which peaked at 1 in 3 members elected to a position in local government.¹⁵⁷ This lies at the heart of party activity and has, since its inception, informed national campaign tactics. For a third party such as the Lib Dems, normally in opposition at Westminster and unable to make a national breakthrough, the role of local campaigning is central to its survival and to an understanding of intra-party power.

This chapter explores the development of thinking in the strategy and tactics of the Liberal Democrats and looks at how this may influence the overall balance of power within the organisation. It is divided into four sections. The first explores general election campaigning, looking at the evolution of targeting and the use of polling, taking each general election in turn and examining the ideas behind the strategy employed by the Liberal Democrats in their attempts to break the two party hegemony at Westminster. The second looks at the institution of the Campaigns Department and its reluctance to professionalise. It explains how the department has expanded, and centralised, and at the tactics it has employed, as well as looking at the ways in which private polling and the new media influence campaigning techniques. We explore both the grassroots 'Focus leaflet' culture that has dominated the 'ground-war' and the increasingly presidentialised and leadership-led 'air-war' in order to achieve an overall understanding of competing priorities. Using the definition of professionalism from Webb and Fisher, it would be reasonable to expect to see an increase in the employment of individuals from with expertise outside the party, that these individuals be entrusted with autonomy, and that they are able to exercise mobility in the jobs market. In addition the professionals might be able to demonstrate self-regulation, and an above-average level of commitment to each task. In a "soft" interpretation of professionalism we might expect to see the party self-consciously attempting to be more effective and a shift in workplace culture.

The third section explores the process of approving and selecting party candidates. This section also draws upon a number of mini-case studies that look at individual seats and candidates to

¹⁵⁵ Priorities at party HQ are demonstrated most clearly in Chapter 7 'Resources'. When the party suffered mass redundancies it left the campaigns department with 1 member of staff, but membership services with the largest number, totaling 4 staff.

¹⁵⁶ A ratio of 1-14 councillors to local members corresponds approximately with the ratio of councillors nationally to national membership tables. In general terms 6% of members are councillors.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 18, 2010.

explore the extent to which autonomy is exercised in this important element of party life and to see which interests are best served. The fourth section looks at the individuals that are important in arriving at these priorities. The Campaigns Department led by Chris Rennard, was able to eclipse and eventually replace the Chief Executive during a period in which he remained at the helm at Headquarters for nearly 20 years. His significant alternative power-base has had important consequences for the party. The chapter concludes that the party has adapted and modernised its campaigning operation, which has undergone a process of centralisation, and secondary to this a more reluctant and incomplete process of professionalisation.

ii) Campaigns – strategy & tactics

In 1988 the party's goal was to survive the merger, and during the 1992 general election it was to establish the party as a permanent and serious third force in British politics (Brack 2007). It employed a strategy that integrated three key elements; realignment, community politics and political co-operation (MacIver 1996). MacIver devised a typology that set out the different party strategies at this stage, and which remain relevant to the party's more recent history. He argued that the party divided in to centrists and radicals, then again in to those taking a long or a short term view of how to achieve these ends. The long-march centrists he says were a dwindling group, frustrated by slow-progress and paralysed by inactivity. The long-march radicals by contrast were growing in strength and number, including the party's traditional left-wing activists such as Tony Greaves and Gordon Lishman, and were joined by the party's local councillor base. The less patient quick-fix centrists were those that viewed breakthrough as unlikely to come other than through co-operation with other parties. They are compared with the equally impatient quick-fix radicals; ; small in number, driven by radical ideas, and prepared to work with other parties. He puts Simon Hughes and Paddy Ashdown in this category.

In summary the long-march is the tactic employed by those who aimed to breakthrough without the help of another party, the quick-fix belongs to those that believed a hung-parliament was the party's best chance to have influence, and in readiness to do a deal needed to be willing to work with either one of the two major parties. In a study of this kind these groupings provide a useful way in which to assess more recent developments and which of the two strategies has been in play.¹⁵⁸

1992 and 1997

In 1992 strategy, in the long-march centrist mould, comprised three main elements. Firstly, there was the manifesto containing the '5 E's', and strongly associated with Paddy Ashdown as leader (see Chapter 3). Secondly, there was the targeting strategy devised by Chris Rennard, whose aim was to build support in areas where the party enjoyed local campaigning successes. Thirdly, Des

¹⁵⁸ It is also interesting to note that the Party Reform Commission ('The Bones Commission') framed its report in to a set of 'solutions' divided in to 'Quick Wins' ('to improve our chances at the next general election'), and 'Longer Term Changes' ('to follow the next general election') with an additional solution 'Urgent – to build the foundations for the MP goal'. The mixture of short, medium and long term strategy appears to take account of the different goals belonging to different party strata and are similar to those McIver has identified.

Wilson took over as Communications Director intent on dispelling the 'wasted vote myth' with a campaign entitled "My Vote", and operating a strategy to insist the party were given fair and equal media coverage.¹⁵⁹ The party's targeting strategy began in 1992 and acted as a pilot scheme. The campaigns department aimed to hold the 22 seats it already had, focusing any additional resources in key marginals, with a maximum ambition of delivering 30 seats. It actually went down to 20 seats but the campaign was deemed a success, giving accurate predictions and making the best use of the party's limited resources. The party succeeded in its goal to re-establish itself as the third party, and Ashdown as a credible leader (Butler and Kavanagh 1992).

Between 1992 and 1997 Ashdown persevered with his 'project' of realignment on the left and co-operation with Labour, in a switch that owed much to the 'quick-fix' approach. The parliamentary party grew from 20 to 26 following some sensational by-election victories and the party on the ground grew significantly as it pushed the Conservatives into third place between 1992 and 1996 in local government elections.¹⁶⁰ Between elections the party continued its strategy of building on the ground, seizing on local issues, nurturing a team of support and converting this into an activist base which delivered Focus leaflets to local households on a regular basis.¹⁶¹ The 1997 general election team was led by Richard Holme and Tim Clement-Jones with Jane Bonham-Carter as Director of Communications and Chris Rennard continuing in his role as Director of Campaigns. Rennard identified 50 target seats on top of the 18 it identified as its 'incumbency', and to which the top 35 were assigned a full-time agent. There were therefore three levels of targeting, the 18 being defended, then the 50 target seats divided in to the top 35 Rennard believed it would win, and the remaining 15 which were not given priority but whose key personnel would be invited for training and sent target-seat mailings. The remaining 582 seats in the UK were given minimal support and no financial assistance from the central party. As well as targeting resources the campaigns department also gave strict instructions to local parties that were not on the target list to campaign in their closest target seat and to all but ignore their own if it was considered to be unwinnable. The party enjoyed some success in part due to this, and also benefiting from media coverage which it struggled to achieve under normal circumstances (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). In Parliament numbers leapt from 18 to 46 MPs, and while not the breakthrough in terms some had hoped for, represented a sufficiently significant increase in parliamentary numbers to have a serious impact on the organisation, as explained elsewhere in this thesis.

After the general election Rennard drew up a set of basic principles setting out the 'five most important steps to winning a constituency', which are summarised below:

- campaigning all year round, not just during general elections
- gear the campaign to the concerns of the voters in those seats
- build the local organisation to deliver leaflets, knock on doors and raise funds
- convince people that we *can* win
- pursue tactical voting where it helps us.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ The author of this thesis worked as a Press Officer with Des Wilson for the Lib Dems during the 1992 general election campaign.

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.research.plymouth.ac.uk/elections/elections/results%201996.htm#Changes> (accessed 10.02.2011).

¹⁶¹ Appendix M contains a typical Focus leaflet, delivered in 2011 to households in the Lewes constituency.

¹⁶² Details are set out in "The Campaign Manual" provided free to all PPCs.

In order to promote this message the Campaigns Department stepped up its training at conference, and conducted workshops in each of the party's regions, attended by over 1000 activists in each round, while at the same time improving communications with candidates and local activists with the advent of email. The party spent more on polling data in 1997 than in 2001 or 2005, but embraced it again in 2010 making use of online polling in order to achieve a greater amount of data that could be collected at minimal cost.¹⁶³ This certainly led to a more efficient and better organised campaigns effort but control over the targeting decision and the distribution of resources in support of those seats belonged to the Director of Campaigns.

2001 and 2005

In 2001 the party adopted a different strategy, moving away from Labour politically, entering the general election arguing that they could replace the Conservatives as the party of "effective opposition". The party continued to use private polling to assess the electorate's response to equidistance and conducted research on the views of floating voters to the party's proximity to either of the other two parties. Data obtained in marginal seats suggested that it was not beneficial for the Liberal Democrats to position themselves closer to Labour.¹⁶⁴ This could be seen as belonging to the 'quick-fix' strategy, (shifting in response to polling rather than in response to specific policies), but this time resulted in equidistance - a more centrist, less radical stance. Kennedy had around him a close-knit and small team, with pivotal roles played by Chris Rennard, and Tim Razzall. The press office was headed up by former BBC journalist David Walter and Kennedy relied heavily on his personal office run by Anna Werrin – a set-up one interviewee described as his 'kitchen cabinet' – and one which was very much considered to be his close and somewhat closed group of advisors.¹⁶⁵ The strategy on the ground was to continue to build in areas where the party found support, recruiting people on the doorstep, developing networks of supporters prepared to keep up the delivery of Focus leaflets, particularly between elections, in the knowledge that where the party employed this strategy it had proved successful at the local level and with the expectation that, combined with targeting resources, this would translate nationally as it had in 1997. Rennard's thinking was in part guided by the success of a by-election in Romsey in the previous year, won by Liberal Democrat candidate Sandra Gidley. Private polling conducted for the party in Romsey showed that 81% preferred the policy on spending on health and education even if that meant tax increases, compared with 17% who preferred a policy to 'save the pound' (a campaigning slogan adopted by the Conservatives) (Rennard 2001). However, what had worked in Romsey proved difficult to roll out on a national level.

The strategy, sometimes referred to as 'Rennardism', however, was for the first time, beginning to attract some criticism. The party's lack of ideological cohesion was exacerbated by these "constituency-based micro-contests" (Russell 2010). Genesis 500 was a consultation paper that challenged the thinking on party strategy, prepared by MEP Robin Teverson in May 2002, and argued that the existing targeting strategy made a significant breakthrough impossible. The paper

¹⁶³ Interview 67, 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Interview 67, 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Interview 32, 2009.

explained that the party's target seats programme was limiting, since the party's financial constraints and the number of seats deemed 'winnable' implied an incredibly long-haul. It aimed instead to "energise" 300 seats to 'winnable' status, while maintaining the current target seat strategy, but offering £1000 in incentives and support to those adopting a Genesis 500 status, and aimed to produce a majority Lib Dem government in 2009.

The paper detailed a series of annual goals for each Genesis seat together with an overall three year plan including aiming to make constituencies financially 'self-sustainable'. It appears to have been a direct challenge to Rennard's strategy of incremental growth. His defence, in an FFAC away-day attended by the party elite, hinged on his belief that spreading the load across 300 constituencies would result in fewer wins, particularly since the subsequent loss of by-election trophies won in Eastbourne in 1990 and Newbury and Christchurch in 1993, demonstrated that breakthroughs would not translate across the UK at the general election. He also questioned the practicality of building at the local level in the terms set out in Genesis 500, and returned the party once more to his powerful, proven target-driven and formulaic 'steps to success'. Rennard's overall approach was also criticised by fellow MEP Graham Watson, in particular over which policies were emphasised and the decision to play down the party's pro-European stance in the 2004 European parliamentary elections but gathered little backing (Watson 2010).

In 2005 the same strategy was employed, with a targeting calculation aimed to capitalise on areas where support was already strong and where a network of leaflet deliverers were in place and had been active throughout the electoral calendar. The campaigning period now included local, mayoral, devolved and European elections between UK general elections, making it a constant part of party life. The team continued with Chris Rennard and Tim Razzall at the helm, and with the addition of Sandy Walkington, former Director of Public Affairs for British Telecom, as Director of Communications. Walkington undoubtedly brought a more professional edge to the operation, but was very much a committed activist at the same time, having been a member of the Liberals since 1973, a PPC and local councillor.

This is the election in which more than previously, the targeting strategy and focus-leaflet 'carpet-bombing' appeared tired and out-dated. Rennard, having overseen by-election wins in Brent-East and Leicester South, and making significant gains in Birmingham Hodge Hill and Hartlepool, was cautious in his own predictions, which were based on the strength of the party on the ground on a seat-by-seat basis. This time the party had garnered support in traditional Labour areas, but found difficulty translating this strategy in to success at the national level (Whiteley, Seyd et al. 2006). It was combined with an eye-catching strategy referred to as 'decapitation' in which the Conservative party front-bench were targeted, including leader Michael Howard, Party Chairman Theresa May, Oliver Letwin and David Davies, but which failed completely.¹⁶⁶ The results highlight the paradox of the party's strategy - while voting consistently against Labour in Parliament, and gaining popularity for opposing the Iraq War it adopted a strategy of focusing on areas where they were

¹⁶⁶ Tim Farron was successful in unseating Tim Collins, Shadow Secretary of State for Education and MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale with a majority of 267 votes, which could be considered a small win for the decapitation strategy.

coming second, combined with 'decapitation' and targeting Conservatives. The campaign was more effective against Labour, winning Hornsey & Wood Green from the Labour minister Barbara Roche, and benefiting from student votes for opposing student tuition fees.¹⁶⁷ Overall the party gained ten seats and a 3.7% rise in the vote. Despite a £2.4m last minute donation by Michael Brown, and a significant increase in spending on private polling and billboards, it was felt that the party should have targeted differently and done better (Butler and Kavanagh 2005). Although there is evidence that its local support base is what insulates it from the traditional third-party squeeze (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005), the party has also benefited from adopting a single-issue style of campaigning, in response to the electorate associating it with one issue at a time, most obviously education or Iraq. Arguably, the 2005 general election demonstrated that policy-orientation rather than locally based campaigning, was most successful.

The tactic was the subject of a significant challenge this time in a paper brought to the party's Federal Executive in April 2007¹⁶⁸. This paper stressed that targeting had been a success, and had turned a 3% increase in the overall vote to an increase in seats in parliament. However, it also criticised the limits of Rennardism, and proposed an alternative strategy that aimed to take power by overtaking one of the party's two major rivals in a plan for majority government and third party breakthrough. It constituted a direct challenge to those in the party whose strategy was based on aiming instead at playing a pivotal role in a future hung parliament as the party's best chance at power and electoral reform. The paper was discussed and formed part of a longer submission to the Bones Commission, which rejected this view in favour of its stated goal, to target 200 seats and break the two party hegemony in two elections time.

2010

Between 2005 and 2010 the Liberal Democrats underwent some important changes at the elite level, with a new party leader, new CEO, new campaigns director, and various new strategies set out in the Bones Commission. Regarding campaigns, the Commission aimed to address the complaint by ordinary members that joining the party was like "joining a leaflet delivery cult".¹⁶⁹ At the same time, some senior figures in the party thought it was time to challenge the party's general election strategy of targeting and incremental growth. There was a shift in emphasis, as it was acknowledged that Kennedy's realignment had failed and Labour were increasingly unpopular. Clegg, seeing the increasing potential for a hung parliament, made every effort to establish equidistance – leaving the door open to doing a deal with whichever party had the majority of seats. He appears to have seized an historic opportunity and rather than moving away from the long-term strategy adopted by Kennedy and Rennard, continued with targeting at the constituency level, while aiming for influence in government as a junior coalition partner. This was very much the 'quick-fix' strategy and can be seen here, and in the preceding chapter where negotiations over the party manifesto are discussed. It also marks the shift from policy-maximising to office-

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lib-dems-hold-inquest-after-their-decapitation-strategy-misses-targets-489833.html> (accessed 10.02.2011).

¹⁶⁸ This paper was brought to FE by MEP Robin Teverson, who made a further similar contribution about the party's targeting strategy, to the Bones Commission.

¹⁶⁹ The Bones Commission p14.

maximising, with the leadership making every effort to avoid being tied to policies that might make future negotiation with either party, difficult.

The campaign itself was conducted by a new team put together by Clegg including Chair of the General Election Campaign and former Managing Director at Saatchi and Saatchi, John Sharkey, with former local government leader and former chief whip, Andrew Stunnell as Vice-Chair. Danny Alexander, Clegg's Chief of Staff, produced the manifesto, Chris Fox was in post as the Chief Executive, Hilary Stephenson as the Director of Campaigns and Jonny Oates as Director of Communications.¹⁷⁰ The televised debates made this an atypical contest, resting heavily on these events, in which Clegg excelled, and his strategy of equidistance was put to the test with constant public overtures by Cameron (as well as Brown), repeatedly 'agreeing with Nick'. The party surged in the polls with Clegg coming top out of the three leaders following the first debate.¹⁷¹ Although performing strongly in the second, and again topping the poll in the third and final debate, Clegg's popularity failed to transfer into votes, and the party lost five seats overall. What the television debates did, however, was put in to sharp focus the power of the individual leader over the party itself and almost certainly strengthened Clegg's hand in the negotiations that followed - something considered more closely in Chapter 9. On the ground, the party had pursued the 'Northern strategy', a targeting tactic aimed at making greater headway in to Labour heartlands, in a development of the party's success in areas such as Liverpool at the local level. The 'northern offensive, southern defensive'.¹⁷² campaign failed (Kavanagh and Cowley 2010) perhaps in part due to the fact that most tried and tested electioneering techniques were completely overshadowed by the TV debates, Clegg's success at which put the party and its policies under greater scrutiny.

In each of the general elections described above the party, directed by the campaigns department and (with the exception of 2010), led by Chris Rennard, followed a carefully honed targeting strategy. Challenges to this have come from those that believed a national breakthrough was possible and preferable, but have consistently found little support. It is logical therefore to conclude that the alternative, that of the 'quick-fix', of the smaller partner in a hung parliament, has been the party's most realistic chance at gaining power, and has recently become the basis for its strategy.

iii) The Campaigns Department

The Campaigns Department at Party Headquarters suffered the heaviest blow in the mass redundancies that followed merger in 1988. Although the new party began with a full complement of staff the results of the 1989 European Parliamentary elections, in which the party polled 6% of the vote coming fourth to the Green Party and failed to win a single seat, confirmed a dip in support, resulting in falling membership figures and dwindling income, and prompted a severe cut

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/liberal-democrat-general-election-team-announced-15826.html> (accessed 17.11.2011).

¹⁷¹ Leaving aside your own party preference, who do you think performed best overall in tonight's debate? Nick Clegg: 51%, David Cameron: 29%, Gordon Brown: 19%, Don't know: 2%. <http://www.suite101.com/content/uk-general-election-2010-who-won-the-leadersdebate-a226259> (accessed 31.03.2011).

¹⁷² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/apr/06/nick-clegg-liberal-democrats-election> (accessed 10.02.2011).

in staffing levels. In 1989 a campaigns team of 13 staff, comprising 11 area agents and two staff at Headquarters had been reduced to just one, Chris Rennard, who became Director of Campaigns and Elections.¹⁷³ In October 1990 the Department recruited one additional member of staff, and in 1992 a further member of staff specifically to deal with candidates.¹⁷⁴ At that time the department was line-managed by the General Secretary Graham Elson, until the 'Mid-Term Review', a wide-ranging review of party staffing arrangements conducted in 1997, which removed this responsibility from Elson, in order that the Director of Campaigns reported in to the Chair of the party's Campaigns and Communications Committee instead. The Mid-Term Review was the point at which the party acknowledged the need to run a professional Headquarters, 'topped-up' rather than run by volunteers, and that the integration of the 'air-war' and 'ground-war' would be the best way to blend the grassroots with professional campaigning. A more thorough assessment of the Mid-Term Review is conducted in Chapter 7. This shift in management structure does, however, indicate the significance of the role of Director of Campaigns following the 1997 general election. In particular in recognition of the success of his targeting strategy, Chris Rennard became the 'Chief Executive of Campaigns' and a new CEO was appointed to run the administration and human resources function. The 1997 result was accompanied by an increase in funds, as Short Money alleviated some pressures on the party's research and press function, and allowed for an improvement in IT.

In its day-to-day operation the campaigns team comprised two major strands, the first was staying abreast of election developments and information drawn from the local level using private polling. The second was devising a strategy based on this information, including

- deciding which would be target seats and how to build them
- the literature for target seats, including 'messaging'
- agents for target seats
- training, particularly of constituency agents
- agreeing detail on the manifesto¹⁷⁵

In 1997, 2001 and 2005 the Campaigns Department had a very hands-on role in recommending items be removed if they had little or no campaigning potential, such as policy on Europe and electoral reform in 1997, and focusing instead on a penny on income tax to fund education, and then to fund the NHS, coming up with the 'CHEESE', the acronym by which the 97 policy priorities became known.¹⁷⁶ The Campaigns Department commissioned private polling to establish the popularity of policy positions and in 1997, then increasingly in 2001 and 2005, and this became the basis upon which the party message was based. Polling was met by Des Wilson in 1992 with some skepticism, but with the addition of polling advisor Julian Ingram in 1997, gradually began to inform the party's message (Greender and Parminter 2007). Again this tactic, in spite of some reservations, particularly from Alan Beith in 1992, and some reticence from Richard Holme in

¹⁷³ Interview 44, 2009.

¹⁷⁴ The candidates officer worked in and with the campaigns department, but was appointed by and accountable to the Joint State Candidates Committee.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 44, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ See chapter 5 for more information on CHEESE and the party manifestos.

1997, shows the increasing authority of Chris Rennard and, in 2001 and 2005, Tim Razzall, both of whom were strong advocates of the polling-led strategy.

Private Polling

Julian Ingram, a long-term party member and advertising professional, was brought in to help the campaigns department understand voter priorities. In the build-up to the 1997 general election Ingram, together with research company JSK, devised and conducted a series of polls in target seats and held seats that the party considered to be marginal. The approach involved scrapping the use of focus groups to gather information and replacing them with polling data. The polling strategy was aimed at vote maximising and followed a number of steps. Firstly it aimed to establish respondents 'propensity and intention', in order to establish a sample of floating voters. These were then asked a standard panel of voting intention questions, including whether they could name their MP, and tactical voting intentions. Polling data was collected from a sample of voters derived from the party's centrally held database known as EARS (Election Agent Record System), which was developed in the mid 1980s. This data is taken from the electoral register and amended by individual parties using their own canvass returns.¹⁷⁷ A usual sample comprised 1000-1200 voters, and with the advent of the internet has become increasingly sophisticated, and in 2010 the polling data was collected entirely online. Respondents were also asked to respond on the importance of specific issues, in 1997 for instance, on the "1 penny for education" policy. Polling in this instance revealed that the majority of voters thought this meant they would pay an extra penny for education, rather than that it represented an overall increase of 1% on income tax.¹⁷⁸ The party were therefore able to make use of the data in a number of ways including how best to communicate policy, and to understand the electorate's preferences in more detail.

Between elections, the campaign department advocated building local campaigns with the use of easy-to-read tabloid-style 'Focus' leaflets, that should be put through as many letter boxes as possible, as often as possible. Estimates from the party in 2011 were that locally produced Focus leaflets reached approximately 10 million UK households. The Candidates Officer would oversee the selection and training of parliamentary candidates and to produce a directory for the press of all PPCs in the run-up to the general election. During by-elections the entire operation would stop and focus on that, often closing down at Cowley Street in London and decamping to a makeshift Headquarters in the constituency.

The 'air-war' was activity concerned with communicating the party's message at the national level, and began in earnest in 1992 under Des Wilson. It involved producing a grid of media interviews, coordinating this with a campaigns-based set of press-briefings each morning, press releases and overseeing party political broadcasts. These would often focus on themes chosen from the manifesto although often press briefings would revert to asking for the Lib Dem's reaction to a story or event introduced by the other parties.. Here Chris Rennard also had an input, scripting some broadcasts and producing information based on his own research about the popularity of

¹⁷⁷ Interview 68, 2011.
¹⁷⁸ Interview 67, 2011.

certain issues and how they should be communicated. The 'air-war' was, however, largely the responsibility of the party's Director of Communications and Director of the General Election campaign. In common with its rivals, the party adopted a strategy of increasingly 'market orientated' Party Election Broadcasts, using personalities, music, short clips and in particular an emphasis on issues with which it was positively associated (Gunter, Saltzis et al. 2006). The increased use of the party leader in political marketing is in keeping with a common strategy toward presidentialisation and party adaptation (Farrell and Webb 2000).

New Media

Opinions over the impact of new media on the party vary from those that believe it has been minimal to those that believe the party has failed to maximise its potential. Discussion sites such as CIX, Lib Dem Voice and others provide a place for members to exchange opinions, or to let off steam. The party, however, are clear that "within an era of the permanent campaign ...the prime purpose of communication is to help win elections, or to acquire resources (money, helpers) which will in turn be used to gain votes" (Lilleker, Pack et al. 2010). While it is clear the party is ahead in terms of using email to communicate with members, and has embraced new technology with website updates and a useful intranet, party strategists believe that overall the new media has had little impact on the vote. The central party began systematic electronic communication with members in 2000.¹⁷⁹ Following the 2001 general election the party saw 180,000 hits on its website, and concluded this was a small number compared to the overall electorate, and probably represented journalists and party members.¹⁸⁰ The internet has been included in overall party strategy largely as a tool for communications internally, with candidates and members, via its intranet, to provide briefings and information. The party has brought its blogging community together under one banner, 'Lib Dem Voice' which launched in August 2006. Thus far 573 people have written a blog post for the site although the majority have only written one, while its two most regular contributors write daily.¹⁸¹ Obtaining an overall picture of the impact of blogging is difficult, since mentions of the Liberal Democrats in non-party blogging sites are numerous. This is also the same for social networking sites such as Facebook, and Twitter, although the party supposedly tops its rivals with 23 of its MPs using Twitter, representing 37% of the parliamentary party.¹⁸² The advent of social networking is significant in enabling the party to customise its message at election times, particularly in order to make best use of polling data, which is immediate, compared with printed media that requires a three week lead time.¹⁸³ The party were, for instance, able to make immediate use of online feedback to Nick Clegg's performance in the 2010 live TV leadership debates.

The Party Reform ('Bones') Commission dedicated a section to 'technology, databases and innovation' and throughout the report refers to the use of new media to help the party realise its goals. EARs was criticised and thought to be incapable of supporting its goal towards more

¹⁷⁹ Interview 66, 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Interview 44, 2011.

¹⁸¹ Mark Pack (2722) and Stephen Tall (2292) are Lib Dem Voice's most regular contributors (February 2011)

¹⁸² http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8479000.stm (accessed 15.02.2011)

¹⁸³ Interview 67, 2011.

MPs.¹⁸⁴ The Commission recommended the party's use of technology be better integrated, to increase the party's use of phone-banks for canvassing, and that FE appoint a 'technology board' to report in to COG and review these provisions further. The Bones Commission recommended the party appeal to its members for those with professional expertise in this area, and meetings were convened, led by Lynne Featherstone, as Chair of the Technology Board. It was, according to one member of staff "completely useless. They brought them all together, and thought they'd meet and agree. I can't think of a worse strategy for getting anything done".¹⁸⁵ The Technology Board appears to have been largely dormant since 2009.

A number of interviewees acknowledged that new media has enabled them to access information more easily, however, particularly parliamentary candidates making use of the PCA (Parliamentary Candidates Association) website, Huddle, and the main party website intranet. Here activists are able to access a wealth of information on policy, campaign messages derived from polling, tactics and methods, although some have complained that it is difficult to navigate.¹⁸⁶ The use of centrally generated press-releases, with minor alterations aimed at 'localising' the campaign have also recently come under criticism accused of 'churnalism'.¹⁸⁷ ALDC have a separate website specifically dedicated to attracting potential local candidates which is thought to be a very useful tool in local campaigning and in the activity of council work.¹⁸⁸ In conclusion, then, the new media has opened up opportunities for party activists, providing campaign tools and information from central sources. Its impact on the electorate is thought, by them, to be of less significance.

iv) Candidates

One key area in which the interests of ordinary party members is recognised is through the selection of party candidates. It is an important area where autonomy can be exercised and intra-party power assessed. Appendix I sets out the party's process for people wishing to become candidates which is open to any party member, who then has to satisfy a series of approval procedures before going forward to a selection panel. There are three areas in which the selection of party candidates is interesting to this study. The first is that changes have been made to the process by which candidates are approved which represent a professionalizing of the party machine. Secondly, the rules governing the selection process change when a parliamentary by-election is called giving significantly more central control. Thirdly, while this research reveals little or no interference from the top in the selection of candidates, it does reveal involvement of a different nature in the pursuit of diversity by the party's Committee for Gender Balance.

Potential candidates are required to satisfy a process of approval and selection before becoming a PPC. This is the responsibility of the state parties, for instance in the case of candidates in England, the English Candidates Committee. All parliamentary candidates are invited to join the

¹⁸⁴ In July 2011 the party announced the decision to replace using EARS with the more up-to-date VAN database package used by the Democratic Party in the USA.
<http://us2.campaign-archive2.com/?u=4761a1f83089fd89eba4fef19&id=804ef22f9b&e=d58ae78154> (accessed 05.07.2011)

¹⁸⁵ Interview 54, 2010.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 41, 2011.

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/feb/23/churnalism-pr-media-trust> (accessed 24.02.2011).

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.bealibdemcouncillor.org.uk/> (accessed 24.02.2011).

Parliamentary Candidates Association which offers support to those already selected. The process devised by the party at the outset was lengthy and slow, requiring candidates to complete a 64 page form and assess themselves on the basis of 52 different 'competencies'. This process was conducted before potential candidates had undergone any kind of training but was used to assess their suitability, which was then tested further before a selection panel which comprised eight people, including some from outside the constituency, and on average took a whole day to approve four candidates. The process was reviewed as part of the Bones Commission and streamlined, with new rules coming in to force in 2008 whereby candidates would be offered pre-assessment training. Its overall goal was to 'improve the pool of candidates who...come from a range of backgrounds'. It specifically noted "...rather than those who have 'proved themselves' through delivering millions of leaflets or serving for years as a local councillor" (Bones Commission p58). The process was accelerated, and aims to approve eight candidates in a day, with a streamlined panel of four individuals. The number of 'competencies' a candidate is required to possess was reduced to six, now comprising:

- Communication Skills
- Leadership
- Strategic Thinking and Judgment
- Representing People
- Resilience
- Values in Action

The conference also passed a motion to reduce the length of time a candidate had to have been a party member, from one year to nine months. One interviewee suggested that there is a move within the party to reduce this further in order to encourage party sympathisers to put themselves forward and to drop the membership requirement altogether.¹⁸⁹ Once the local party have selected their PPC, the candidate is then encouraged to attend a number of training events organised through the various party regions, and also conducted at the party's twice yearly federal conferences. The party has devised a website 'Lib Dems 4 Parliament' that operates an intranet for those involved in the approval and selection of Parliamentary and Welsh Assembly candidates (<http://www.libdems4parliament.org.uk/>), which is only accessible to party members and includes a download site where PPCs can obtain campaigning material and advice. Those wishing to become candidates are offered training, free to all candidates at the party's twice yearly federal conference and membership of the PCA (Parliamentary Candidates Association) which provides members with an intranet for "campaigning information, constituency profiles, the swing seat database, and a steadily growing body of expertise on all things candidate related".¹⁹⁰ Similarly ALDC provides members with an intranet for both local candidates and councillors, including campaigning material, news feeds, election results and advice for those in office. In 2009 an alternative website 'ACT' was set up by the party, and run from Cowley Street, to encourage members, candidates, councillors and importantly non-members, to join in with specific campaigns. Local campaigners, including sitting MPs, and interest groups are urged to join and encourage campaigning activity through discussion and membership, similarly to 'Flock Together'

¹⁸⁹ Interview 15, 2009.

¹⁹⁰ http://www.parliamentary.org.uk/tikiwiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=1 (accessed 24.02.2011).

described in Chapter 3. Both are linked to Facebook and Twitter, as well as the party's own intra-net and sharing site 'Huddle'.

Further reforms proposed by the Bones Commission included raising the morale of PPCs by encouraging meetings with members of the Shadow Cabinet (p59) and "implementing a cultural shift" to demonstrate the value of candidates' professional achievements "as well as any previous role they may or may not have had as a local activist of party official" (p60). The Commission also proposed a 'leadership Academy' to improve on and formalise the training of MPs, PPC, staff and volunteers, to be led by a 'Capability Board' and to be accountable to COG. With regard to campaigning the Commission is clear in its tone, moving explicitly away from the volunteer-activist culture toward a more professional party, indeed it refers to the 'volunteer party' and the 'professional party' as two separate entities and arguably gives preference to the latter. It is also ambitious in introducing a significant number of new processes that have, early indications suggest, enjoyed varying degrees of success. The approval process has undoubtedly been accelerated although proposals to achieve greater diversity in the candidate pool is a more long-term goal and dependent on other factors, such as overall levels of party support, to be successful.

When a parliamentary by-election is called the approval and selection process changes under a special 'protocol'. Due to the nature of by-elections, which puts the media spotlight on an individual constituency, the party has devised a different process for the selection of candidates. If a candidate already exists in the given constituency they are effectively stood-down and made to reapply together with other approved candidates, and go through a two-step selection process. The first step is for approved candidates to go before a local selection panel, and a specially appointed Returning Officer, who draw up a short-list based upon "the by-election selection criteria".¹⁹¹ The short listed candidates are interviewed by a by-election panel at Party HQ that comprises:

- Chair or Vice Chair of ECC
- An MP (preferably one that has fought a by-election)
- Regional Candidates Co-ordinator (or nominee)
- Director of Campaigns (or nominee).

The panel vote, giving the Chair a casting vote in the event of a tie. Successful candidates are then invited to attend a local hustings at which all local party members will be entitled to vote, where proxy and postal votes are not provided, and the outcome of which cannot be subject to appeal. This process enables a short-list to be agreed by the party elite and is open to interference as the mini case-studies below demonstrate.

In common with other parties the Liberal Democrats have a male-dominated parliamentary party,

¹⁹¹ See 'Protocol for selection a Parliamentary by-election candidate' English Parliamentary Candidates Office, No 8.

and have made various attempts to reverse this trend, including heated conference debates which rejected all-women short-lists, 'zipping' in the 1999 European parliamentary elections and other gender-balance strategies¹⁹².

Table 12. Women Liberal Democrat MPs in general elections since 1992.¹⁹³

	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
Women <i>n</i>	2	3	5	10	7
Men <i>n</i>	18	43	47	52	50
Women %	11	7	11	19	14
Men %	89	93	89	81	86

This reflects a male-dominated list of approved candidates, (in 2007 the party's approved list of candidates comprised a total of 24.59% women), and a bias in selection that appears to favour male candidates (Evans 2008). The party set up the CGB – the Campaign for Gender Balance (formerly the Gender Balance Task Force) at the federal conference in 2001. This works towards improving the representation of women by “seeking out, training, mentoring and providing practical support to women candidates”.¹⁹⁴ Its progress means the party has more women coming forward as candidates, and that these are selected in greater numbers, but the ratio of women to men reduces upon closer scrutiny of the party's target seats, resulting in ongoing gender bias in the parliamentary party. The Bones Commission made recommendations to increase the diversity of the candidates pool, particularly by offering financial support to parties adopting candidates from ethnic minorities but made no specific mention of addressing gender balance.

What follows is a series of mini-case studies based upon candidate selection in seats which interviewees believed were worthy of special mention. They help to build a picture of the party's approach to certain issues that arise in candidate selection, particularly with regard to by-elections:

Constituency case-studies

Tatton 1997

The decision by Liberal Democrats and Labour to stand down candidates in Neil Hamilton's former constituency of Tatton demonstrates a further way in which influence can be brought to bear on decisions that formally rest with the local party. According to interviewees the Liberal Democrat and Labour senior staff had come up with a plan that would show them in the best possible light, uniting behind a single candidate designed to highlight Hamilton's alleged corruption. Martin Bell read about this, and contacted the parties, putting himself forward. The PPC was already in place and the local party were unhappy at being asked to stand down their popular local man (Ashdown 2000). Senior party staff drove to the constituency with Martin Bell in an attempt to sell the

¹⁹² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-big-question-are-allwomen-shortlists-the-best-way-to-achieve-equality-in-parliament-412987.html> (accessed 11.07.11)

¹⁹³ <http://www.ukpolitical.info/FemaleMPs.htm> (accessed 11.02.2011).

¹⁹⁴ <http://genderbalance.org.uk/en/page/about> (accessed 11.02.2011).

proposal, and explained that since Labour would only co-operate with the plans with a candidate like Bell, and without him would revert back to a regular fight, which they were more likely to win, the Lib Dem candidate capitulated. The Executive voted 5-4 in favour of stepping aside, under pressure from the central party.¹⁹⁵

Yeovil 2001

Paddy Ashdown's decision to stand down as Liberal Democrat Leader and MP in 1999 triggered an interesting search for a PPC in a seat which was considered one of the party's safest. The party's decision to select David Laws was met with consternation among pro-gender balance activists, who considered it a prime opportunity to field a female candidate.¹⁹⁶ Some in the party pointed to the circumstances that favoured a personally wealthy man, without family commitments, such as Laws, who was able to move to the constituency and campaign from the start compared with, for instance, a working woman with a family, who would be unable to offer the party such resources.¹⁹⁷

Hartlepool 2004

Frustrated at the slow progress of CGB progress there is evidence from interviews that suggests CGB began to exercise more radical behind-the-scenes methods to ensure women were put forward for winnable seats. When Peter Mandelson became the UK's European Commissioner in September 2004 the by-election of his Parliamentary constituency of Hartlepool was called. The Liberal Democrats followed their agreed procedure and began inviting approved candidates to put themselves forward for approval. Previous PPC, local boy and the party's Federal Treasurer, Reg Clark, put himself forward and together with five other candidates went through the party's screening process by a panel convened at party Headquarters. The panel agreed that only two of the prospective six approved candidates passed the protocol, and Clark was rejected on the grounds of having insufficient knowledge of party policy, thought by some to be an extraordinary situation given his prominent position as elected federal treasurer.¹⁹⁸ The candidates that went before the local party hustings were a less well known local candidate and a dynamic, educated, media-friendly mother of four from Surrey, Jody Dunn, who was selected. The decision to reject Clark came as a surprise to many and was described as a 'coup' by the CGB. More conspiratorial accounts suggest the decision represented a personal attack on Clark who was a controversial figure in the party (see p146), but the preparations to launch his candidacy outside his family home in the constituency the following day by the party's senior press team, suggest the decision came as a genuine shock.

Richmond Park 2005

¹⁹⁵ Interview 44, 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Interview 15, 2009.

¹⁹⁷ In 2010, just 22 days after agreeing the coalition and taking his place in government, Laws' long-term relationship with Jamie Lundie was revealed, and called in to the question whether some of his expense claims were permissible. Laws then resigned. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/mps-expenses/7780642/MPs-Expenses-Treasury-chief-David-Laws-his-secret-lover-and-a-40000-claim.html> (accessed 31.03.2011). Until this point his sexuality and private life had been kept outside of the public domain since the beginning of his political career in 1999.

¹⁹⁸ Interview 13, 2009.

There is evidence of interference in the process involving the timing of a by-election, for instance ensuring that Jenny Tongue's decision to stand-down from her parliamentary seat in Richmond Park was timed to coincide with the end of Susan Kramer's campaign in the London Mayoral contest, in order to give her an opportunity to put herself forward. Kramer won the nomination and the seat in 2005.¹⁹⁹

Cardiff Central 2005

With two suitable candidates dividing the local party in the target seat of Cardiff Central, a third 'uniting' candidate was actively sought out, and Jenny Willott was encouraged by senior figures in the party, to put herself forward. Although living in London at the time, Willott was encouraged by senior party figures, to move to Cardiff in 2000 where she then secured the nomination and won the seat in 2005.²⁰⁰

Each of these mini case-studies indicates that pressure can be brought to bear on the local party, the selection process, the timetable, the approvals process and the hustings, by those with a particular interest. It was not possible to find one example of direct interference in candidate selection by the party elite, but there is plenty of evidence that communication, political skill, party resources and expertise can be utilised order to manipulate the outcome.

v) The rise and fall of Chris Rennard

Chris Rennard is synonymous with Liberal Democrat campaigns. He has known no other employer but the party, and worked as Director of Campaigns from 1988 to 2003 then Chief Executive at party HQ in Cowley Street, until his resignation in 2009.²⁰¹ Despite the fact that the campaign strategy worked well in 1992 and 1997, it achieved less success in 2001 and 2005, yet Rennard himself, almost single-handedly responsible for campaign strategy between 1988 and 2009, was able to reach a position within the organisation that at times eclipsed even the party leader. An assessment of his individual contribution to the party is worthy of special mention, since it appears his role has been somewhat underestimated in the literature to date. Rennard's rise to prominence is one that reflects the party's twin-track approach to the modernising of party activity; attempting to bring about success and efficiency, while maintaining an active grassroots base. It may also be in part responsible for triggering a counter-tactic funded by those closely associated with *The Orange Book*, whom, it is argued, formed the dominant coalition in recent years (see Chapter 9).

Rennard's significant power in the organisation was recognised by Russell & Fieldhouse in 2005, whose series of interviews with party officials revealed that strategic strength had been accumulated by the Director of Campaigns, since between 1988 and 2001 it appeared that party

¹⁹⁹ Interview 44, 2009.

²⁰⁰ Interview 44, 2009.

²⁰¹ Chris Rennard is now a Lib Dem working peer.

owed its survival, through by-election victories, significant growth at the local level and incremental growth at Westminster, to him (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005 p74-75). This is all the more important when seen together with a number of examples that demonstrate how over the years the party to some extent sacrificed the importance of policy to the importance of campaigns (see Chapter 5).

Rennard began working for the party in 1982 as an election agent and pioneered the party's tactic of local issue campaigning through Focus leaflets, a method that began at the local level, involving close co-operation with ALC, then ALDC, involving workshops and the production of campaign manuals. The tactic involved producing tabloid-style leaflets that focused on issues drawn from comments from local people, which were turned in to campaigning points for party candidates. His steady hand in the immediate post-merger years in the one-man Campaigns Department, bought him much respect and gratitude, and with the sensational by-election victories of the early 1990s that he was able to both predict and deliver, led him to become the trusted advisor and confidante of the party elite. He is renowned for his ability to recall election facts, demonstrating political insight and an ability to conduct successful campaigns. The dominant image of Rennard was of a committed party activist, with an unswerving self-belief, to whom the party owed a debt of gratitude, but interviewees were also critical of his failure to see a bigger picture for the party beyond that of incremental wins. Ashdown recalls that Rennard was opposed to his project with Labour in 1998, fearing that it could split the party, damaging his preferred strategy of gradual growth and of consistently ruling out co-operation with political opponents (Ashdown 2000; Ashdown 2001). He also recalls, for instance, Rennard sending him a fax prior to the Eastbourne by-election, where Ashdown preferred not to stand a candidate out of respect to murdered Tory MP Ian Gow, in which he was reprimanded by the Campaigns Director for not discussing the decision with him (Ashdown 2001). The tone of the fax, Ashdown recalled, "could have got him sacked", but Rennard won the argument, and the Lib Dems won the by-election.

Following the chaotic period immediately post-merger, when overall responsibility for Headquarters was shared between Andy Ellis and Archy Kirkwood, the first long-term General Secretary, Graham Elson, was appointed. Elson was invited to take up the post, which was not advertised, was first suggested as a result of friendship with other senior people in the party, and involved facing an interview panel of over 20 individuals convened at very short notice.²⁰² He was appointed in July 1989 and was said to have enjoyed a relatively straightforward relationship with others at Cowley Street overseeing the formalisation of various departments and procedures. His successor Elizabeth Pamplin was appointed, again without the post being formally advertised, and, as a human resources specialist, was said to have been selected in order to take a more hands-on approach to the party's recruitment procedures. Pamplin's was an unsuccessful and short-term appointment and was shortly followed by Hugh Rickard, whose hire was the culmination of a more professional process, involving external recruitment specialists. Rickard had management and personnel experience as Rear Admiral in the Navy, and was also a committed long-term party sympathiser. His term at the helm is described by insiders as 'fraught', eclipsed by

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Interview 17, 2010.

the Director of Campaigns whose independent power-base was now highly significant. One insider explained that as Rennard's reputation for being able to deliver success to the party grew, so his control over resources grew also. In particular Rennard was the person with whom the final decisions associated with resources to target seats rested, and those target seats would then be in receipt of a greater support than that afforded non-target seats. He was able to hire and fire campaigns personnel, which was done without an overall human resources strategy, building up staff in regional bases, then laying them all off after a general election. Power within the party at HQ therefore centralised around the distribution of resources to target seats, giving significant influence to the Director of Campaigns. Rickard was replaced by Rennard - in part an acknowledgement of the fact that it was impossible for anybody else to run Headquarters and expect him and his Department to fall in to line.²⁰³

The potential difficulties over the appointment of Rennard to CEO were discussed at a meeting of the FE in September 2003, and the decision was voted upon. Some 20 were in favour, four abstained and five voted against, citing a potential lack of management experience and narrow skill base. Although incomparably knowledgeable about the party, Rennard had no experience outside the Lib Dems. Despite his vast knowledge of Lib Dem campaigning and election results, his appointment was the championing of the grassroots campaigner. The appointment was largely popular, and the party then appointed a new Director of Campaigns, Paul Rainger, and created a new post 'HQ Director', taken up by Ben Stoneham, in order to carry out the day-to-day management of party business, leaving Chris Rennard as CEO to concentrate on bigger picture political and campaigning priorities. A number of interviewees spoke of the need to win Rennard over, or ensure his support before they could realistically expect to have the support of others in the party elite, including the leader.²⁰⁴ One senior politician explained:

I found it amazing that this character, Rennard, had this influence.....in a party that was the most democratic in Western Europe. So there was the paradox of somebody spending money without accountability and campaigning, who was completely uncontrolled. (Interview 29, 2009).

The 2005 general election is described by a number of interviewees as the moment when it became apparent that the role of CEO was less well suited to Rennard, whose strategy and style were beginning to be out of step with the rest of the party. This is a reflection of a number of factors. Firstly, his approach to campaigning was thought to be becoming over- zealous. One described a heated discussion over putting certain policy items in the 2005 manifesto which Rennard opposed on the grounds they were not good campaigning points; upon being bound by the decision of FPC, he reproduced the draft document with the new item included, but in indecipherably small print.²⁰⁵ Secondly, the role of the CEO was improperly defined. Kennedy was unprepared and unwilling to remove Rennard from his post, although some insiders pointed to difficulty finding the formal means by which to do this. Ming Campbell attempted to rectify this with

²⁰³ Interview 27, 2010.

²⁰⁴ Interview 49, 2009 and Interview 24, 2009.

²⁰⁵ Interview 10, 2009.

an exchange of letters that attempted to 'contract' Rennard to oversee campaigning at the forthcoming general election. Even though it was in the position he wanted, the move represented restraint and the formalising of his position through a binding employment contract, and was never signed.²⁰⁶ One parliamentarian described how they were unsure how to "bell the cat"²⁰⁷, and it was, according to one source, this, that Nick Clegg had in mind when commissioning Chris Bones to conduct a thorough review of the party's internal workings.²⁰⁸

He [Rennard] was an independent power-base which was not something the constitution had envisaged. (Interview 25, 2009).

Thirdly, there is some evidence that HQ was resistant to the advice of professionals and consultants. This is considered more fully in Chapter 7 on Resources, however, it is interesting to note that contrary to common perceptions, it appears to be Rennard's commitment to 'believers' and party bureaucrats, and his suspicion of 'careerists', that characterise a *lack* of professionalisation. Rennard was described as a 'specialist' and someone that understood a formula that worked and refused to be flexible about campaigning methods or listen to the ideas of others. Having never been employed other than by the party he would not be considered a professional in the widely deployed sense of the term regarding party organisation. Fourthly, the party put too much faith and too much power in the hands of one individual. Some interviewees criticised the decision to ring-fence campaign budgets in theory to "keep the sticky hands of the party activists off the brass"²⁰⁹ but which removed accountability for its spending outside of the usual channels, including FFAC, and giving yet more control to the Director of Campaigns. Finally, the CEO's own assessments of the 2001 and 2005 elections are that they were both success stories of which the party could be proud (Rennard 2001; Rennard 2005), putting his ambitions at odds with some of his parliamentary colleagues. Those critical of Cowley Street describe a "pervading culture of martyrdom"²¹⁰, although others blame the Kennedy leadership for allowing a strong dual power-base to develop in the first place.²¹¹

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there was swelling criticism of the impact which the now entrenched targeting strategy began to have on grassroots members. One activist explained:

Conference training sessions explain the 'winning formula'. Ordinary members now don't want to be as proactive as they were. They're becoming de-skilled....they're just asked for money. Campaigns control the money and candidates have to do as they're told. (Interview 15, 2009).

This suggests that even though party HQ was very much championed by an activist-led

²⁰⁶ Interview 29, 2009.

²⁰⁷ Interview 5, 2009 – an expression taken to mean to reign someone in that was acting without sufficient accountability.

²⁰⁸ Interview 15, 2009.

²⁰⁹ Interview 64, 2009.

²¹⁰ Interview 25, 2010. In this context 'martyrdom' would mean one of working long and sometimes unreasonable hours, for relatively low-pay in support of the party or 'cause'. In addition this could also mean a closing of ranks against anyone that challenged these conditions.

²¹¹ Interview 40, 2009.

campaigns department, resisting the excesses of 'careerist' or professionalising tendencies, control over strategy and the party purse-strings led to it becoming inevitably more centralised.

vi) Conclusion

This chapter has examined the main ideas that inform the Lib Dem's campaigning strategy. Campaigning is the activity that connects ordinary members to the party machine, in the case of the Liberal Democrats, in significant numbers. It is fair to say that the party has, until holding national office in 2010, seen itself as primarily a campaigning organisation. With regard to this the party has experienced change at three levels of the party hierarchy. Firstly, on the ground the party's campaigning methods have become more systematic and while not directly centrally controlled, increasingly based on a standardising template designed at Headquarters. Local parties are now offered extensive campaigns training in how to produce appropriate campaign literature. The growth of the internet, and the party intranet has connected local and regional parties to centralise resources such as the PCA website and Huddle, which provide information, a consistent message and a coherent campaigning method to grassroots members. Once in place, this overall connectedness has an impact on the work done by ordinary members and party candidates are now able to access a wealth of centrally designed resources. There is no evidence of direct interference in the selection of candidates, although undoubtedly the party elite were able to encourage, discourage, train, support and in general influence outcomes, if it so wished. Examples, however, are far and few between.

Secondly, the party at Headquarters, in particular the Campaigns Department has modernised and adapted to new technologies. It has, however, until recently resisted moves toward professionalism, largely due to a pervasive amateur culture and grassroots-orientated leadership by Chris Rennard. Although it is too small in size to conform to the operational practices of a professional campaigning department by hiring individuals through specialist agencies to conduct some of its work, it has at times employed expertise in research and polling, which has in turn informed its targeting strategy. This has, however, been piecemeal, and the use of outside expertise has until recently been treated with suspicion. Chris Rennard was able to control the targeting strategy, campaigning tactics and financial priorities, developing a formidable power-base at party HQ. The detailed analysis of each general election demonstrates the success of this targeting strategy in delivering an increased number of seats in spite of a decrease in the popular vote, while also acknowledging its limitations. The key components of the definition of professionalism, particularly the employment of outside expertise, the freedom to exercise autonomy in this field and mobility in the jobs market, are not evident. There is evidence that decisions about candidate selection afford significant autonomy to the constituency parties, and that the new 'competencies' provide a list of characteristics that would broadly fit with that of so-called "soft" professionalism. Overall, however, the process has, for the period studied, been incomplete.

Thirdly, Kennedy's somewhat loose grip on power as Leader allowed for a vacuum to develop at the top of the party that enabled Rennard, with the consent of the wider party, to build a significant parallel power-base at Party Headquarters. This is uncommon and highlights the tensions within the third party that has typically aimed to be both a campaigning organisation, while at the same time increase in numbers and power at Westminster.

Rennard's iron grip on party HQ can perhaps best be seen by the change in culture at Cowley Street since his departure. His successor, Chris Fox, former Director of Corporate Relations at Tate and Lyle plc, has introduced a much more business-like approach. Although Fox's appointment (informally by Nick Clegg and Ros Scott but later rubber-stamped by FE), its timing (5 months before a general election), and the coalition that followed, make for a very untypical period in office, his impact on HQ is already clear:

Its more focused in its thinking. The business objectives are sharper. There's more focus on outcomes, rather than the process, and people are being held to account more. (Interview 26 (2), 2011).

Senior Executive Teams have been set up, adhering closely to a 5 year strategic plan, introducing a level of professionalism and a workplace culture that more closely resembles those indicators set out in Webb & Fisher's 2003 study. The campaigns department in particular has been radically overhauled, and is described in Chapter 9. Fox was closely associated with Mark Oaten's centre-right 'Liberal Future' in 2001, and the 'Orange Bookers' that followed, and is thought to be close to the leader.

In conclusion then and in contrast to the party's policy-making processes described in the previous chapter, this examination of campaigns supports H1, but fails to fully support H2. The campaigns department has, at least until 2009, demonstrated a process of centralisation around party HQ, or more specifically, Chris Rennard, while at the same resisting certain key elements of the professionalisation process. This process appears to have begun after 2009.

Chapter 7 – RESOURCES ²¹²

i) Introduction

The complexities of intra-party power are demonstrated nowhere better than through a study of the distribution of resources, where we also draw together themes developed in previous chapters. This chapter looks at what resources the third party has, how these have changed over a period of time and what can be deduced from this with regard to the three levels of party activity set out by Katz & Mair in their 1994 study of political parties; the parliamentary party, the central party and the party on the ground (Katz and Mair 1994). It also looks at what the party has within its gift and focuses on patronage and peerages in particular. Panebianco says that the 'dominant coalition' comes about by negotiating control of the 'zones of uncertainty' which comprise competency, environmental relations, communication, formal rules, financing and recruitment (Panebianco 1988). With this in mind what follows is the detailed examination of party resources.

Without the reliable backing of the corporate or trades union community, the Liberal Democrats have convincingly argued that their development is constrained by a lack of resources. It is true that its income is dwarfed by those of its competitors, but this study suggests this has presented no barrier to professionalisation. The party appears to have reformed in all but one of Panebianco's six 'zones of uncertainty' in spite of its somewhat unreliable income. Upon closer examination of local party finance it is clear that, although local parties have autonomy over their own finances, they are increasingly dictated to by the federal party, who control the all-important targeting strategy and are therefore able to exercise some indirect control over these resources and would like to exercise significantly more (p253). These 'zones of uncertainty' are identified as areas where it is possible to see change in the organisational activity of a party, and whoever controls these areas "holds a trump card" (Panebianco p33). In particular he identifies competency as the 'power of the expert', particularly powerful when an individual holding such competency is indispensable to the organisation. The second 'zone of uncertainty' is environmental relations, by which he means the area where the party interface with the world outside, and who may have responsibility for decisions in response to events outside the party's control. Communication is a third vital area for examination, and control over relations between the party and media is clearly important in an understanding of intra-party power. Fourthly he explains that the formal rules, which in the case of the Liberal Democrats would include the constitution and standing orders that govern its various committees and bodies. The enforcing or manipulating of these formal rules is a strong indication of power relations. Clearly financing, his fifth zone of uncertainty, is important since political parties are heavily dependent upon funds in order to run their operation and employ staff. Having control of this clearly impacts on the party organisation and can tell us a great deal about who is in control. Finally the sixth 'zone' is that of recruitment, where Panebianco looks at involvement in the organisation, from membership, to candidates, 'careerists' and 'believers'. Control over who can do what is clearly significant.

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Parts of this chapter exists in "Sandals to Suits – Professionalisation, coalition and the Liberals Democrats", Elizabeth Evans and Emma Sanderson-Nash, BJPIR (Volume 13, Issue 4, November 2011).

It is possible to see two different stages in the process of professionalisation, since it appears to have been embraced first by the Parliamentary party and at a much slower pace, (indeed at times resisted), at Headquarters where a more amateur-volunteer culture has been the order of the day. This is an interesting observation and one not untypical in political parties but perhaps of greater significance in one which, as in every other aspect of party life, experiences tension between the grassroots and the elite (see Frankland, Lucardie et al. 2008 for an assessment of Green parties). The term 'professional', as set out on p31, is defined in terms of party work as displaying five specific characteristics: expertise, autonomy, mobility, self-regulation and commitment (Webb and Fisher 2003; Webb 2008). This definition is useful and is employed in this context, and is distinct and different from any other definition that might, refer simply to "standards of delivery and competence" (Negrine 2005). There are inevitably those employees for whom these ideal types do not fit, particularly recently, including some senior appointments of individuals who fit the description of 'professional' in the context of party employment, but who also demonstrate a long history of party activity and commitment (see for example Chris Fox and Sandy Walkington), although in the broadest sense these definitions and their characteristics offer a useful template for this study. In keeping with the definition of professional we would expect to see party resources used in the employment of experts from outside party ranks, an education and training of a particular standard, and that such individuals are able to exercise autonomy and career mobility.

Analysis of party finance is difficult for a number of reasons. In the first place parties are required under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, Electoral Admission Act 2006 and the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009, to ensure donations above £500 are from a permissible source²¹³, to declare donations to the central party of over £5000 and to declare donations to individual accounting units of over £1000 to the Electoral Commission. The legislation, which is relatively new, has come into force to encourage transparency and scrutiny in an area of party life hitherto surrounded with secrecy. It is therefore relatively recent and makes comparisons with party finance prior to the legislation somewhat uneven. Before this the Liberal Democrats published an annual budget and accounts in the report section of the party conference literature, and in 2002 the Electoral Commission began to publish party income, in more detail and including the identity of individual donors, on a quarterly basis. The impact of the 2006 Act was to ensure that loans were subject to the same regulation as donations, since the use of loans instead of donations in order to keep donors' identities anonymous was revealed to be widespread during the build up to the 2005 general election. It should be noted therefore that the figures held centrally, particularly prior to 2006, either by the federal party or the Electoral Commission, can create a false impression of overall income.

In simplest terms the federal party derives its income from three sources: the state, individual donations and membership subscriptions. The former comes to the party as Short and Cranborne money, while other income is generated through party activism and fundraising appeals. The proceeds are then divided between three recipients. Short and Cranborne money pays for POLD (Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats) staff, membership subscriptions pay for the

²¹³ Permissible sources for party donations are individuals that are eligible to vote in the UK, or from trades unions or companies that are registered in the UK.

running of Headquarters through the 'general fund', and one-off donations are specifically ring-fenced in the 'campaign fund' to finance the general election. This chapter takes each of these sources of income and looks at how the party raises and spends it, first the Parliamentary party, then the party centrally and finally at the local party level. Prior to the merger of 1988, the Liberal Party and the SDP were separately functioning bureaucracies, each with a central headquarters, parliamentary organisation and (although far less well developed in the SDP) an organisation on the ground.²¹⁴ This section looks at what emerged from this process in greater detail and in particular at two periods of reform: The Medium-Term Review (1997) and The Bones Commission (2008). These internal reviews demonstrate the desire of the party leadership who set up both, to move towards what we might recognise as an electoral-professional model at key moments in its history. Finally in a party that until 2010 was unable to wield power at the national level, it examines patronage, in particular the recommendation of peerages. The link between party funding and peerages is generally well documented (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2010) but very little scrutiny has focused on the Liberal Democrats in this regard. The Liberal Democrats Parliamentary party has, since its inception, contained more peers than MPs, and traditionally a number of 'heavyweights'.²¹⁵ The scramble for a place on the red benches is one of the more interesting features among a party of grassroots origins. In spite of passing motions at conference to produce an elected 'interim peers list', candidates for which far outnumber any other elected party committee, leaders have consistently recommended peerages for individuals that do not appear on the list and, it is argued, may, on occasion, reflect interests other than those of the party grassroots.

ii) The Parliamentary party

The Parliamentary party of the Liberal Democrats (POLD) has undergone two significant shifts since its creation in 1988. Firstly it has benefited from Short and Cranbourne money, and in 1997 when its number of MPs more than doubled this had a significant effect on its income. What it decided to do with that money also gives us an indication of its priorities, in particular the rise in importance of the press office. Secondly, and following on from this, was a parallel increase in the research support paid for by POLD (rather than MPs own personal research assistants paid for by their office costs allowance), and the development of the party's 'Shadow Cabinet'. In organisational terms this is important since it signifies a cultural shift within the parliamentary party toward a party aspiring to government. Here we examine each of these changes in greater detail.

²¹⁴ Interview 64.2009

²¹⁵ The Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords have included Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and others who held ministerial posts in previous Labour governments.

Short and Cranborne Money

MPs are paid an annual salary of £65,738 with a choice of contributory pension schemes. In addition to this MP's may claim:

- £14,582 if chair of a Select Committee
- £19,900 for accommodation to non-London MPs
- £10,663 for the rental of constituency offices outside London and £12,761 in London
- £ 10,394 for office equipment
- £109,549 for staff

In total therefore an ordinary back-bench MP, with a constituency outside London (irrespective of its location) is able to claim a maximum of almost £150k in allowances, with travel for themselves and their immediate family on top.²¹⁶ Although these offices are run in order to support the MP's parliamentary activities, they often double up as a campaign centre for local party activity. There is sometimes tension between the local party and MP over the use of these resources, and MPs guard the division between their parliamentary work and the local party jealously.²¹⁷ However if the income so derived were to be included in the overall pot perceived as party money it would for the Liberal Democrats in 2010 have exceeded an additional £8.5m. While the division between party work and constituency work is quite clear, there exists an informal 'tithe' which recommends that MPs pay back 10% of the total derived from their income and allowances to their local party for campaign purposes. This is a system that has been in place among the party's Councillors for many years and in 2010 was adopted by the party's Ministers.²¹⁸ The Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats (POLD), however, derives its income, above that which is given to MPs for their own individual offices, from Short and Cranborne money, introduced during the Wilson government (1974-76), to support the parliamentary activities of opposition parties.

This income is to fund the party in its opposition activity. There are further funds available to the Leader of the Opposition's office for which the Liberal Democrats, as the second opposition party, have not previously qualified. In May 2010 to the dismay of many in POLD, the party, having entered a coalition government, lost its right to both Short and Cranborne money, the consequences of which are described later in this chapter. First, however, we look at the party prior to merger to see how it has changed since the mid-1980s to the present day in its parliamentary staffing arrangements.

²¹⁶ House of Commons Information Office Factsheet M5 Members Series 'Members' pay, pensions and allowances'. Revised May 2010.

²¹⁷ Interview 5.2010

²¹⁸ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/lib-dem-ministers-follow-advice-for-councillors-and-give-10-to-the-party-22329.html> (accessed 09.03.2011).

Table 13. Short and Cranborne money 1997-2011

Parliamentary session	Short money £	Cranbroune money £	Total
1997/1998	405,311	33,310	438,621
1998/1999	419,559	28,250	447,809
1999/2000	1,084,895	31,857	1,116,752
2000/2001	1,112,906	65,052	1,177,958
2001/2002	1,155,583	66,743	1,222,326
2002/2003	1,174,410	68,278	1,242,688
2003/2004	1,210,901	195,000 ²¹⁹	1,405,901
2004/2005	1,244,855	201,045	1,445,900
2005/2006	1,536,220	206,272	1,742,492
2006/2007	1,596,867	212,873	1,809,740
2007/2008	1,667,009	217,982	1,884,991
2008/2009	1,733,771	228,445	1,962,216
2009/2010	1,749,385	237,136	1,986,521
2010/2011	167,565	27,808	195,373

Source: (Kelly 2010, p17-20)²²⁰

Parliamentary staff 1986-2011

In 1986 all members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party staff were invited to come together in a new staff-led organisation, to be run following the election of an elected Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary.²²¹ This is interesting since it enables an understanding of the kind of work undertaken by political staff prior to the merger, and the way in which the party relied on amateurs. In addition to regular meetings to discuss the business of the Parliamentary party and to represent their interests, this body was to “help introduce new members of staff to the offices and other staff”. A staff guide was produced by Duncan Brack in his role as Assistant to Archy Kirkwood²²², then Chief Whip, and in order to help secretaries and research assistants in their day to day duties it explained party structure, parliamentary procedure, committee work, press releases, computers and how staff could find their way around the parliamentary estate. In 1986 the Liberal Party had 22 seats largely in central Wales and the Scottish highlands, few of whom had full-time staff in London, preferring instead to use their office-costs allowance to pay for an office in the constituency, in some of the remotest parts of the UK. By 1991 this had started to change²²³. The

²¹⁹ In 2002 the House of Lords passed a resolution increasing funds to opposition parties which is responsible for the large increase on previous years.

²²⁰ This table is low since the party's right to Short & Cranbourne money ceased after the May 2010 general election.

²²¹ Interview 37 2009, and internal memo dated 28th August 1986 to Parliamentary Liberal Party Staff.

²²² Archy Kirkwood himself started out as an MP's Researcher, working for David Steel prior to winning his own seat of Roxburgh and Berwickshire in 1983.

²²³ In 1990 the author of this thesis was employed by Simon Hughes, MP for Bermondsey as his Parliamentary Assistant, and between 1991 and 1992 by Ray Michie, then MP for Argyll and Bute as her Parliamentary Researcher. The first job followed an advert placed in The Guardian newspaper, and the second was from word of mouth and included responsibility for the 'Women's Issues' portfolio.

party had 21 MPs. Excluding the Chief Whip and Leader, who had their own teams and larger premises, the other 19 employed on average one secretary each, usually paid and full-time, and 11 employed Research Assistants at the same time, often part-time or on a voluntary basis. The Parliamentary Staff organised 'skills development' days where MPs' London based staff would be trained in the research and presentation of information, parliamentary procedure, and dealing with the press (particularly local and regional) leaving national press to the Press Office separately run and located in the Whips Office. The merged party continued with this staffing arrangement throughout the period 1988-1992, while the remaining three SDP MPs who had refused to merge continued their own, much reduced, independent organisation.

At this time in addition to MPs' own staff, POLD employed staff in the Whips Office, which included two press officers, one senior researcher who worked with any MP asked to serve on a Standing Committee, and an information officer or volunteer to assist with administration. The Chief Whip had two staff to help with legislative business and to produce the weekly 'whip' ..²²⁴ Staff were almost all committed party members, often with close personal or family ties to the MP, and positions were filled by word of mouth, often coordinated by Ewan Cameron, the party's Senior Researcher. Requirements for employment by an MP would usually include a commitment to the party's values, secretarial experience and/or a degree, but primarily strong ties with the constituency, an understanding of local issues and the local press. It would not be uncommon for an MP to recruit a secretary in the constituency who would then move to London to fulfill the post.

In the build-up to the 1992 general election the party began employing more specialist researchers, initially on those aspects of policy and portfolios that were prioritised including constitutional reform, economics, trade and industry and the environment²²⁵. This is the first evidence of a move toward issue expertise taking precedence over constituency-based knowledge, since these researchers were connected to the portfolio, regardless of which MP held the spokespersonship at the time. Based on a forecast of income from Short Money the parliamentary party agreed to take on a total of seven full time staff in the Whips office; mostly press officers, in preference to research assistants.²²⁶ In addition at this time the Lords Whips Office was organised in a similar fashion, overseen for over two decades by Celia Thomas,²²⁷ with three research staff and at times an intern helping with administration. The Leader's Office also operated a similar sized and somewhat independent office, and in 1991 consisted of four secretarial posts including a caseworker and receptionist, and five research staff including a press assistant and senior speechwriter. The June 1992 Parliamentary party Staff Handbook describes each of these roles, together with explanations of the responsibilities of individual press officers, organised according to broadcast, print or regional media.

In 1997 the parliamentary party more than doubled in size, and changed in character with an intake of professionals and experienced local councillors (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2010).

²²⁴ Each Thursday a fax would be sent to each MP in their private or constituency office informing them of the week ahead's legislation, together with a one, two or three-line whip indicated by underscoring.

²²⁵ This data is taken from internal phone lists of POLD staff in 1991.

²²⁶ POLD internal memo dated 18th June 1993.

²²⁷ Since 2006, Baroness Thomas of Winchester.

The Short and Cranborne money that accompanied this meant a significant increase in the funds available, which prompted The Medium Term Review (detailed below) and in simple terms was spent recruiting a team of specialist researchers to shadow government portfolios, as well as expanding the party's research and press operations. Party staff also expanded following devolution and by 2002 had evolved into an organisation with a quite different and more professional feel. The internal phone directory lists a Whips Office staff comprising two support staff to the Whip, a parliamentary press team of nine, and a parliamentary resource centre (dealing with research portfolios) of 15. It also lists 53 MPs with 61 secretarial and research staff in London and 113 secretarial and casework staff in their constituencies. This varies from MPs with one member of staff in total, based in London (David Laws), to one member of staff in London and 4 in the constituency (David Heath), but averages at one in London and one in the constituency. Payment for staff would have come from the MP's individual office-costs allowance, and could be supplemented by the MP putting a share of their own salary into the overall fund (Simon Hughes) to encouraging charities, individual donors or the local party to supplement staff (Norman Baker). In 2002 the Leader Charles Kennedy continued to employ a team of staff including two in communications, five secretarial and administrative support with two further people in his constituency of Ross Cromarty and Skye (one of the furthest away in the UK), a chief of staff and a research assistant. The House of Lords had four staff, similar in size to the operation run in Brussels and Strasbourg for Liberal Democrat MEPs. The party also employed staff to support the various devolved governments; five staff to support its 17 Members of the Scottish Parliament, four to support its six Assembly Members in Wales, and four to support the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland who had five assembly members – all of whom employed their own secretarial, research and casework staff in a similar style to that of their Westminster counterparts.

In summary, the most noticeable change that followed the 1997 increase in the number of MPs and Short money that accompanied it was the growth of professional support to the MPs in a newly centralised Policy/Research and Policy/Communications operation. Charles Kennedy developed the 'shadow cabinet' system, with MPs shadowing government portfolios. Specialist researchers worked on a 'client-basis' for the Shadow Cabinet in a much more business-like style, and without a formal connection to the individual MP or their parliamentary constituency.²²⁸ The Policy Unit divided in order to support both the press office and the resource centre, splitting into two new departments, the Policy and Research Unit (formerly Parliamentary Resource Unit), and the Policy and Communications Department (formerly the Press Office). This merged staff previously divided between Cowley Street and Parliamentary Staff now came under one umbrella, POLD (Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats) and under one roof (Cowley Street).²²⁹ Although Short money was specifically for the purposes of parliamentary opposition work it undoubtedly helped the party at HQ to have this additional money spent on its premises. The move may have been an attempt to break through the amateur culture at Cowley Street but was met with limited success and an 'us' and 'them' dynamic soon developed with POLD staff and

²²⁸ Interview 59, 2009.

²²⁹ Some policy staff were situated at 2 Abbey Gardens, part way between Cowley Street and the Parliamentary Estate, but the majority were at HQ.

federal party staff in two distinct and different camps.²³⁰ The Whips Office was then without the press or research staff, and dedicated solely to the work of the party's parliamentary business. When Kennedy resigned and Campbell became leader he intended to make the party "sharper and slicker", but his short period in office prevented progress despite clear intention. This came instead with Nick Clegg's setting up of the Bones Commission described in greater detail below.

iii) Cowley Street

The Liberal Party had its UK Headquarters at the National Liberal Club, a grand and historic building in the centre of Whitehall, London.²³¹ By contrast the SDP had offices at 4 Cowley Street, in the heart of Westminster, close to the Millbank television studios and near Conservative Party Headquarters in Smith Square. The merged party agreed upon the more suitable premises at Cowley Street in what was seen by some as a symbolic shift toward the Westminster professional political scene and away from the more old-fashioned liberal party base at the NLC. More than one interviewee recounts that during merger negotiations the size of party membership (and consequent reliable income stream derived from subscriptions), had been exaggerated. Less than a year into merger the new party, with a very much reduced income, faced a significant tax bill and potential bankruptcy, resulting in the decision to more than halve the number of party employees.

²³² The party was then left with approximately 15 full time staff at Headquarters, and a handful of MPs staff coordinated through the Staff Association (described above).

Federal Party finance

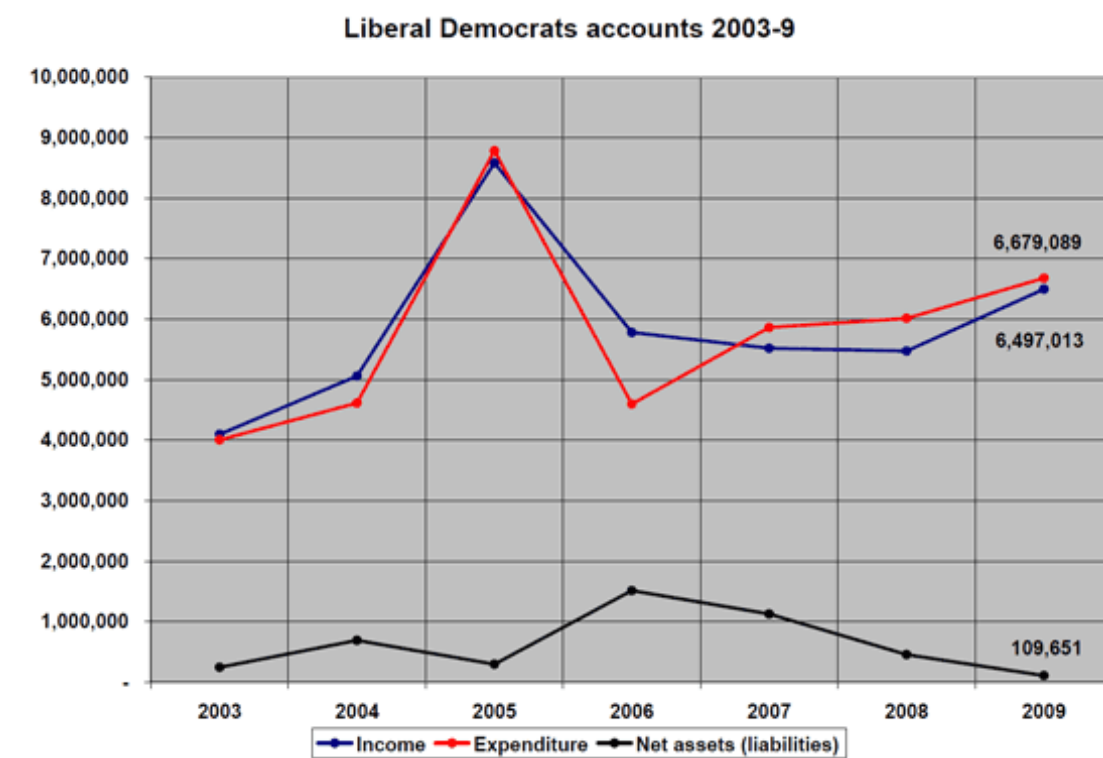
The federal party is financed in two ways. The first combines income derived from membership subscription fees, newspaper revenue, affinity schemes, grants, and profits made on the twice yearly federal conferences which makes up the 'general fund' and is used to finance the running of party Headquarters. The second combines income from individual donations and investment on this income which makes up the 'campaign fund' and is ring-fenced to finance general elections. This has always been the case although in recent years greater flexibility over its use has been demonstrated, and the federal party are able to step in for a campaign it considers to be important, other than the general election, such as during the 2008 London Mayoral contest.²³³ The campaign fund can therefore be treated as a 'bail-out' fund, although the sums involved are usually in the region of £50-80k and of a much smaller magnitude than those concerning the UK general election.

²³⁰ Interview 61.

²³¹ The National Liberal Club (NLC) was opened in 1882 by William Gladstone as a meeting place for party members and campaigners.

²³² Interview 64, 2010.

²³³ Interview 25.2010

Table 14. Declared party income 2003-2009 ²³⁴

Tables 14 adds income from the general fund and the campaign fund together as income, and adds all campaigns and staff costs together as expenditure. As we would expect, income and expenditure are relatively constant and both peak significantly during a general election year. As a more detailed breakdown demonstrates, the campaign fund in particular peaks at this time and general fund income remains constant.

Table 15. General fund and campaign fund income 2002-2009. ²³⁵

Year end 31 December	General fund total £	Campaign fund total £
2002	3,383,147	301,378
2003	3,450,749	645,531
2004	3,759,361	1,300,760
2005	3,621,197	4,960,838
2006	3,949,960	1,831,435
2007	3,866,813	1,653,686
2008	4,382,908	1,090,348
2009	4,342,355	2,154,658

²³⁴ <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/party-finance-analysis/party-finance-analysis-accounts-2009#LD> (accessed 03.03.2011).

²³⁵ Source: Electoral Commission.

Headquarters staffing arrangements

The arrangements at Party HQ have changed little since 1988 and the departments can be divided into three broad categories, according to size and permanence. What follows is a description of each department, its main responsibilities and any significant changes in personnel. This is intended to demonstrate the strength of party bureaucracy. It draws on Panebianco's distinction between political and bureaucratic professionalism and suggests that the party has operated under a relatively strong bureaucracy at Headquarters. He offers a classification of party staff: managers; notables; representative bureaucrats; executive bureaucrats; staff professionals; hidden professionals and semi-professionals. With regard to the Lib Dems, whose staff is relatively small, these distinctions provide only limited explanations. We can, however, draw from them a distinction between bureaucrats and professionals, the former being concerned with administrative systems and stability, the latter with expertise and adaptation. This is in contrast with, (and can at times be in competition with), professional party staff, whose incentives are different: for instance, they can usually find work outside the organisation if the need arises (Panebianco 1988). The five main departments comprise:

- Chief Executive
- Policy and Research
- Policy and Communications
- Marketing, Fundraising and Membership Services
- Campaigns

The Office of the Chief Executive began as that of the General Secretary, an administrative role overseen by the Party President and included one or two full time administrative staff. By 2002 this had grown to seven in total, and included an HQ Operations Director responsible for the day-to-day running of the building and staff, and a Political Assistant keeping the CEO abreast of developments within the party. The Policy and Communications Department and Policy and Research Department are described in greater detail with regard to the Parliamentary party and has in recent years expanded and gone through a number of changes in management and structure (see above). The Chief Executive would have complete control therefore of the Campaigns and Marketing department. During Chris Rennard's period in the job, he had a very clear claim to experience as former Director of one of these departments, and worked very closely with David Loxton, whose employment with the party also began at its inception. Party Headquarters at this time employed a number of 'lifers' and had a reputation for resisting change.²³⁶ This can be demonstrated by looking at attempts by federal party treasurer, Reg Clark, to establish his own unit at party HQ.

Encouraged by the Kennedy office, and on the advice of external fundraising consultants 'tree'²³⁷, Clark set up a 'Treasurer's Unit' within Cowley Street to run the party's Business Forum, annual fundraising ball, high net-worth donors club 'Liberty Network' and legacy programme. The Unit

²³⁶

Interview 29, 2010.

²³⁷

<http://www.treelondon.com/> (accessed 07.03.2011).

employed three full-time staff, whose salary was paid directly out of the funds it raised, acting outside the formal structure at HQ, were excluded from its Investors in People assessment, and seen by many at Cowley Street as 'outsiders'.²³⁸ Liberty Network was controversial, hosting expensive dinners and giving members who contributed a minimum of £1000 a year, a series of events attended by the leader and other senior parliamentarians. It launched with a series of lectures where 'tree' explained to a select audience of prominent party supporters, celebrities and donors, what the party needed to 'break through' and what they believed stood in the way. Membership of Liberty Network peaked at approximately 150 and while considered to be a success by some, that it unearthed a small number of new and significant donors, was criticised by others, accused of elitism and exclusivity, and of having simply switched existing donations from one source to another.²³⁹ This led to a head-on collision between the Treasurer and Chief Executive (Clark 2006). A number of interviewees noted the reluctance of the Chief Executive to make use of outside consultants or advisors and once Clark had resigned over an unrelated matter, he was quick to bring the Treasurer's Unit in to line. 'Membership Services' took over responsibility for much of its work and became 'Marketing, Fundraising and Membership Services' with a staff totalling ten by 2009.²⁴⁰ Chris Fox, CEO since 2009, has employed fundraising professionals to revitalise the party's fundraising effort, with some degree of success.

The Campaigns Department was the biggest loser in the post-merger redundancies, losing all its Area Agents in 1989, but growing since then from a staff of one to a staff of typically five, including the Candidates Officer. In addition the party regained its Area Agents taking this total, although not situated inside HQ itself, to 21²⁴¹. In addition to these main five departments there were others with typically one Director and three staff:

- The International Office
- Conference and Events
- Finance

The International Office manages the party's work with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.²⁴² The Foreign Office began this initiative in 1992, designed to connect UK parties to sister parties in fledgling democracies in Europe and throughout the world and involves setting up a number of short-term projects in which overseas politicians and staff come to the UK or vice-versa for training purposes. The Liberal Democrats receive an income in support of this work which pays for this department and which separated it from the body of work done elsewhere in the building. The Conference and Events Department organise the party's twice yearly federal conference with a support staff of three or four and the annual fundraising ball. The Finance Department deals with all matters concerning the party's banking arrangements, including producing annual accounts and is typically supported by two members of staff. Since the

²³⁸ Interview 72, 2011

²³⁹ In particular Chris Rennard's submission to the Bones Commission makes this point.

²⁴⁰ Interview 27, 2009.

²⁴¹ This has been the subject of recent reform – see Chapter 9.

²⁴² The author of this thesis ran the International Office for a period of 4 months during the 1992 general election.

introduction of PPERA legislation the party has employed a Head of Compliance and Constitutional Support, with two staff overseeing business relating to the English Party and the London Regional Party. Finally the party employs individuals on behalf of the English Party including Candidates officer and Training Co-ordinator, and one staff member to run Liberal Youth, one to run Women Liberal Democrats, one to oversee the Campaign for Gender Balance and one on Diversity. The party declares its total head-count of staff employed by the federal party to the Electoral Commission and has since 2001 this has ranged from 41 to 48. The party had increasingly outsourced certain operations, most of which represent one-off tasks such as the banking of income following appeals, which is done by the Royal Bank of Scotland in Doncaster, and IT support which is brought in as and when necessary.²⁴³ It does, as discussed in Chapter 6, employ pollsters, advertising agents and other specialists at the time of the general election, and this is funded by the campaign fund rather than the general fund.

The Medium Term Review

The arrangements at Cowley Street have undergone two important changes since the new party was launched in 1998: in 1997 following The Medium Term Review and in 2008 following The Bones Commission. Before turning to these it is important to note, however, that at general elections Lib Dem HQ becomes the party's federal campaign centre and any internal changes that are likely to take place as a result of election outcomes will be brought in immediately afterwards. The Medium Term Review was undertaken following a meeting of the party's Federal Executive immediately following the 1997 general election in order to review "the party's activities and the resources necessary to undertake them". It aimed to review the party's activities over the following three to five years in response to increased numbers at Westminster, the re-emergence of a strong Labour party, forthcoming elections, a shortage of funds and the reduction in party activity on the ground in non-target areas. The remit for the review explicitly states that it should aim to make changes that did not necessitate changes to the party constitution which "would result in a degree of internal argument that would be disproportionate to any likely advantage and provide unnecessary distraction and delay".²⁴⁴ It noted that in 1999 the party would face an increased campaigning task including elections of half its councillors, a referendum on London government, elections to Scottish and Welsh devolved governments, the first UK wide European elections by PR and a referendum on PR for Westminster.²⁴⁵ Its main recommendations were:

- i) To step up the party's fundraising effort. The party acknowledged the decline in overall party membership, particularly in non-target areas and the problems associated with its financial dependence on subscription levies. It recommended developing long-term strategies based on regular standing order payments rather than one-off responses to election appeals, to encourage legacies, and to develop an 'in-house telephone team' for a variety of membership, research and fundraising purposes. It also noted the need for a coherent policy

²⁴³ Interview 54.2009

²⁴⁴ Report of The Medium Term Review Group, 27th November 1997, p9.

²⁴⁵ The referendum on PR for Westminster did not materialize but was widely expected to follow from the Cook-Maclennan Report.

on 'promotional services' such encouraging members to use Visa and National Breakdown, with whom it had developed an agreed division of income.

- ii) To promote the interests of ethnic minority candidates.
- iii) To improve training by strengthening the role of the Training Task Group and providing certification for training undertaken.
- iv) To improve the party's IT "using an outside consultant".
- v) To clarify the role of the Chief Executive and the Campaigns Department, in particular integrating the General Election Unit into Campaigns and making it accountable to the Campaigns and Communications Committee rather than the Chief Executive.
- vi) To integrate the Policy Unit into a new Policy and Research Department.

This demonstrates a clear shift in the party's thinking in favour of a more professional, expert-driven, electorally-focused headquarters. It also shows tensions between the Campaigns Department and the Chief Executive, the closure of the Policy Unit as a stand-alone Department and the beginnings of outsourcing.²⁴⁶ To a large extent, the Medium-Term Review recommendations were implemented, aided in part by the rearrangement of Policy, Research and Communications described above, thereby enabling the party at Headquarters to benefit from the increase in Short money. The structural changes were undertaken, but an overall shift toward professionalising the party, did not proceed at the same pace. The significant power around Chris Rennard, as both Director of Campaigns and then as Chief Executive is detailed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. One interviewee explained: "One of the problems was that Chris was the sort of boss who wasn't about to appoint anybody that was half as bright as he was and that might just give him some grief".²⁴⁷ IT and fundraising were not outsourced, and the work of 'Lib Dems Calling' was brought more closely under the control of the Campaigns Department. Before stepping aside as Chief Executive Chris Rennard proposed that the job description change once more making the CEO accountable directly and jointly to the Leader and President,²⁴⁸ rather than the Campaigns and Communications Committee, arguably a further centralisation of authority.

The Bones Commission

The party's next major review of the party's internal affairs did not take place until 2008 when leader Nick Clegg, president Simon Hughes and chief-executive Chris Rennard jointly commissioned Chris Bones to undertake a wide-ranging review of the party's operations. This is discussed in previous chapters, particularly on campaigns where it had an impact, although its main recommendations were on the question of party resources, and it is examined more thoroughly here. Aimed at 'creating the conditions for continued and increasing success at the next general election and beyond' (Bones Commission 2008), the Bones Commission was a review carried out in early 2008 by Professor Chris Bones (former Dean of Henley Business School), Duncan Greenland (Chair of FFAC), Kate Parminster (charity professional) and Paul Burstow MP (Chief Whip).

²⁴⁶ Interview 61.2010

²⁴⁷ Interview 25. 2010

²⁴⁸ Interview 41. 2010

Bones was an interesting choice to chair this review, since his experience in the party was limited to having chaired his local party (Oxford East) in 2005, and although a long standing party member who joined the SDP in 1981, he had a low profile in the organisation. At the time of the review he was Dean of the Henley Business School, and his website there lists his areas of interest as 'strategic human resources management, organisation change, communication and engagement'.

²⁴⁹ The remit of the Commission, as described by the authors, was 'not to criticise what exists today' but to 'think forward and to describe the organisation we need to campaign effectively such that we double the number of MPs we have in two elections' (Bones Commission, p1). It was seen by the press, however, as a direct challenge to Rennard's authority, to the constitution that gives power to the party grassroots and represented significant centralisation.²⁵⁰ The intention of the committee, its recommendations and their legacy remain the subject of some disagreement within the party. It is, however, fair to say that the Commission attempted to create some clarity of organisation, and that such clarity could make influence over the organisation easier for some of those wishing to exercise it. The use of language and terminology within the report confirms that the party is committed to the establishment of a more professional party, indeed the introductory notes to the report highlight that "we have used the term 'voluntary party' to refer to members of the party who perform various roles and functions, and the term 'professional party' to refer to both those employed by the federal party, national, state, regional and local parties and also the Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats (POLD)." (Bones Commission p3). Whilst this terminology may appear semantic or simply axiomatic, for a party with a tradition of devolving power to its members this use of the professional/voluntary dichotomy tells us something about the image the party wishes to convey, not only externally, but crucially also internally. The party's staffing arrangements and structure is summarised in an organigram, (attached in Appendix G), from October 2009, which combines paid staff with unpaid party officials but which nonetheless helps to provide an overall idea of the departments, their size, complexity and hierarchy. An updated version from October 2010 is contained in Appendix H, and is discussed in Chapter 9. It demonstrates the significant loss of staffing numbers since entering coalition, and where these losses have been suffered.

One of the concrete proposals to come out of the Bones report was that the Federal Executive establish a Chief Officers Group (COG) "delegating to it responsibility for developing and ensuring the execution of Party Strategy" (Bones Commission, p.31). Essentially this means that the FE will cede power to COG, an unelected body led by the leader, described by one interviewee as FE the "non-executive board" and COG the "executive board".²⁵¹ The report notes some recent successful decisions that have helped streamline the party's strategy for conveying their messages to the public. In particular the report notes that combining the role of Leader's Press Secretary and Director of Media has created a more coherent and ultimately less confused media strategy. Of course this also means that the Press Secretary of the leader now also speaks for the party and vice versa. Additionally, the development of phone bank capacity and increased

²⁴⁹ <http://www.henley.reading.ac.uk/about/staff/christopher-bones.aspx> (accessed 01.04.2011).

²⁵⁰ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article4340213.ece> (accessed 10.03.2011).

²⁵¹ Interview 14 2009.

fundraising capabilities highlights that the party recognises the need to professionalise these operations in order to compete with the other two main parties. In the very simplest terms, the professionalisation of the party can be seen with an increase in the trend to recruit senior staff from outside the party ranks, the use of headhunters and professional search and selection companies. The party has historically recruited from its activist base, largely depending on party loyalty to supplement low salaries. In more recent years the party has hired professionals, who may also be party sympathisers but experience of the world outside Westminster is now considered a distinct advantage.²⁵² This strategy was boosted in 2007 when the party appointed a raft of new media advisers to specialise in specific policy areas and recruited the former political director of Bell Pottinger Public Affairs, Jonathan Oates to head up the party's communication department. Clegg is particularly noted for employing personally chosen individuals, including Lena Pietsch and Polly Mackenzie, rather than relying on long-term party bureaucrats.

The report also noted a need for the party to be both centralised in some areas and decentralised in others, thus achieving a coherent strategic vision whilst also allowing for 'individual initiatives'. The tension between a coherent centrally led strategy whilst also allowing party members to feel involved is a leitmotif throughout the report. Whilst fears of those who had submitted feedback to the report highlighted a lack of transparency and accountability with regards to resource allocation and decision-making, the report appears to stress that greater centralisation is inevitable in order to maximise electoral support. Indeed the report noted that "Generally speaking, small organisations work best when they are simple, have few layers and ruthlessly exclude duplication." (Bones Commission, 2008, p10) In sum, the Bones Commission represented a significant development for the party. Whilst it did not change the policy making process, the report has important structural implications and is evidence of the drive to professionalise. Moreover, it self-consciously aimed at 'vote-maximising'. The heart of the report is in its desire to see power shift from the grassroots to the leader.

The Review's recommendations were brought in to effect throughout 2008 and 2009 on a trial basis, with progress to be assessed after two years. Early indications are, however, quite mixed. One insider put it bluntly: "You don't just get change because you publish a report".²⁵³ Another described it as a "huge disappointment",²⁵⁴ while others welcomed its streamlining and professionalising shift.²⁵⁵ In particular the proposed Capability Board and Technology Board have both already become defunct. Proposals on fundraising, candidate selection and merging compliance with the party's Board of Trustees, have been successful. There has been noted success in bringing outside professionals to the party's fundraising, candidates and conference departments. Most importantly COG has been met with some resistance and criticism, but appears to have survived. The Leader's attendance at COG meetings is somewhat sporadic, but the structure is there should he need it, and is expected to be constituted at some stage.²⁵⁶ It is perhaps the general election of 2010 that has had the greatest impact on the party's

²⁵² Interview 44, 2009.

²⁵³ Interview 9, 2009.

²⁵⁴ Interview 54, 2010.

²⁵⁵ Interview 25, 2010.

²⁵⁶ Interview 54, 2010.

implementation of the Bones Commission's recommendations, and these are considered in the final chapter.

iv) The party on the ground

Local parties are able to raise their own funds and each party which raises in excess of £25k must report this annually in keeping with PPERA legislation. Typically this involves approximately 100 local parties, which suggests an income overall at the local level in excess of £2.5m. Interviewees often cited a direct correlation between those parties able to fundraise in excess of £25K and those able to mount a sufficient campaign to get an MP elected.

Firstly membership subscriptions are paid to the various state parties, from which the federal party raises a levy. The size of this levy is the subject of debate and a vote at federal conference and is usually in the region of 40%. This provides the 'general fund' (see above) which pays for the day to day running of Cowley Street. The remainder is divided between the state party (for instance the English Party – which also houses staff in Cowley Street to take care of membership and candidates), the regional party and the local party. This division is agreed upon following a complex series of incentives that are agreed between the various layers of the party and may include incentives, for instance, returning a greater proportion of income subscription that comes from new members in order to incentivise local parties to recruit rather than just renew membership. The Bones Commission considered this in its 2008 review, but would have been unable to change this without a full conference debate in order to make the constitutional changes necessary. Since constitutional change requires the support of two thirds of conference delegates the Commission dropped this, although there remains a view held among some within the party that all funds should come into the federal party and remain there to be distributed in a more centralised and needs-based system.²⁵⁷

In theory then, local parties have significant funds at their own disposal. In addition they may receive grants from ALDC and other party bodies but it would be false to say they are able to exercise absolute autonomy. Firstly local parties are required to pay a levy to their Regional party, usually about 15%. Regional parties also receive income from bi-annual lotteries and the central party, and play an important role in carrying out the strategy of targeting, described in Chapter 6. This strategy in turn guides decisions that govern which local parties the regional party will financially support, often by paying for Regional Media Coordinators and Area Agents, for example, rather than in the direct giving of cash. These staff are trained, if not seconded directly, from the central party. One local party activist summed it up "They bring in national campaigners and they decide how its run".²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Interview 25 2010.
²⁵⁸ Interview 70 2011.

v) Patronage and peerages

Until May 2010 the Leader of the Liberal Democrats had been unable to distribute positions in government to his team. He had, however, enjoyed the power to recommend peerages, and has done so in significant numbers. One interviewee described this as 'influence, not power' since the power lay with the Prime Minister who was able to increase or reduce the number of peerages offered to each party, and so force the party leader to drop a few from his list, or

Table 16. Number of Liberal Democrat MPs and Peers 1988-2011

Year (January)	Total MPs	Total Peers	Total	Peers as %
1988	20	57*	77	74
1989	20	54*	74	73
1990	20	53*	73	73
1991	22	55*	77	71
1992	20	56*	76	74
1993	20	58*	78	74
1994	20	54*	74	73
1995	20	52*	72	72
1996	20	56*	76	74
1997	46	57*	103	55
1998	46	68	114	59
1999	46	69	115	60
2000	46	54	100	54
2001	46	62	108	57
2002	52	65	117	55
2003	52	65	117	55
2004	52	64	116	55
2005	51	68	119	57
2006	62	74	136	54
2007	62	78	140	58
2008	62	78	140	56
2009	62	72	134	53
2010	62	72	134	55
2011	57	83	140	59

increase it, at relatively short notice.²⁵⁹ In 2009 of the 102 individuals that had held parliamentary seats for the party since 1988, 31% had stood down, lost their seats or retired, 42% of the total were made Peers, 13% died, 8% were elected MEPs or MSPs and 5% continued to fight to regain their parliamentary seat.²⁶⁰ Table 16 shows that Peers have continually outnumbered MPs since 1988, reducing from just over three-quarters of the parliamentary party to just over one half with

²⁵⁹ Interview 30, 2010.

²⁶⁰ This data is triangulated by House of Lords Whips Office staff.

the post 1997 general election intake.

In 1999 the party introduced a system for electing an 'Interim Peers Panel', (interim because it was party policy to replace the House of Lords with an elected chamber). The Peers Panel is open to anyone that had been a party member for over a year providing they meet the qualification criteria for being a Parliamentary candidate. In 1999 a total of 180 members put themselves forward. Election publicity material is then circulated to the electorate which comprises autumn federal conference delegates. In 1999 the votes were redistributed using the single transferable vote which required 140 'rounds' to elect 50 members to the Panel. The rules governing the Interim Peers Panel were changed following a decision taken by the Federal Executive in May 2004, which introduced an Advisory Panel²⁶¹ which would make recommendations to the Leader from the list, but also clarified that the Leader was under no obligation and would have the final say. By 2006 the realisation struck that the list bore little resemblance to the Peers actually appointed; those putting themselves forward had dropped to 47, from which 30 were elected to the list, and dropped further to 45 prospects in 2008 and 41 in 2010.²⁶² Since becoming leader in 1988, Nick Clegg has appointed 24 new peers of which only eight were from the Interim Peers List.²⁶³ They were appointed in two tranches, in May 2010, when nine new peers were created, none of whom came from the interim list.²⁶⁴ Clegg's 2008 list comprised:

Floella Benjamin	television presenter and children's campaigner
Mike German	former Deputy First Minister (Wales)
Meral Hussein Ece	councillor, Islington
Kenneth MacDonald	former Director of Public Prosecutions
Kate Parminter	former chief executive of CPRE and member of internal Lib Dem inquiry 'The Bones Commission'
John Shipley	councillor, Newcastle upon Tyne
Richard Allan	former MP
Matthew Taylor	former MP
Phil Willis	former MP

Mike German, Meral Hussein Ece and John Shipley have long and distinguished history as Liberal Democrat Councillors and their appointment will have been widely in keeping with the party's history of bringing experienced local politicians to the House of Lords. Richard Allan, Matthew Owen and Phil Willis similarly reflect the tradition of bringing former MPs to the second chamber. Experienced campaigners and prominent individuals from the charity sector, such as Kate Parminter and Kenneth MacDonald are likely to be broadly welcomed by the party membership, although Parminter's role as one of three members of the Bones Commission raised a few eyebrows. There was, however, disquiet in the party's activist and blogging community that none

²⁶¹ The Interim Peers Advisory Panel would consist of the President, the Vice Presidents, the Leader of the Lords Party (or his/her nominee), the Chief Whip in the Lords (or his/her nominee) and one representative from the Commons Party.

²⁶² The 2010 Interim Peers List was a 'top-up' to the existing list due to traditional creation of more peers after a general election.

²⁶³ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/15-new-liberal-democrat-peers-appointed-22130.html> (accessed 01.03.2011).

²⁶⁴ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/nine-new-lib-dem-peers-appointed-19722.html> (accessed 07.03.2011).

of the new intake were from the Interim Peers List.²⁶⁵ This is explained by some in the party elite as a consequence of difficulties that arise from political disbarment among individuals with distinguished careers, who are about to retire, for example.²⁶⁶ In November 2010 the second tranche were appointed of whom eight were from the list and are noted by italics:²⁶⁷

<i>Dee Doocey</i>	<i>2006 peers list – Chair of the London Assembly</i>
<i>Jonathon Marks</i>	<i>2008 peers list - QC</i>
<i>Monroe Palmer</i>	<i>2008 peers list – Chair of Lib Dem Friends of Israel</i>
<i>Ben Stoneham</i>	<i>2008 peers list – HQ Operations Director</i>
<i>Sal Brinton</i>	<i>2010 peers list – Executive Director of Association of Universities, in the East of England</i>
<i>Nicol Stephen</i>	<i>ex MP</i>
<i>Susan Kramer</i>	<i>ex MP</i>
<i>Jenny Randerson</i>	<i>ex AM</i>
Claire Tyler	chief executive of relate
Paul Strasburger	businessman and philanthropist
Mike Storey	former leader of Liverpool City Council
John Sharkey	chairman of 2010 general election campaign
Raj Loomba	businessman and campaigner for widow's rights
Judith Jolly	campaigner, activist and Chair of Devon & Cornwall LDs
Qurban Hussain	deputy group leader on Luton Borough Council

This represents an even bolder decision to select some but not others from the list. The inclusion of Paul Strasburger has attracted some attention, having joined the party relatively recently and also making a series of sizeable one-off donations to the campaign fund.²⁶⁸ The 'Cash for Honours' inquiry of 2007 cleared the party of any wrong-doing, although questions continually arise in the media, about the link between donors and peerages. It is argued by some in the party that such questions have become so frequent that the appointment of people that have made donations may be in part designed to demonstrate transparency. It is, therefore, difficult to draw clear conclusions about the nominations of peerages. What is clear is that the party appoints a significant number in proportion to its MPs, that former MPs and Councillors continue to make up the majority, and that the Interim Peers List agreed upon by the grassroots members in a full ballot of conference representatives, is largely overlooked by the leadership.

To simply 'follow the money' would be to miss a good deal of the subtle changes that have taken place within the parliamentary and central party over a period of 22 years. Big donations are headline-grabbing, particularly the £2.4m donation, eventually ruled permissible, from Michael Brown's company Fifth Avenue Partners, but was a one-off. It is the regular income from membership subscriptions and Short money upon which the party relies, bases its annual budget

²⁶⁵ Interview 36.2009

²⁶⁶ Interview 30.2010

²⁶⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11797202> (accessed 07.03.2011).

²⁶⁸ <http://www.thisisbath.co.uk/news/Big-Lib-Dem-donor-Paul-Strasburger-peer/article-2916099-detail/article.html> (accessed 07.03.2011).

and where trends can be observed. Outside of these usual channels the decision by hedge-funder and Orange Book co-editor, Paul Marshall, to give £1m to rekindle Centre Forum, a think-tank closely associated with the party, is worthy of note. While the organisation is in no way financially connected to the party and it would be wrong to suggest there is any financial incentive to making such a donation, it does appear to represent a change in thinking about the best way to see the party do well, giving preference to a think-tank over the usual campaign fund spent at party Headquarters.

v) Conclusion

This chapter highlights two specific moments when the party aimed to change its organisation; 1997 and 2008. The ambitions set out in both the Medium Term Review and the Bones Commission give us an insight into the priorities of the leadership. In summary their proposals demonstrate shifts in emphasis toward:

- an increase in media and communications resourcing and coordination;
- an increase in portfolio-specific research in preference to general party policy staff;
- the desire to use outside consultants and outsourcing;
- the use of expert search and selection recruitment companies in the hiring of staff.

These reflect a greater degree of control over what Panebianco refers to as the 'zones of uncertainty' and are a strong indication of moves toward the more 'electoral-professional' model he describes. Specifically the dominant coalition has emerged through increasing control over five of the six resources at its disposal (Panebianco 1988):

- i) Competency – the increasing use of specialists in the party's research operation seen through the development of a shadow cabinet and the prioritising of expertise over party loyalty.
- ii) Environmental relations – it is reasonable to expect that together with the increase in hiring people from outside the party, particularly those with corporate experience, will involve closer working with external bodies, such as charities, NGOs and think tanks.
- iii) Communication – there is strong evidence that the party has prioritised its press office and when faced with staffing decisions has put this above research support, in an attempt to be seen as a credible electoral force. It controls the output of literature by local parties by situating HQ campaign staff in target seats at election times.
- iv) Financing – there is no evidence of the party extending its authority over areas of finance previously outside its control, although the PPERA legislation has necessitated centralised compliance, and there has been a concerted effort to improve the party's fundraising from an operation at the centre.
- v) Recruitment – the party has increasingly relied upon outside consultants for advice, making greater use of outsourcing and recruitment specialists in the appointment of professional staff.

In this aspect of party life then, it is possible to infer that the party has professionalized according to our earlier definition. The only area where the party is unable to demonstrate control is over the formal rules, that is to say the federal constitution that continues to restrain the leadership over policy (see Chapter 5). As has already been explained the federal party itself does not have control of all monies coming in to the party, with local parties declaring income over £25k, but exercising a large degree of autonomy over how this is spent, and smaller less active parties raising smaller sums which bear little relevance to the overall picture. Interviews suggest that the party elite would prefer to have greater control over these funds but are unwilling to propose the constitutional changes that this would necessitate in a clear acknowledgement of the hostility this would provoke among the grassroots. Instead the party operates a complex system of levies and grants, up and down its hierarchy. In summary membership subscriptions are paid to the state parties, a large proportion of which ends up with the federal party, who return a proportion of it to the regions, but keep control through training, targeting and staffing, of how that is spent. Local parties can fundraise separately through events, raffles and dinners but it needs the support of the central party if it is to mount a credible local campaign, and is therefore inclined to trade some autonomy in return. In spite of this, in order to conclude that the party has centralized we would expect it to have complete control over monies coming in at every level, and this is not the case.

Much of the literature about party resources focuses on the timing and likely causes of change (Harmel and Janda 1994) and it is clear from the evidence set out in this chapter that the Lib Dems have made their most significant changes post-election (1997), and post leadership-change (2008). In 1997 the party in parliament had more than doubled and the Short money that followed brought more staff and more professional staff in Westminster at least. In an attempt to share this benefit with the party in central office some reorganisation followed, but this highlighted the 'us' (Cowley Street) and 'them' (Parliamentary staff) culture that pervaded the party. At the same time Kennedy made his mark in establishing the 'Shadow Cabinet', which benefited from centrally financed research support, while the parliamentary party also experienced some division within its ranks in creating 'backbenchers' for the first time.²⁶⁹ When Kennedy resigned and Campbell became leader, resolving these tensions became a top priority and one that was continued with renewed rigour by Clegg in the setting up of COG.

When the party's resources are reduced it makes redundancies, and when the party's resources are increased it hires more people. Money may indicate the extent to which the party can put into practice the ambitions it sets out in papers such as the Medium Term Review and the Bones Commission, although it is not a crucial factor with regard to the organisational dynamics to which the party aspires. Chapter 6 has shown how the dominant culture at Cowley Street was not one that embraced professionalism, but did become increasingly centralised in response to the growth of the party bureaucracy. In addition we should note that there is little doubt that across all parties the legal requirements to comply with the PPERA legislation in 2000, has contributed to centralisation. A change in personnel and the overhaul of party business represented by the Bones Commission shows the inclination toward an increasingly top-down organisation. The party

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Interview 59, 2009.

increasingly values professional expertise over party loyalty in a process of adaptation that reflects the superiority of the party elite over the grassroots by controlling the zones of uncertainty. If any further proof were needed this can be seen in the Leader's choice of nominations for peerages, which has rendered the much debated and sought-after Interim Peers List of little worth.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, however, is the best evidence yet that the party in public office is able to subordinate the party elsewhere. While the resources it has at its disposal include Special Advisors and the might of the civil service, the party elsewhere has lost short money and lost a significant proportion of its staff through subsequent redundancies.²⁷⁰ Although the party leadership can point to the policy making process as emblematic of the party's commitment to devolving power, being in coalition inevitably challenges this goal. Clegg has demonstrated commitment to centralising the party's organisational structures, putting an inevitable squeeze on the ability of the party's grassroots to exert any real or significant influence. The consequences of the coalition on party finances are discussed in Chapter 9.

In conclusion then, this chapter suggests that the distribution of party resources, both human and financial, is something the elite wish to control. The evidence in this chapter supports H2, that professionalisation has taken place, but is less clear on H1 and fails to demonstrate centralisation, largely because local parties are still able to raise and spend funds autonomously. The distribution of the 'air-war' element of the campaigns budget, described earlier, is evidence of centralisation but this is only one element of spending. It is, however, clear, that recent moves by the leadership point to an ongoing process combining professionalisation with centralisation, and the aim is to secure greater control over this area of party life.

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Early reports of the coalition recommend an increase in Special Advisors and a significant increase in the resources made available to the Lib-Dems – see 'United We Stand', Akash Pawn, Institute for Government report, 2010.

Chapter 8 – Findings and Conclusions

i) Introduction

The Liberal Democrats are not like their Westminster rivals. Firstly the party was created from the merger of two distinctly separate political parties, with separate ideologies and organisations. Secondly, it was designed with a federal structure, with devolution at its core, and gave significant powers to the grassroots members, particularly over policy-making. Finally, it has, until 2010, spent its entire Westminster life in opposition. These three factors are a constant refrain in this thesis, and appear to have shaped the party at every level and at every phase of its development. This background is important: if it is possible to see the evolution of the party from infancy through adolescence, it is possible to predict how it might mature, in this case, when confronted with the opportunity to take part in government.

This thesis demonstrates three clear phases of development between 1988 and 2010. Firstly, the period from 1988 to 1997, when the party at Westminster was small and maverick, the party at Headquarters was almost bankrupt and reliant on amateurs and volunteers, and the party grassroots were radical, unpredictable and policy-motivated. Secondly, the period from 1997-2006, when the party at Westminster grew and professionalised, the party at Headquarters also grew and centralised, and the party on the ground gained significant experience running local councils, sharing the elite's vote and seat-maximising goals. Thirdly, during the period from 2006 to 2010, the party began to experience the effects of electoral success. The party at Westminster was hit by a series of shocks that resulted in three leaders in as many years. The party at Headquarters also lost its 'leader' and the Bones Commission recommended the reorganisation of the party so that grassroots committees were superseded by the leadership-run Chief Officers Group.²⁷¹

Although these factors cannot be considered to be causes of the 2010 coalition government, the power that they delivered to the leadership, arguably gave Nick Clegg the freedom to negotiate a coalition agreement that would have previously been inconceivable. The leadership still leads a party that is bound by a constitution designed to give power to the grassroots, that votes on policy at the twice-yearly federal conference, that elects the leader, president and numerous committees directly, and that continues to give autonomy to the party at the local level. The political reality that has grown up around that constitution, however, has produced a party that has adapted to the needs of modern electoral competition and evolved into a professional vote-maximising and office-seeking organisation at the same time. The years 1997 and 2008 were pivotal moments in this process.

This chapter sums up the evidence provided in previous chapters in order to support these conclusions. To begin with there is a re-cap of the findings set out in Chapters 5 (policy), Chapter 6 (campaigns) and Chapter 7 (resources). Next we examine these findings in more detail and

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These conclusions are summarised in table xix.

draw a number of conclusions from them in order to test the hypotheses set out at the introduction. Finally we return to the theoretical context in which the work was designed and examine factors that may contribute to causation.

ii) Findings

Parties born & raised in opposition.....have been able to exploit the only resource at their disposal: the organisation. (Panebianco 1988).

The organisation of the Liberal Democrats demonstrates a party that has evolved while in opposition, with two separate power-bases, one in Parliament and one at party Headquarters, one representing the party elite, the other the grassroots. The analysis of three key areas of activity - policy, campaigns and the distribution of resources - clearly demonstrates that the party has experienced organisational change, with centralisation at Headquarters and professionalisation at Westminster. As previously mentioned, the difference between these two processes is that the first is concerned with organisational power, the second with organisational complexity. Thus there are different phases, types and causes of party organisational change. Here 1997 represents the moment when the party began to professionalise in Parliament and centralise at Headquarters. 2008 represents the beginning of process of greater centralisation in both of these party arenas, drawing power closer to the leader.

Policy

Chapter 5 explores the policy-making process which, formally speaking, has undergone very little change in the past 20 years and continues to be in the hands of the federal conference. The control of this, however, is the FCC, an elected party committee, the 2003 review of which demonstrated an awareness of the need to balance this formal purpose with the media opportunity and fundraising potential of the event itself. This represents a clear shift toward a more professional output from the federal conference, and emphasises the event as one in which the party aims to present a united front. It may not always be successful in doing so but the intention is to maximise the opportunities the event offers, particularly in the build up to a general election. The case-study on tuition fees demonstrates that the Leader continues to be restrained on issues of policy, and the case-study on Iraq demonstrates that the Leader can be bounced in to action by the grassroots. The leader has traditionally written the party manifesto, and continues to do so, assisted by various professionals, colleagues and committees. It may be that in this area – one in which he is clearly able to exercise power – the status of policy made at conference will continue to be downgraded and made ‘aspirational’. It is clear, particularly from the greater attention paid to elections to its Federal Policy Committee, that the grassroots have the final say in matters of policy and take this role seriously, but the status of that policy may be shifting, and will be one area worthy of closer scrutiny in future.

Campaigns

Chapter 6 focuses on the party's campaigning tradition, and in particular on the targeting strategy pioneered by Chris Rennard. As the 1997 general election and numerous by-election wins demonstrate, the strategy was successful, popular and coherent. The party focused heavily on this strategy, which combined with PPERA legislation, private polling and the growth in electronic media, led to the centralising of party operations at Cowley Street. With a more volunteer-based culture, however, there is evidence that professionalisation was met with some resistance here. There is no doubt that Chris Rennard was held in high esteem for having delivered a strategy that worked and brought the party, at Westminster and at the local level, closer to power. While his legacy is important in teaching the party the primacy of this targeting strategy, the appointment of Chris Fox, with corporate experience and a greater focus on professionalism, resources and delivery, has signalled a significant culture change at party HQ.

Activists and campaigners remain important to the party, and are encouraged to make use of the online community that enjoys lively and un-moderated discussion, first through CIX and now through blogging. There is no evidence that the party leadership interferes with candidate selection, although there is some evidence that the process could be centrally controlled during by-elections, and that, as the mini-case studies testify, a more subtle and discrete pressure could be brought to bear on outcomes in the selection of candidates for target seats. Overall, then, with regard to campaigns, the party has controlled the flow of money and of information from Headquarters, but appears to have done so with the consent, willingness and encouragement by a membership who share the spoils in local government.

Resources

Chapter 7 examined the use of resources, both human and financial. The party has for a long time claimed that it is a lack of financial resources is one of the greatest barriers to success. This may have been what led the party to its targeting strategy in the first place, but there is little evidence to support claims that it is this alone that has prevented significant breakthrough. Local parties are given a degree of autonomy over their own finances, while the federal party claims a percentage of income and then returns this to local parties that do as they are told. At the same time, the party at Westminster has been able to make good use of its income from Short money to professionalise its efforts and develop a 'shadow cabinet'. Prior to 1997 the formalising of portfolios in this way was ridiculed by the other parties, but this plucky move when combined with a doubling of seats, enabled the Liberal Democrats to insist on being taken seriously. Indeed this aping of government, in a move to be seen as a government in waiting, is significant in the party's incremental progress toward the eventual sharing of power in 2010.

iii) Hypotheses

Returning to the original research questions raised in this thesis, Hypothesis 1 states that the Liberal Democrats, as a party interested in maximising seats in order to gain executive power, underwent a process of centralisation. This hypothesis can be confirmed with regard to the party's campaigns department, based on the research conducted. The second hypothesis posits that the Lib Dems, as a party interested in maximising seats in order to gain executive power, underwent a process of professionalisation, which is supported in all aspects of party life; policy-making, campaigns and resource distribution. The party then, is succumbing to the 'iron-law of oligarchy'. The process of professionalisation has been clear, although the process of centralisation is less straightforward: the leader has come closer to, but in the end is still a little way from having, free-reign over his party.

These conclusions present scholars with something of a paradox. The process described above suggests the subordination of the grassroots by the leadership, although in the Liberal Democrats this is not necessarily the case: at any rate, the membership appear to have been willing and compliant and to welcome a strengthened leadership. This is in part due to the factors explained at the beginning. Being a party that originated from the merger of two separate parties, its members are skilled in the art of compromise. Secondly being a federal and devolved party has given it experience in government at the state and local level. Finally the experience of being permanently in opposition has made the party weary, and prepared to take a gamble. It has, simply, had less to lose and has been willing therefore to trade some internal democracy for stronger and more ambitious leadership. Given that much of the analysis pointed to the 'credibility gap' as its greatest barrier to power, the risk appears to have been cautiously calculated (see Russell & Fieldhouse, 2005). In return the leadership have, thus far, left the sacred party constitution intact. It needs the membership, particularly local activists, and particularly if its electoral fortunes begin to reverse. Whether these activists are as skilled in the art of survival as their predecessors is hard to predict, particularly with the more professional and ambitious culture the party elite have encouraged. This would make a return to the 1988-1997 phase unlikely, although that might attract a new and enlivened activist base. More interesting, perhaps is the impact of government on the party elite itself and the extent to which it begins to fashion the party as a small but significant permanent feature at the centre of British politics and one that, providing it remains above a critical mass at Westminster, may be able to continue in the role of kingmaker. This is considered in more detail in the Epilogue (Chapter 9).

Table 17 represents a summary of conclusions in order to simply and effectively demonstrate the three phases described, and the impact of each on the three areas of party arenas this study has focused on.

Table 17. Summary of conclusions

	1988-1997	1997-2006	2006-2011
Westminster	20 MPs Maverick Rebellious	52-62 MPs Professionalising United	57 MPs Dominant Factionalizing
Headquarters	Nearly bankrupt Amateur Chaotic	Increased funds Centralising Stable	Professionalising Subordinated Stable
Grassroots	Radical Rebellious Suspicious	Office holders Compliant Wary	Professionalising Ambitious Ambivalent

The period between 1988 and 1997 is a party with very few MPs, mostly from the celtic fringes, and renowned for colourful characters. At the same time Cowley Street faced bankruptcy and survived following mass redundancies, reliance on volunteers and a somewhat ill defined but evolving operational strategy. Grassroots members were radical and rebellious, using the federal conference as a way to put the leader in his place and where defeats over policy were more frequent. Between 1997 and 2006 the party experienced a period of professionalisation, particularly in Westminster where numbers and corresponding funds significantly increased and the 'Shadow Cabinet' was developed. At the same time the targeting strategy coming from Cowley Street had paid off, and where a more centralised, focused and stable operation began to emerge, culminating in the promotion to Chief Executive of the Campaigns Director. The party's grassroots benefited from a phase of improved training and the success at local government continued, matched by some success in the new devolved state parliaments. Between 2006 and 2010 the party experienced a further stage of change in which it suffered from a number of shocks and scandals resulting in three leaders in as many years. The leadership candidates that came forward, Clegg and Huhne, both represented a modernising tendency within the party. The targeting strategy that had served the party so well appeared to be floundering. Shortly after Clegg's success a new CEO was appointed, embracing professionalism at Headquarters, and coupled with the Bones Commission's streamlining proposals to party committees, gave the new leader the platform from which to launch an ambitious and successful campaign for executive office.

With regard to the hypotheses posed by this study, we are able to summarise that with regard to policy-making and the distribution of resources, the party has experienced a phase of professionalisation in support of H2. With regard to campaigns this has been preceded by a period of centralisation, supporting H1. These findings are summarized below :

Table 18. Summary of findings

	Policy	Campaigns	Resources
Hypothesis 1	No	Yes	No
Hypothesis 2	Yes	No	Yes

iv) Causes of party organisational change

Since the party merger in 1988 two key moments that prompted phases of transition can be pinpointed and are summarised in Table 17; 1997 and 2008. The first is when the party doubled its numbers at Westminster. The second is a more gradual process that began with the 2005 lacklustre general election and resignation of Charles Kennedy in 2006, and then entailed the turbulent leadership battle that followed, the short tenure of Menzies Campbell, and the leadership of Nick Clegg. In response to each of these, the leadership reacted with a review of its affairs, in 1997 the Medium Term Review and in 2008 the Bones Commission. Party organisational change theory, turning increasingly to studies of individual parties, provides a number of competing options by way of explanation. Panebianco sets out three questions in order to arrive at a conclusion about causation, beginning with the 'direction of change', and asks whether parties evolve or whether change is driven by political development. The second question asks if change is intentional or not, and the third asks if the origins are exogenous or endogenous, in other words are the drivers external or internal to the party (Panebianco 1988). This study suggests that while traces of the party's origins remain, and could be said to affect elements of change, it has been political development that has been the more influential factor. It also strongly supports the theory of intentional change, since reviews and their recommendations are an empirical factor here. We turn finally to the question of where the drivers or causes for change originate.

Harmel and Janda develop this theme, and offer a number of possible explanations based on internal factors such as leadership change and dominant faction displacement, and external factors including constitutional reform, public funding, the emergence of new parties, but most significantly a 'shock' that relates to the party's primary goal (Harmel and Janda 1994). The change in 1997 was clearly not triggered by leadership change or dominant faction displacement. Even if it is accepted that Ashdown's leadership, and in particular his 'project' of closer co-operation with Labour was dealt a fatal blow by the 1997 result, it does not follow that the organisational changes that occurred at that time would have been caused by this – indeed Ashdown's resignation came a full two years later. The result did indeed have an impact on the party, but by the time the Medium Term Review was drafted the party had already put in place the beginnings of a shadow cabinet, and party headquarters had already developed a sophisticated targeting strategy. What changed was having the injection of funds to formalise and expand on these existing operations. Electoral defeat, or 'shock' as the 'mother of all party change' lacks resonance in a third and smaller party, whose definition of 'success' and 'failure' will be different from those of its rivals, for whom executive office is the primary goal. For the Lib-Dems, a vote-

maximising and increasingly office-seeking party, success could be defined as one in which their target number of MPs was met or exceeded (1997) or not (2005). In 1997 it was electoral success that drove organisational change. The series of events that triggered the 2008 Bones Commission are different. The resignation of Charles Kennedy accompanied by his confession of alcoholism, an investigation into the £2.4m donation by Michael Brown, and a series of salacious tabloid headlines involving the private lives of potential leadership candidates Simon Hughes and Mark Oaten, shook the party. Menzies Campbell's short period in office failed to restore confidence and stability, and the need for a change in leadership both in Parliament and at Headquarters became more urgent. It was therefore a change in leadership, and particularly the events that led to Nick Clegg becoming leader, that signalled the 2008 Party Reform 'Bones' Commission, and the organisational change it prompted. There is no doubt Nick Clegg's ambitions were a game-changer for the party, and he was well aware of the potential difficulties its fragmented organisation could create. Moves toward a more streamlined and efficient party strengthened his hand and gave him the freedom to negotiate the coalition of 2010. This theory is supported by evidence in Chapter 9, that explains the change in the dominant faction, in this case those behind *The Orange Book*.

The Liberal Democrats have experienced two key periods of change, one that appears to have been primarily caused by external factors, that is the general election of 1997, the other that appears to have been driven by internal factors, specifically the leadership of Nick Clegg. Although there is broad support for a developmental view of change it seems these specific events triggered reforms that would not have 'just happened' otherwise. This also supports a more integrated theory that combines these causal factors (Harmel, Tan et al. 1995; Harmel 2002). This thesis also demonstrates that the party has experienced two types of change, one that is best described as professionalisation and the other as centralisation. Chapter 9 argues that Clegg's leadership is drawing these together and that the period studied is transitional.

v) Individuals, interests, institutions and ideas

Clearly the individuals that have played significant roles in the phases of organisational change set out above have been crucial, in particular Paddy Ashdown, Charles Kennedy, Nick Clegg, and Chris Rennard. Chapter 9 offers reflections on the coalition and in particular the crucial roles played by those behind the scenes, for example Paul Marshall and David Laws. At the same time the interests that have been important to the party have taken a side-ways shift. In particular the role of local councillors in the central phase of professionalisation have been less evident in the third stage of party development. It is unclear whether new interests are coming to the fore. This may be simply a function of size, since the party has as many, at times more, officers at the local level, leaving few non-councillors to go around. The institution, represented in party terms by the constitution, remains unchanged. Interviewees, particularly those on the modernising wing of the party have hinted that its reform is inevitable since the document itself is no longer 'fit for purpose'.²⁷² Such a self-conscious move toward reform would be to break the intra-party tensions

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Interview 33, 2010.

described in this thesis wide-open, and many interviewees have described the leaders reluctance to do so. There has in any event, been significant change without it. This leads to the final area, that of ideas, where there is scope for considerably more research. The party has reached a kind of organisational maturity that is evident from the emergence of ideological factions. The centre-right leadership by Nick Clegg of a centre-left party itself suggests a centralised organisation. The party has always avoided left-right labels, and appears more keen than ever to resist them, in a further demonstration of political expediency, enabling potential coalition with partners on either side.

Chapter 9 – Reflections on the 2010 Conservative Liberal-Democrat coalition.²⁷³

i) Introduction

The Liberal Democrats that Nick Clegg led in to coalition with the Conservatives in May 2010, this thesis has demonstrated, were a very different party from the one Paddy Ashdown attempted to cosy up to Labour in 1997, and different again from the one Charles Kennedy led in opposition to Blair's war on Iraq in 2003. The role of the parliamentary party has increased while the role of grassroots activists has diminished. Indeed the character of the activists has shifted away from the 'beards and sandals', pouring over the minutiae of policy, to one more sympathetic toward the ambitions of an office-seeking leadership. The party has become more professional since benefiting from an increase in Short money after the 1997 general election, and a significant structural change following a wide-ranging review of all its activities in the 2008 Bones Commission. Upon entering the 2010 general election the party appeared to display all three of the characteristics its 22 years showed worked in its favour (see Chapter 3): charismatic leadership in Nick Clegg; a motivated and strong grassroots base acting as the 'glue' that traditionally holds the party together; and claims to equidistance or at least distance from both of the parties that it challenged and would ultimately need to negotiate with.

This thesis has explored party activity and intra-party organisational changes between 1988 and 2010, stopping just short of the general election in May that year. The majority of interviews were conducted in 2009 and early 2010, although a small number were conducted post-election. But the events that followed are significant and deserve some reflection. This epilogue aims to do two things: to reflect, briefly, upon what the party in coalition has done with regard to policy, campaigning and resources and secondly to see what this might mean for the party in public office, in central office and on the ground. The ascendancy of the party in public office is well documented (Katz and Mair 2002) but the impact on a smaller party, a junior coalition partner with over a third of its parliamentary party currently holding office in government, and having lost almost half its staff in post-election redundancies, may be of greater significance than had been anticipated (Bale and Sanderson-Nash 2011).

ii) Five days in May

Early accounts of coalition negotiations give an interesting insight in to the Liberal Democrats' preparedness for this eventuality. In particular David Laws provides a diary of events in May 2010 that admits that the negotiation team had been meeting in secret since 2009. Although he is of the view that Nick Clegg was genuinely equidistant, he describes how predictions of a hung parliament with the Conservatives having the most seats grew in credibility and dominated discussions (Laws 2010). He explains that to do nothing in the event of a hung parliament was not an option, and that Chris Huhne argued convincingly against a 'confidence and supply' arrangement, which he

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An earlier version of sections of this chapter appear in Bale, T. and E. Sanderson-Nash (2011). A leap of faith and a leap in the dark: the impact of the coalition on the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The Cameron-Clegg Government: Coalition Politics in an Age of Austerity. M. Beech and S. Lee. , Palgrave Macmillan.

said would be indecisive, lead to weak government and potentially damage the recovery. Laws describes his genuine surprise at the number of concessions on policy the Conservatives were prepared to give, and at the willingness of the party in Parliament and on the Federal Executive, to accept the agreement. Experienced campaigners call this naiveté on the part of those in the party that did not cut their teeth in council chambers, and blame this for Law's bullish approach to the tuition fees policy (Breton 2011). His account does, however, describe how the personal chemistry shared by the leaders was evident, and a deal was immediately on the table. In addition nearly two thirds of 57 the Liberal Democrats who won seats in the 2010 general election were challenging Conservatives, which helps explain why they would have wanted to avoid a second election at which a rise in Tory support could be expected (see Appendix F). It also makes clear that whether the coalition proves to be delivering a Liberal Democrat agenda or not, the document offered to the parliamentary party was clearly perceived as doing so.

Clegg was well prepared, and surrounded by a burgeoning group of MPs with either experience of coalition, or what could be interpreted as an ideological slant toward the Conservatives. Jim Wallace negotiated and participated in Scotland's first government in which Scottish Liberal Democrats were the junior partners in coalition with Labour between 1999 and 2007. Andrew Stunnell was formerly the Leader of Cheshire County Council, in coalition with Labour between 1985 and 1990. Chris Huhne (Nick Clegg's leadership rival) Danny Alexander (also new in the 2005 intake and an ambitious MP very close to Nick Clegg and effective go-between with the Leader's office and the parliamentary party) and David Laws (co-author of *The Orange Book* and regarded as an intellectual heavy-weight within the party) completed the team. Those that were left out of the team included former leaders, Lord Ashdown and Charles Kennedy, both of whom urged caution over coalition, Kennedy finally opposing the move, Shirley Williams, while supporting the decision to enter coalition, described it as the 'passing away' of a generation driven by ideology. Indeed, a brief glance at the 'top 50 most influential Lib Dems' compiled annually by the Daily Telegraph, most recently in September 2010, is revealing. Of the top 25, 10 hold posts in government, and the return of David Laws is much hoped for by the party leadership. Other senior office holders include the Chief Whip, Alistair Carmichael MP, Special Advisors Lena Pietsch, Alison Suttie and Polly Mackenzie, the Leader in Scotland, Tavish Scott, and two party staff, the Chief Executive Officer Chris Fox and Director of Communications Jonathan Oates. Other than the former leaders already mentioned, Ros Scott has resigned as Party President, Evan Harris lost his seat in 2010 and Lord Oakeshott resigned his position as Treasury Spokesman in the Lords following an attack on the coalition over what he saw as its toothless banking reforms. The only person in the list that can be considered powerful in his own right and not a natural ally of the coalition is Simon Hughes, MP for Bermondsey, who was elected Deputy Leader in a vote of the parliamentary party. Hughes beat Tim Farron, who went on to become President, by 38 votes to 18 (68% to 32%). Hughes has since been appointed the Government's Advocate for Access to Education after abstaining on the tuition fees vote, something that appears to represent a softening of his position.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23905910-simon-hughes-why-i-abstained-in-tuition-fees-vote.do> (accessed 21.05.2011).

In a further move to shore-up the legitimacy of the decision to enter coalition, Clegg was able to demonstrate the support of his party during a 'special conference' convened in Birmingham in order to operate the constitutional 'triple-lock' mechanism. This is a safeguard in place to protect the party's grassroots against a change in strategy or direction in an amendment passed at the party's Federal Conference at Southport in 1998 (Pack 2011). It was introduced at a time when many within the party feared a loss of independence for the party amidst rumours of Paddy Ashdown's secret meetings with Tony Blair. The version eventually passed replaced a less specific proposal, and states that 'changes in strategy require consultation with party membership', and brought about a rule that requires 75 percent of both the Federal Executive and 75 percent of the Parliamentary party to support such moves. In 2010 despite securing 75 percent of both bodies and being technically unnecessary, the party president (then Baroness Ros Scott) sought to reaffirm the party's support for coalition by instituting the second part of the triple lock and convening a special conference of members. The conference held in Birmingham on 16 May 2010, provided Clegg with a public demonstration of this support. At the time the motion was considered to be something of a triumph by the party's activists, setting out guidelines to protect the party from sacrificing its independence on the short-term whim of an individual leader. Despite this triple lock mechanism, the recent transition within the party, and in particular policy development and organisational structures described elsewhere, has arguably changed the strategy and direction of the party. It was, when seen in light of the fact that Clegg had already signed the coalition deal, an exercise in good relations, giving the party an opportunity to voice support and to demonstrate unity. One interviewee described the leadership's seductive pitch:

They were able to move from a position of 'this is the only game in town and we're holding our nose and doing it' to 'this is the first time in 100 years Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment will become law. (Interview 25, 2010).

iii) Policy

Since entering in to coalition the party have had to grapple with the reality of closing the credibility gap and the growth of factional politics in its ranks. Many of those interviewed post-election rejected an assessment of the 2010 coalition being a triumph for the authors of *The Orange Book*. It is easy to see why, since this would be to admit factionalism and the growing gulf between economic and social liberals. There is clearly a difference in opinion over the role of the state, set out in *The Orange Book*, its follow-up *Britain After Blair* and some counter arguments put forward in *Reinventing the State* (Marshall and Laws 2004; Astle, Laws et al. 2006; Brack, Grayson et al. 2007). Discussions over ideology were far and few between during the Kennedy leadership (Brack 2007) but reignited with the publication of *The Orange Book* and the Huhne-Clegg contest of 2008 (Francis 2010). The sacrificing of 'ideological cohesion' is one consequence of the electoral necessity faced by the third party (Russell 2010) and this thesis suggests that precisely this motivated Paul Marshall and others to turn away from the leaflet-delivering culture to back a more ideologically based debate by funding *The Orange Book* and the Centre-Forum think-tank.

The coalition agreement and the Liberal Democrat manifesto of 2010 appeared to resemble one another sufficiently closely for the grassroots to almost unanimously support it at the 'special conference' held in Birmingham, where they were given an opportunity to show support. Non-affiliated radical magazine 'Liberator' said 'Father Christmas appeared to come early down the Cowley Street chimney' (Breton 2011), and some word-count based assessments of the two documents suggest the coalition document was closer to the Lib Dem manifesto than it was the Conservatives (Quinn, Bara et al. 2010). This may have been so for those supporters of *The Orange Book* whose aspirations were captured in the party manifesto, but created a problem both in terms of policies such as the abolition of tuition fees where the leadership voted against party policy, and by creating a new landscape in which distinctive campaigning priorities may also put the party at odds with itself. The federal party conference held in the spring of 2011 gave Clegg a standing ovation while at the same time voting for an amendment to policy on reform of the NHS, in an attempt to tie the leader's hands on this potentially divisive issue. Assessments of the campaign in 2010 suggest that the party was held back from winning up to 15 seats because its immigration policy was unpopular. Without the policy for an amnesty for illegal immigrants these 15 seats could have enabled it to have done a deal with Labour, and may drive the party ever closer to reliance on polling in target seats in order to drive its preferred future partnerships.²⁷⁵ Changes to policy, then, may have as much to do with a future deal with Labour, as with guiding the Liberal Democratic-Conservative coalition.

The 2010 general election saw Nick Clegg triumph in the first televised leadership debate, enabling him to make his appeal more directly to the voters in a move towards the presidentialisation of the position never experienced by his predecessors. The party, however, continues to need its centrally run campaigns operation, particularly if it is to keep control of party communications while also running devolved operations in Scotland, Wales, the party regions, Europe and at the local level. It will, however, need to resolve growing tension around its branding. The 'untarnished and untried' reputation of the Lib-Dems benefited Clegg on television, but will be impossible to pitch in future campaigns, and will be incompatible with the image of a party that hoped to benefit from a more professional and serious governmental style. His tactic has been to promote instead the 'radical centre' from which he will hope to be in a position to influence either Labour or the Conservatives at future elections.²⁷⁶ The party has been traditionally difficult to lead but appears to have welcomed the strong leadership of Nick Clegg, who led from the front in his first few months in the post, losing three front benchers over a parliamentary vote on the Lisbon treaty.²⁷⁷ Readiness to embrace alternative leadership within the parliamentary party remains unlikely, particularly while the party has half its MPs in government posts. Early criticism of the coalition has come instead from council leaders²⁷⁸ and prospective parliamentary candidates²⁷⁹.

²⁷⁵ Interview 67, 2011.

²⁷⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/mar/13/nick-clegg-lib-dems-centre> (accessed 21.05.2011).

²⁷⁷ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/three-lib-dems-quit-front-bench-over-lisbon-treaty-referendum-2284.html> (accessed 21.05.2011).

²⁷⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12413101> (accessed 21.05.2011).

²⁷⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/nick-clegg/8166996/Liberal-Democrat-candidates-call-on-Nick-Clegg-to-oppose-tuition-fee-rise.html> (accessed 21.05.2011).

There is, however, also growing rebellion among the party's back-benchers.²⁸⁰ Clegg has appointed 23 Ministers (see Appendix K²⁸¹) and there is some discussion about increasing this so that the party has representation in every government department and a larger team of Special Advisors (see Pawn 2010).²⁸² In a party with just 57 MPs he could theoretically ensure that every one experienced, or at least aspired to experience, a government post – giving him significantly greater powers as a function of size, than leaders of other parties or his predecessors.

iv) Campaigns and grassroots

The Liberal Democrats owe their survival in part to the loyalty of support and organisation at the local level, particularly at the Celtic fringes. Marginalising the party on the ground seems perilous while its future in government is insecure. The party, however, reported a significant increase in membership in the first few months of coalition. For every 1 member leaving 8 were joining, which slowed in the months post election to 5 before reducing to 2.²⁸³ The Welsh party, for whom figures are available, report a 12% increase in membership overall, a figure supported by anecdotal evidence from individual constituency parties. This is important not only as an indicator of the party's overall support, but will if it continues have an impact on the character of the party, with the disaffected former Labour supporters it picked up in the mid-2000s leaving, replaced instead with soft Conservatives. The party has a fluctuating support base and it is difficult to imagine it not suffering from a mid-term slump but it will be in rural Scotland and the south west of England that the consequences can be most sharply measured. In spite of popularity veering from 6% to 25% nationally the party has always been able to rely on a strong base in these old Liberal heartlands. At the same time boundary changes and reducing the numbers of MPs are not expected to work in the party's favour.²⁸⁴ As Chapter 5 explains, some members already feel their role has been reduced to primarily that of fundraiser and leaflet deliverer, although there is no doubt they are still a necessary, and for the Liberal Democrats, critical part of the party. They owe this, according to the model, to the legacy of the past, but may try to wrest greater power from it, particularly in the Lib-Dems over the constitution that gives policy-making powers to the membership, or over candidate-selection where the local parties also exercise autonomy. While this makes sense for one of the big parties in a two-party system it is less clear how such a strategy will work for the third party, whose future in office is far from guaranteed in the round. They are more likely to adopt a 'division of labour' tactic that continues to encourage local parties to grow in size, and to in turn be able to exercise control over sub-national politics.

²⁸⁰ In April 2011, almost a year in to the coalition, the number of non-government Lib Dem MPs that had not rebelled stood at just 2, the others all having voted against the government at some point. See www.revolt.com. (accessed 04.05.2011).

²⁸¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Democrat_Frontbench_Team#Liberal_Democrat_Frontbench_Team (accessed 21.05.2011).

²⁸² This has so far been rejected by the Public Administration Committee <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmpubadm/530/53007.htm> (accessed 21.05.2011).

²⁸³ Interview 61, party staff, 2010.

²⁸⁴ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/lord-chris-rennard-av-referendum-22119.html> (accessed 17.01.2011).

iv) Resources

The acquisition of government status is itself, part of a socialisation process and one likely to be impacting heavily on a party that has existed on the political fringe since its creation in 1988, and its predecessor parties, long before that (Katz and Mair 2002). Katz & Mair emphasise a number of ways in which the subordination of the party headquarters to the parliamentary party is demonstrated: firstly the use of state subventions, that is the distribution of financial resources, in this case from Short money and secondly the allocation of staff. As already described, the party has lost its right to Short money with consequent redundancies and the decision to leave Headquarters at Cowley Street.²⁸⁵ In the days that followed the coalition agreement the party was forced to take immediate action to make more than half its staff at Headquarters redundant, reducing from 14 to 5 in the press office and from 22 to 5 in the research office. One source reported this as being appropriate to reflect the different role for party staff in office as opposed to in opposition. "There's nothing for them to do, other than circulate government announcements, which the civil servants do anyway".²⁸⁶ The downsizing of the party operation at Cowley Street has all the more significance when combined with the impact of a large growth in professional support offered to the party in office through Special Advisors. At present the party has a total of 10 Special Advisors, professionals from within the party's own ranks, earning between £67,000 and £80,000 a year²⁸⁷ as well as support from the civil service for government research and press within each individual ministry. One insider explained:

With the move in to government the top tier of Nick's office, they've all become Special Advisors, and the party in a way has....well senior party staff from POLD, HQ or Nick's team, 75-80% have been taken in to government. There's a gap and we hadn't thought of that. We're a small organisation. (Interview 26, 2011).

Two further new developments are worthy of note since the party entered government. The first is that, perhaps in combination with the departure of Chris Rennard and entering government, the party has introduced a significant reorganisation to its Campaigns Department in July 2011. The party has announced three key areas of expertise; Campaigns Development Team, Ground Communications Team and Strategic Seat Operations Team, including 9 new posts to be centrally employed, while at the same time ceasing to employ its current campaigns staff, totalling 20 across the UK. These previous posts are thought to now be the responsibility of the Regional parties, in a move that appears to create a centralised hub of decision-making specialists at HQ, while grass-roots campaigners are kept at the local level, and are to be recruited and funded locally too.²⁸⁸

Secondly, the party has created a new post, Chief of Staff (HQ) and Political Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister, filled by Tim Snowball, close colleague of Nick Clegg, who was appointed

²⁸⁵ the party announced in March 2011 that it was ceasing its rental of offices at 4 Cowley Street and seeking more 'appropriate' premises: <http://www.politicshome.com/uk/story/14920/> (accessed 21.03.2011).

²⁸⁶ Interview 5, politician, 2009.

²⁸⁷ <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/statements/wms-special-advisers.aspx> (accessed 12.11.11).

²⁸⁸ <http://www.markpack.org.uk/major-restructuring-in-the-campaigns-department/> (accessed 29.06.2011)

a Civil Service post immediately after the election, but preferred the party-based work at Headquarters. As well as taking over responsibility for the day-to-day operation at Cowley Street, a job previously undertaken by Ben Stoneham, now Lord Stoneham, who left early in 2011, he additionally acts as the bridge between this and the leader – effectively a bridge between the party in office and the party at HQ.

There have been some interesting shifts in personnel, in particular Duncan Brack, long-term activist, former Policy Director, and latterly Chairman of the Federal Campaigns Committee, resigning in order to take up a Special Advisor role with Chris Huhne, and Alison Suttie shifting from party employment as Deputy Chief of Staff to Nick Clegg to take up a Special Advisor role with Danny Alexander. A number of senior personnel from the Clegg office have also taken up posts in government including Lena Pietsch and Polly Mackenzie. Katz and Mair describe the orientation of the party toward office, which they argue influences the intra-party balance of power. In the case of the Liberal Democrats the power of the Federal Executive had already been circumscribed by the Bones Commission giving a number of its key responsibilities to the unelected Chief Officers' Group. However, the Federal Policy Committee, elected by members at the party conference, also demonstrates the beginning of factionalisation and increasingly appears to be the focal point for those critical of the coalition. In addition to watching this development, the process of parliamentarisation impacts on both the party at headquarters and the party on the ground, and might be measured by an assessment of whether there is reversion to an amateur-volunteer culture at HQ or attempts to de-politicise the party organisation by employing more specialists and consultants on short-term contracts. A summary of staffing is contained in the organigram in Appendix H. This snapshot of party organisation taken in October 2010 shows a streamlining and simplification of the hierarchy, which was accompanied by an overall drop in numbers employed by the party across the board from 110 to 84. The party is in part as a consequence of this, and in part in reflection of its ongoing professionalism, leaving Cowley Street in search of more suitable premises for party HQ.²⁸⁹ One former member of staff explained that the party was being given support by having staff seconded from companies such as Price Waterhouse Coopers and KPMG²⁹⁰, providing specialist consultancy for example, a recent review of Human Resources.

There is no doubt the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg has taken a huge gamble entering into coalition with the Conservatives. He has gambled that he will gain more by bridging the credibility gap than he has to lose by fighting a second election. He has taken a leap of faith that the public will forgive him for cuts in public services and reward him with voting reform. The disastrous results of the May 2010 local elections, in which the party saw its local government base decimated, and the loss of the AV referendum held on the same day, have far-reaching consequences for the ongoing success of the coalition and the Clegg leadership. He has calculated that the party can afford to lose the support it built up under Charles Kennedy in urban areas of the North of England and replace it with support in traditionally Conservative areas. Whatever the coming months and years bring the party has proved itself extremely robust. The party emerged from a deeply

²⁸⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12691946> (accessed 09.05.2011).

²⁹⁰ Neil Sherlock, partner at KPMG in charge of public and regulatory affairs, is a long-term Lib Dem activist, senior advisor to the Leader, listed as in the party's top 50 most influential people.

damaging and divisive alliance as a new entity that within 3 years was making the headlines with sensational by-election wins. It bounced back from polling just 6% in the European parliamentary elections, coming fourth to the Green party in 1990, and again from having its vote massively reduced in 2005. It benefited at the local level when the Conservatives were at their least popular, and conversely when Labour were least popular, arguably able to compete for any seat in the country. It has been beset by its fair share of scandals and personal difficulties but has thus far brought its leadership-loyal grassroots alongside.

Clegg continues to enjoy a strong hand – secure in the knowledge of a fixed-term parliament - having promoted currently 23 of his 57 MPs to government office. Cracks are beginning to show, however, with criticism from defeated council leaders, the defeat of the party's position on the AV referendum held in May 2011, a growing trend of rebellion among back-benchers against the government and the inevitable whisperings of a potential challenge. Naturally the reality of office means he is likely to experience greater unrest than his predecessors, and of a different kind. The party's impressive history of survival and those factors that contribute to it however, remain intact. Where the party lack experience and are most likely to feel the deepest blows are not with tensions within, but simply in the deterioration of its relationship with the electorate, whose protest-vote they look set to decisively lose.

vi) Conclusion

In summary, the parliamentary operation of the Liberal Democrats has become one that befits a party of office, and as such the party has divided in to backbenchers and government ministers. This is made all the more poignant when seen in terms of the support each of these has at its disposal. The backbenchers have a dwindling operation at headquarters and a much-reduced research and press staff; the ministers having seconded most of the party's senior staff, and has these on high incomes and the civil service at its disposal too. Whether the new headquarters is one that relies on amateurs and volunteers or continues with professionalisation albeit with reduced numbers, will be an indication of the impact that public office has in the long term on relations between these two sections of the party. The grassroots have changed over the years, and although they are arguably more instrumental and prepared to take a leap in the dark, it remains to be seen – particularly if their numbers at the local level are radically reduced by poor showings at local elections – whether they will consider it a price worth paying. The potential to obstruct the leader remains through the elected committees and constitution of the party, but these are relics, and represent the pre-government party. The final stage of the party's transition would be marked by constitutional change to alter the arrangements under which it makes policy, and whether it were to accept moves to give the leader greater flexibility, downgrading the role of FPC and conference to something akin to 'advisory' or 'aspirational'. Whether the English decide to start loving coalitions will be tested in coming years and along with it whether the Liberal Democrats love being in office. This will be seen by their willingness to tackle the constitution and policy-making process, whether local parties retain some autonomy over locally-raised funds, and the extent to which experts are increasingly employed at Headquarters.

In the three areas of party life studied here, policy-making, campaigning and resource-distribution, it is possible to identify the processes of centralisation and professionalisation, and so in the party overall both processes are under-way, and both hypotheses supported. It is also possible to see how these developments are advantageous to the leadership, and are likely to be pursued. Furthermore in explaining the combination of factors that describe the party's transition in to an electoral professional party, it is possible to see how these have helped the transition in to government. It demonstrates that the grassroots were almost an irrelevance in the triumph of *The Orange Book*, whose supporters formed a small but powerful cabal and were able to fully exploit opportunities that came their way in the leadership contest of 2008, and subsequent demise of the Labour government (Quinn and Clements 2010; see also Crabtree 2010). The outcome of Clegg's experiment depends upon two things: whether the electorate decide to punish the party at the polls, as they have in the first significant contest since the coalition in May 2010, and whether the party is robust enough to avoid being gobbled up by its larger partner in the process (Bale 2011). If successful it will re-shape political competition in such a way that opens up possibilities for smaller parties and for factions within those that are well established. If it loses and splits, or returns to the wilderness at Westminster, it will have demonstrated the endurance of the two-party system.

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Appendix A – Interview schedule*

Surname	First name	Capacity for interview 2011
Beith	Alan	MP
Leaman	Alan	Former Chief of Staff, Leaders office
Stunell	Andrew	MP, former CEO ALDC, Former Chief Whip
Kirkwood	Archy	Former Chief Whip
Stoneham	Ben	Former staff – Director of HQ
Williams	Ben	Staff – secretary to POLD
Woodthorpe	Brown	Former Chair Candidates Cttee
Thomas	Celia	Former staff - Head of Lords Whips Office
Kennedy	Charles	Former Leader
Bones	Chris	Senior party advisor
Rennard	Chris	Former CEO, Former staff - Dir of Campaigns
Moon	Christian	Staff - Head of Policy
Alexander	Danny	MP & Chief of Staff, Leaders Office
Allworthy	David	Head of Compliance, HQ
Boyle	David	Activist, FPC member, Former Editor 'Lib Dem News'
Loxton	David	Head of Membership, HQ
Steel	David	Former Leader, Liberal Party
Davidson	Dawn	Former Chair, English Party
Barrie	Derek	Former CEO Scottish Liberal Democrats
McCarthy	Donna	Former activist
Brack	Duncan	Former Chair FCC, former Director of Policy
Greenland	Duncan	Chair FFAC
Davey	Ed	MP, former Chair CCC
Epps	Gareth	Member FE
Vernon-Jackson	Gerald	Activist and long-term FE member
Cheesman	Gill	Chair, Parliamentary Staff Association
Lishman	Gordon	FE member
Elson	Graham	Former General Secretary
Simpson	Greg	Former Director of Policy
Jardine-Brown	Helen	Former Head of Treasurers Unit, HQ
Wrigglesworth	Iain	Former President
Walton	Ian	Activist and party staff HQ and Welsh party
Connor	Jane	EARS
Sharkey	John	Staff - Director of communications
Astle	Julian	Director, Centre Forum (think-tank)
Ingram	Julian	Senior party advisor
McGuinness	Justine	Activist and founder 'Reformer' magazine
Heywood	Kate	Assistant to the CEO, HQ
Murphy	Laura	Activist
Opik	Lembit	Former MP
Featherstone	Lynne	MP
McGavin	Margaret	Former party staff
Littlewood	Mark	Former Director of Media
Oaten	Mark	Former MP
Pack	Mark	Former staff - Head of Innovations
Smullian	Mark	Organizer - Liberator magazine
Sowemimo	Matthew	Founder, Social Liberal Forum and former staff,
Campbell	Menzies	Former Leader
Dholakia	Navnit	Former President
South	Nick	Former staff – Research Assistant to Paddy Ashdown

Surname	First name	Capacity for interview 2011
Bliss	Nigel	Head of Finance, HQ
Baker	Norman	MP
Ashdown	Paddy	Former Leader
Clark	Reg	PCC, Hartlepool, former Federal Treasurer
Byrne	Richard	Lewes Constituency Organizer
Grayson	Richard	Former head of Policy Unit, HQ
Scott	Ros	Former President
Walkington	Sandy	Former staff - Dir of Communications
Morris	Sarah	Staff - Head of Training
Williams	Shirley	Former Leader House of Lords
Hughes	Simon	MP
James	Simon	Former staff, LDYS, HQ
Gauge	Steve	Activist
Scott	Tavish	Leader, Scottish Liberal Democrats
Clement-Jones	Tim	Treasurer, former FE member
Razzall	Tim	Former Chair GEC, Former Treasurer
Pickstone	Tom	CEO, ALDC
Greaves	Tony	Former FE member
Mason	Trevor	Parliamentary Editor, Press Association
Goodhart	Willy	Former Chair FPC

*the numbers used as a key for interviews are for personal use only. Interviews were conducted on a strictly non-attributable basis and the numbers used in the thesis text therefore do not correspond numerically to the names in this list.

Interviews were declined for this thesis, by Lord Anthony Lester (Peer), Jackie Ballard (former MP) and Chris Fox (Chief Executive Officer).

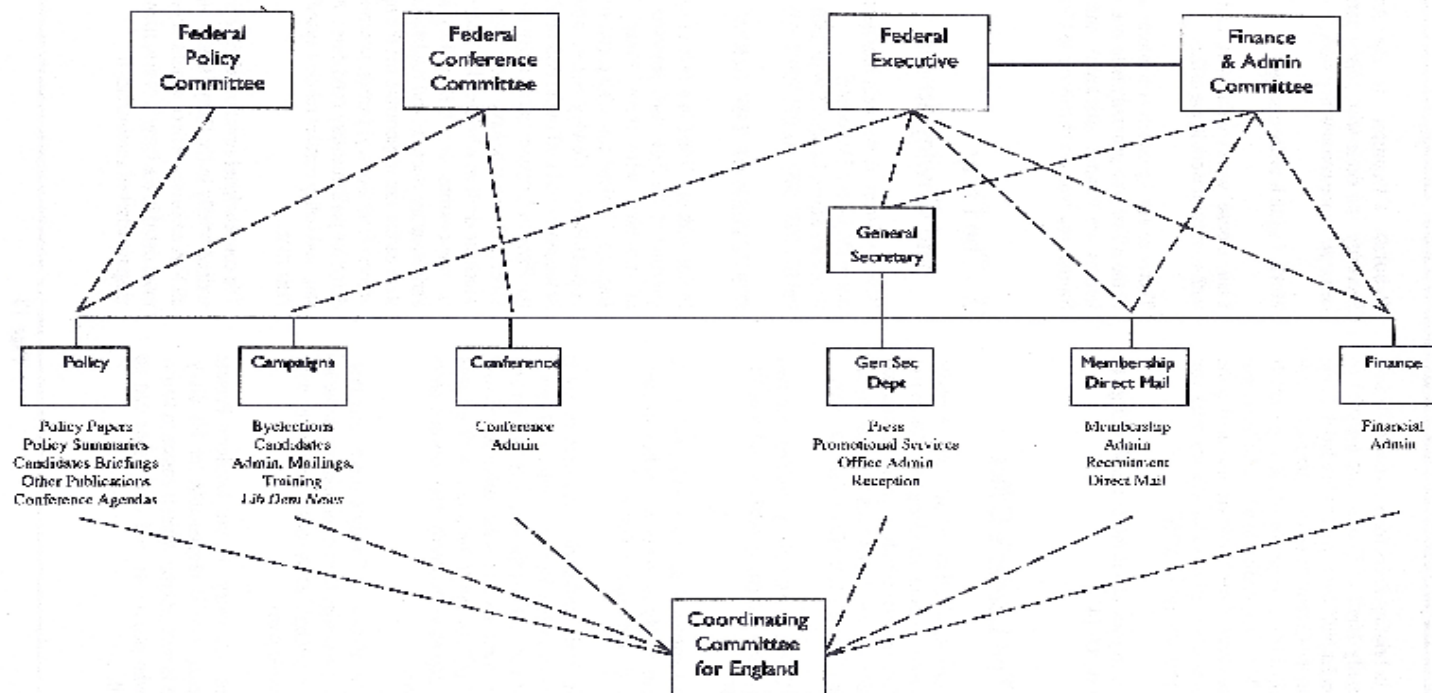
Interviews were cancelled by either side with Evan Harris (former MP), Robert MacLennan (Peer & former leader SDP), John Hemming (MP), Neil Stockley (former head of policy unit), Rob Blackie (former director of research) and Liam McArthur (MSP).

No response was received to email requests for interviews by Paul Marshall (Co-author 'The Orange Book'), Ramesh Dewan (long term FE member) and Peter Yeldon (donor).

Total approached	81
Total conducted	70

Appendix B - Party Structure 1992

**Liberal Democrat HQ: Structure and Relationship to Committees
as at May 1992**



Appendix C – Elected Members of FE 1988-2009

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Appendix D – Former Lib Dem MPs – Where are they now? (1988-2009)

Surname	First name	Became MP	Ceased MP	Present
Richard	Allan	1997	2005	Stood down - now Cisco Head of Public Affairs
David	Alton	1988	1997	Peer
Paddy	Ashdown	1988	2001	Peer
Jackie	Ballard	1997	2001	Lost - now Dir. RSPCA
David	Bellotti	*1990	1992	Lost - now Chairman of Bath Council
Peter	Brand	1997	2001	Lost - retired GP
John	Burnett	1997	2005	n/a
Patsy	Calton	2001	2005	Deceased
Alex	Carlile	1988	1997	Peer
Michael	Carr	*1991	1992	Lost
David	Chidgey	*1994	2005	Peer
Brian	Cotter	1997	2005	Peer
Chris	Davies	1995	1997	MEP
Sue	Doughty	2001	2005	PPC
Parmjit	Singh Gill	*2004	2005	Lost - now Councillor
Donald	Gorrie	1997	2001	Stood down
Matthew	Green	2001	2005	Stood down
Geraint	Howells	1988	1992	Deceased/Peer
Russell	Johnston	1988	1997	Deceased/Peer
Nigel	Jones	1992	2005	Peer
Archy	Kirkwood	1988	2005	Peer
Liz	Lynne	1992	1997	MEP
Robert	MacLennan	1988	2001	Peer
Diana	Maddock	*1993	1997	Peer
Paul	Marsden	2001	2005	Stood down
Ray	Michie	1988	2001	Deceased/Peer
Emma	Nicholson	**1995	1997	Peer
David	Rendel	*1993	2005	PPC
Brian	Sedgemore	***2001	2005	Stood down
Cyril	Smith	1988	1992	Stood down
David	Steel	1988	1997	Peer
Nicol	Stephen	*1991	1992	MSP
Peter	Thurnham	**1996	1997	Deceased
Jenny	Tonge	1997	2005	Peer
Paul	Tyler	1992	2005	Peer
Jim	Wallace	1988	2001	Peer

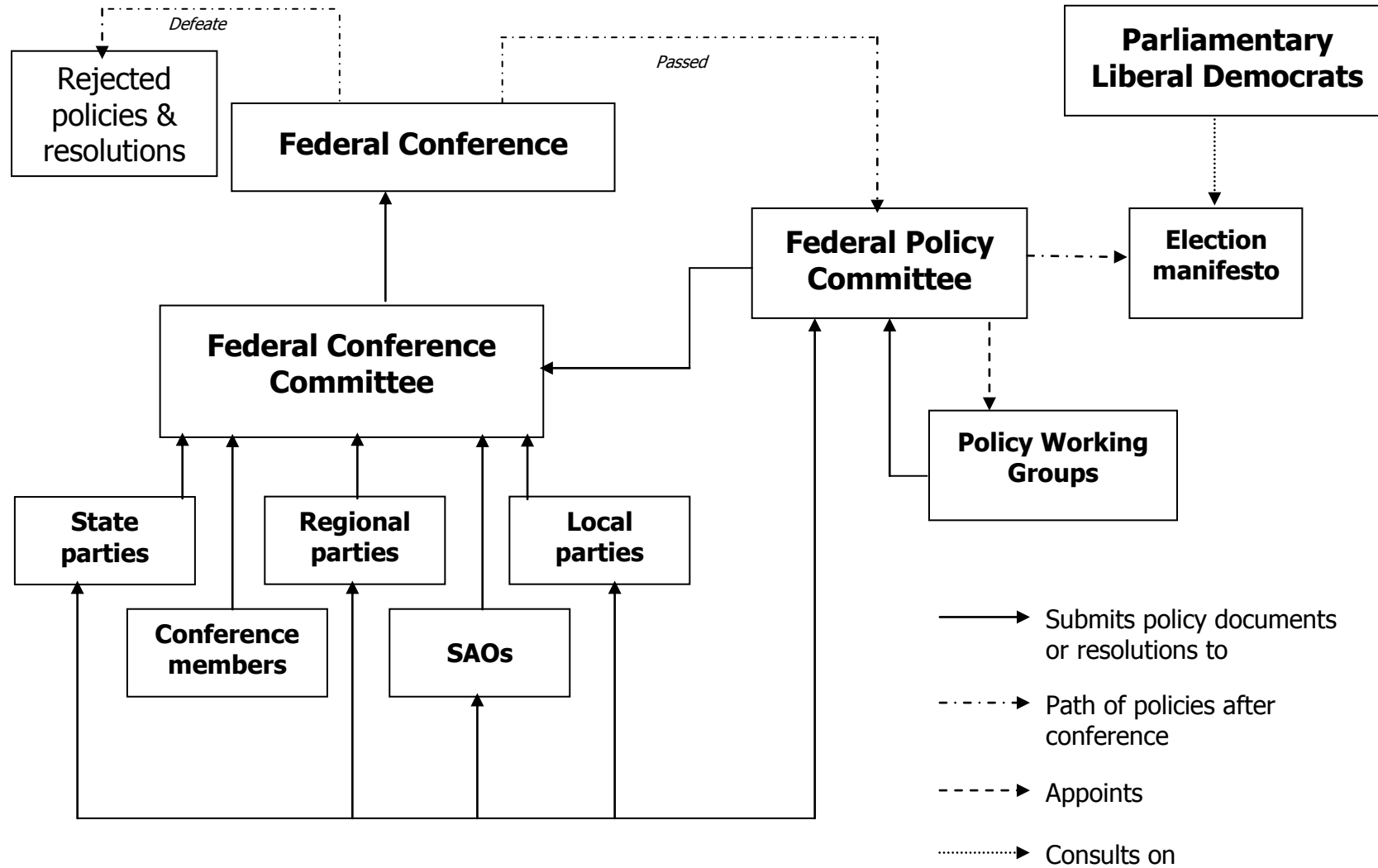
* won in a by-election

** defected from Conservative party

*** defected from Labour party

Richard Livsey & Ronnie Fearn both lost their seat in 1992 but regained it in 1997

Appendix E - Policy-making in the Lib Dems



Appendix F – The 2010 Liberal Democrat Ministers, by constituency,
majority and which party came 2nd

Name	Constituency	Party	majority	% maj
Clegg Nick Deputy PM	Sheffield Hallam	Con	15,284	29.9
Cable Vince Business Secretary	Twickenham	Con	12140	20.3
Laws David	Yeovil	Con	13036	22.8
Moore Michael Secy of State for Scotland	Berwickshire, Roxborough & Selkirk	Con	5675	11.6
Huhne, Chris Energy & Climate Secretary	Eastleigh	Con	3864	7.2
Alexander, Danny Chief Sec to the Treasury	Inverness, Nairn Bedenoch & Strathspey	Lab	8765	18.6
Browne, Jeremy FCO Minister	Taunton Deane	Con	3998	6.9
Harvey, Nick MoD Minister	North Devon	Con	5821	11.3
Webb Steve Business Innovation & Skills	Thornbury & Yate	Con	7116	14.8
Burstow Paul Dept of Health Minister	Sutton & Cheam	Con	1608	3.3
Teather, Sarah Dept of Education Minister	Brent Central	Lab	1345	3
Carmichael, Alistair Deputy Chief Whip	Orkney & Shetland	Lab	9928	51.3
Heath David Deputy Leader of the Commons	Somerset & Frome	Con	1817	3
Lamb Norman Asst Govt Whip	North Norfolk	Con	11626	23.4
Hunter Mark Asst Govt Whip	Cheadle	Con	3272	6.2
Davey, Ed Under Secy for Employment relations, consumer & postal affairs	Kingston & Surbiton	Con	7560	13.2
Stunell Andrew Under Sec for Community cohesion	Hazel Grove	Con	6371	15.2
Baker Norman Under Sec for Regional & Local Transport	Lewes	Con	7647	15.3
Featherstone, Lynne Under Sec for Equalities	Hornsey & Wood Green	Lab	7875	12.5
Lords Wallace Advocate for Scotland	PEER			
Lord McNally Justice Minister	PEER			
Lord Shutt Deputy Govt Whip in Lords	PEER			
Baroness Northover Whip in Lords	PEER			
Lord Saltire Whip in Lords	PEER			

Lib Dems won 57 seats in total

They have 19 government posts

Of these 15 were against the Conservatives	(79%)	
4 were against Labour		(21%)

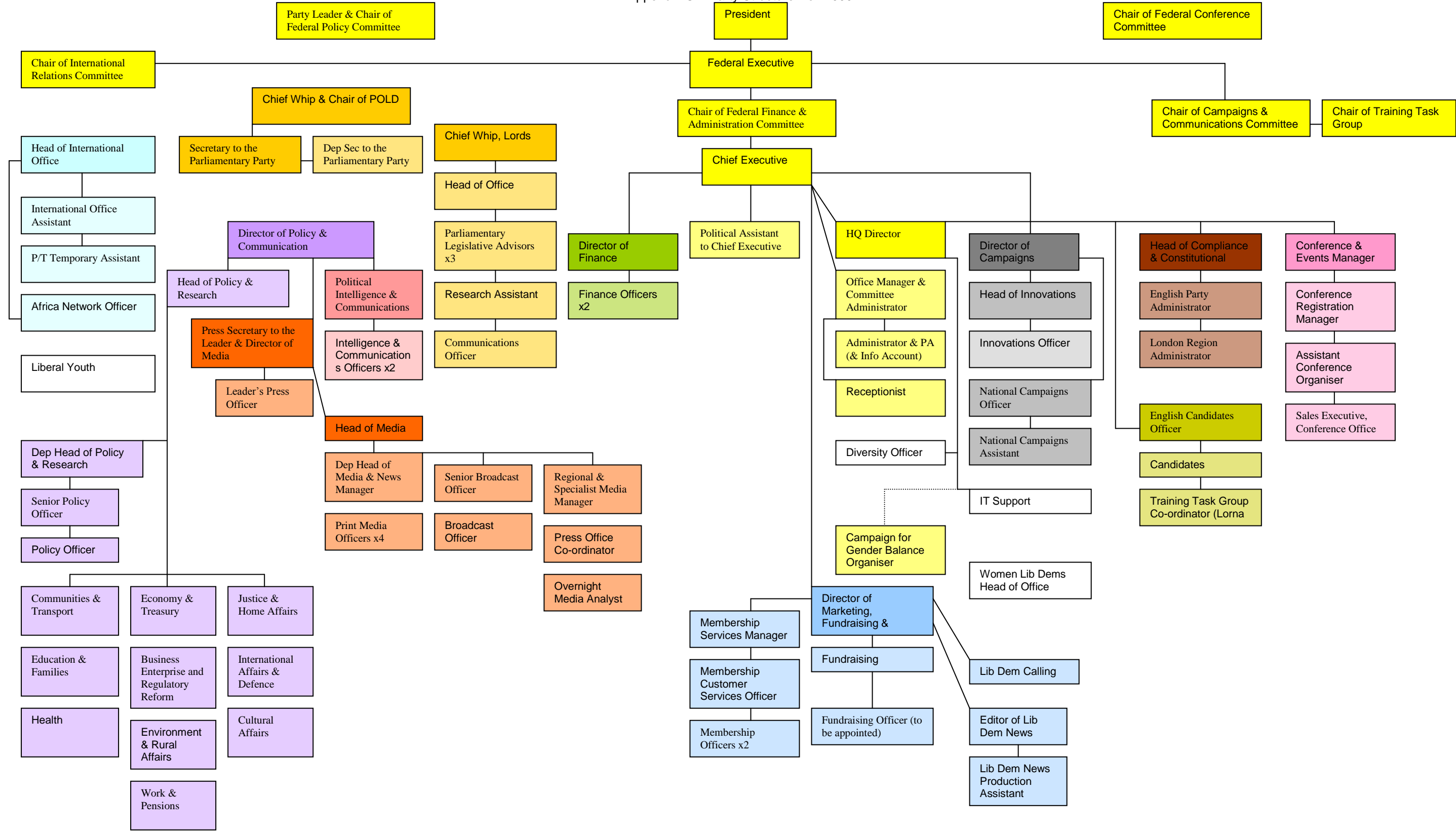
The remainder of the parliamentary party, out of 38 MPs (66.6%)

24 were against Conservatives	(63%)	
13 were against Labour		(34%)
1 was against the SNP		(2.6%)

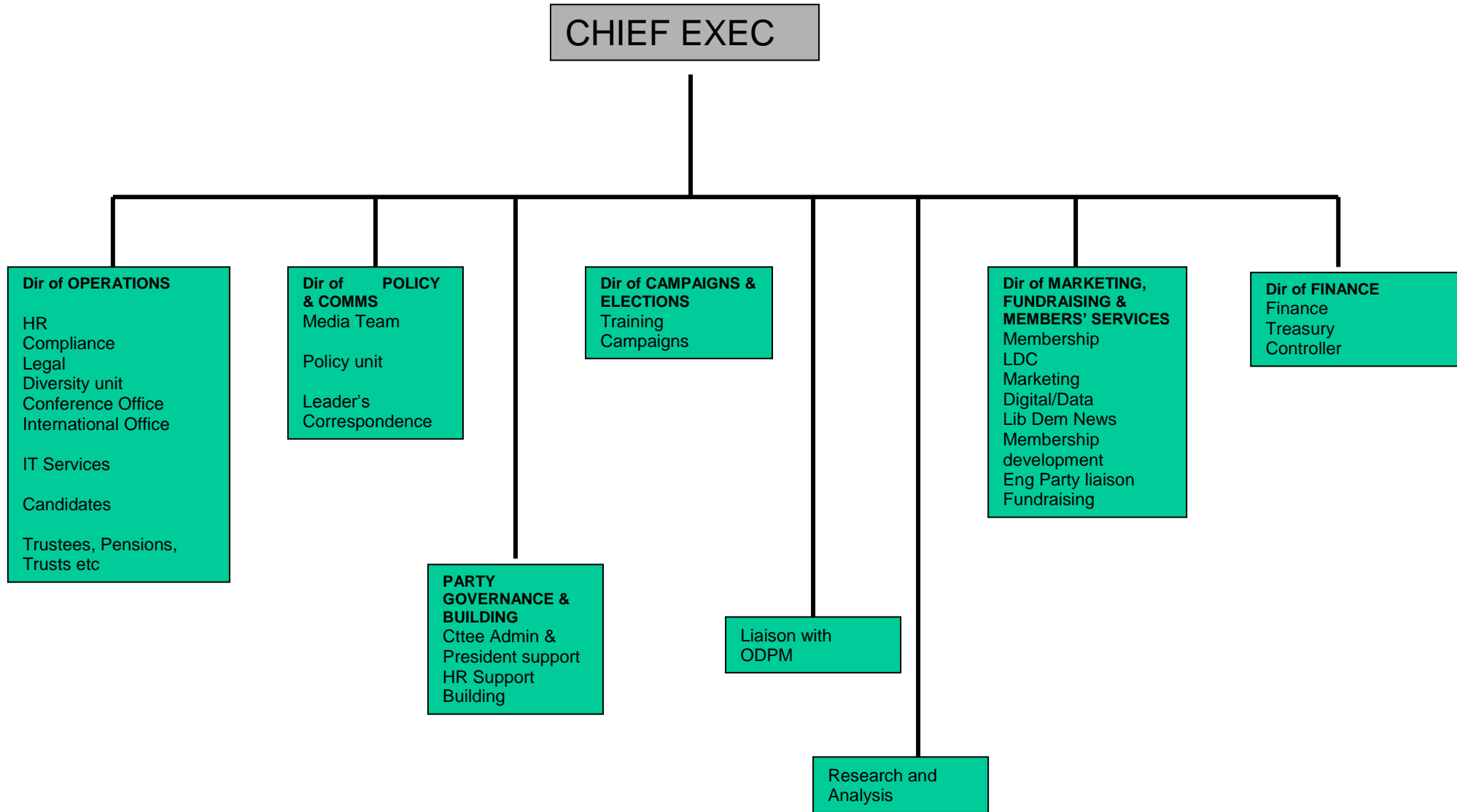
Overall the LDs were challenging

Tories 39 seats	68.42%
Labour 17 seats	29.8%
SNP in 1 seat	1.7%

Appendix G – Party Structure Nov 2009



Appendix H - Party Structure Oct 2010



Becoming a Liberal Democrat Candidate

Welcome to the Liberal Democrat approvals process. As a party, we are always delighted to welcome new candidates.

Becoming a parliamentary candidate and fighting an election as a representative of the Party, can be a fantastic and often life-changing experience. As a candidate you will have the chance to make a real difference to your local area and to stand up for local people. The role is one of variety - one day you may be dealing with a local resident's problem, the next giving your opinion on national Party policy.

The Party's approvals process is designed to ensure clarity and transparency. The process is based upon a Competency Framework. This clearly expresses the Party's view as to the abilities and qualities that a parliamentary candidate should possess. The six competencies that have been identified are:

- Communication Skills
- Leadership
- Strategic Thinking and Judgement
- Representing People
- Resilience
- Values in Action

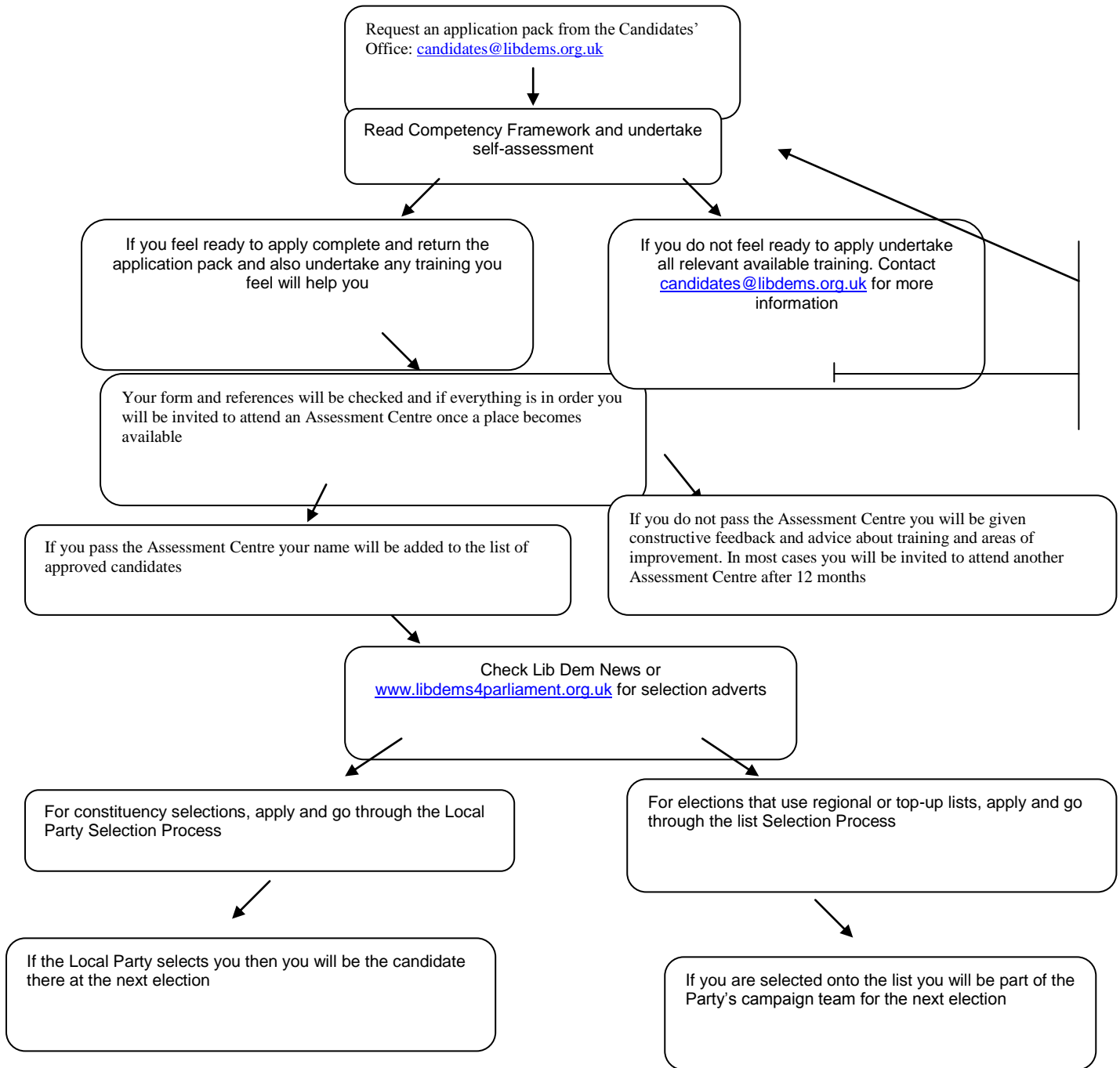
The competency framework is available to members of the Party to study prior to assessment and is included in the application pack. It includes details of the behaviour through which a person can show whether or not they have the necessary skills.

We recommend that you also contact the relevant Candidates' Chair - please see the attached list – for further guidance. In England this will be the Regional Candidates' Chair for your area; in Wales and Scotland you should contact your State Candidates' Chair.

A wide range of training sessions can be found at the Party's national and regional conferences. For further information, go to the main website www.libdems.org.uk and click on the Conferences section.

We hope that this pack will provide you with helpful information on how the approvals process works. If you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance at all, please do not hesitate to contact us.

How to become a parliamentary candidate



The Liberal Democrat Approvals Process in Detail

We are absolutely committed to making the approvals process accessible to all applicants. Please let us know of any access requirements as soon as possible so we can make reasonable adjustments.

We would strongly recommend that you complete the self-assessment questionnaire below. This will allow you to judge how ready you are to go through the approvals process.

If after reading this information pack and undertaking the questionnaire you decide that you would like to start the approvals process then contact us at candidates@libdems.org.uk to request an application pack.

The application forms are very straightforward. We just ask you for contact details, some basic background information and for the contact details of three referees, one of which must be from a Party member. The application form **does not** form part of the assessment nor is seen by the assessors. It is used to ensure that you are who you say you are and that you are eligible to stand for Parliament.

Once you have returned the completed application form you will be automatically added to the list of people waiting for an assessment day. **As long as you have been a party member for 12 consecutive months in England and Wales and 9 consecutive months in Scotland** and as long as there are no problems with your references, we will invite you to attend an assessment centre as soon as there is a space available. Assessment centres take place across the country on a regular basis. Our target is that all eligible applicants will be offered a place at an assessment centre within six months of handing in their forms.

The assessment centre is based on the competency framework. This sets out the things we would expect a parliamentary candidate to do, and those things that a good candidate would probably not do. **The assessment team does not see the information on your application form; they will base their assessment purely upon your performance during the assessment centre.**

At the assessment centre, you will take part in a variety of exercises. These have been designed to allow you to show the assessors how you would perform as a parliamentary candidate. Information about these exercises will be sent to you once you have returned your application forms to give you time to prepare. The exercises are designed so that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to complete them. Several different assessors will mark you throughout the assessment centre. They will be required to show evidence of things that you have said and done on the day to support the grade that you are given at the end of the day.

Depending on whether you are applying to become approved to run in England, Scotland or Wales, or for Europe, you will be given relevant Policy questions on the assessment day to reflect this.

If you successfully pass the assessment you will be approved immediately as a candidate. If you are not successfully approved on the assessment day you will be able to reapply in either 1 or 5 years, depending on your final mark.

Once you are an approved candidate and your name has been added to the Approved List, you are then free to put yourself forward for selection in any seat that advertises for a parliamentary candidate. These adverts appear in Lib Dem News and on www.libdems4parliament.org.uk.

To apply for an advertised seat you will need to contact the Returning Officer whose details will be in the advert. The Returning Officer will send you an application form, which has to be returned by the given deadline. The Local Party Selection Committee will then shortlist the applications (you may be asked to attend a short-listing interview). If you are successfully short-listed, then you will have three weeks to campaign among the Local Party members to put forward your case. At the end of the campaign, there will be a hustings meeting at which the Local Party members will vote for who they want to represent them at the next General Election. If the Local Party selects you, then you will fight the next General Election for that seat.

Scottish Parliamentary elections are split between constituency based first past the post seats and regional seats (based on the boundaries of multiple constituency seats) that are elected using the d'Hondt, or closed party list, method. Constituency seats are selected as for a General Election with the regional seats as for a European Election. There are 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament of which 73 are constituency seats. To stand in Scotland, candidates must have completed an assessment centre and also have successfully completed the Scottish policy assessment.

Elections to the National Assembly for Wales are split between constituency based first past the post seats, and regional seats that are elected using the d'Hondt, or closed party list, method. There are 40 constituency seats, selection for which is carried out on a constituency basis. There are five regions, with four members being elected from each region. List candidates are selected by a one-member one-vote system across each region. In order to be a candidate in Wales at either Assembly or Westminster elections, candidates must have completed an assessment centre and also have successfully completed the Welsh policy assessment.

European elections operate on the d'Hondt system of voting, which requires each party to have Euro-Regional list of candidates, ranked in order of preference. You can apply for selection in as many regions as you want but may only be included on one final list. To qualify for inclusion on the Lib Dem list, candidates must complete the relevant sections of the exercises on the assessment day.

Who's who in approval and selection

The approval and selection of Parliamentary Candidates is the constitutional responsibility of each of the three Federal State Parties of England, Scotland and Wales. Each State has an elected Candidates Committee, which takes the decisions and sets the policies that govern the processes of the approval, selection and review of their Parliamentary Candidates. In England, this is undertaken by the English Candidates Committee (ECC); in Scotland, the Scottish Campaigns and Candidates Committee (SC&C); and in Wales, the Welsh Candidates & Campaigns Committee (WCC).

Each of these State Candidate Committees has an elected Chair who represents the Committee on a variety of bodies including the Joint States Candidates Committee (JSCC).

In England, each English region also has a Regional Candidates' Chair (RCC), who is responsible for organising assessment centres, appointing Returning Officers, and providing advice and support to members going through the approvals and selection processes.

The Candidates' Office

The staff in the Candidates' Office, based at the Lib Dem headquarters in Cowley Street, is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the approvals process for the English, Scottish and Welsh Parties. They act as the first port of call for any general enquiry about standing as a Parliamentary Candidate, and can provide advice on the best person to speak with at a regional or state level if you have a more specific query.

Their responsibilities include sending out application forms, processing returned applications (including sending information about new applicants to Candidates' Chairs) and providing support and advice to members going through the approvals and selection processes. They are also responsible for providing support and advice to the elected committees and Chairs.

Other organisations that may be able to offer help, advice or training are:

PCA – Parliamentary Candidates' Association
www.parliamentary.org.uk

CGB – Campaign for Gender Balance
www.genderbalance.org.uk

LDDA – Liberal Democrat Disability Association
www.disabilitylibdems.org.uk

EMLD – Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats
www.ethnic-minority.libdems.org

DELGA - Liberal Democrats for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality

www.delga.org.uk

Jargon Buster

Here are some common terms and acronyms that you may hear people using about approval and selection:

PPC - Prospective Parliamentary Candidate - the person who will fight the seat for the Party at the next General Election

PSPC – Prospective Scottish Parliamentary Candidate

PAC – Prospective Assembly Candidate (Welsh Assembly)

PEPC - Prospective European Parliamentary Candidate

RO – Returning Officer - the person appointed by the region of state to make sure a selection is run fairly and according to the rules

ECC - English Candidates' Committee; oversees the approval and selection of Candidates in England

SCC or C&C – Scottish Campaigns and Candidates' Committee; oversees the approval and selection of Candidates in Scotland

WCC or CCC – Welsh Candidates' and Campaigns Committee; oversees the approval and selection of Candidates in Wales

JSCC – Joint States' Candidates' Committee; co-ordinates the maintenance of standards in the approval and selection across all 3 States.

RCC - Regional Candidates' Chair, a member of the Regional Executive who has responsibility for approval and selection in that region. They also provide support and help to candidates throughout the approval and selection processes

Self-assessment questionnaire

This short questionnaire is designed to help you decide whether you are ready to submit an application for assessment. As the assessment centre is pass/fail, it is important that you make sure you are fully prepared and are applying at the right time for you. Read this questionnaire to help you decide whether you would benefit from further training or development before attending the assessment centre, particularly if you have been a member for less than 12 months in England and Wales or 9 months in Scotland and so are not yet eligible to be assessed.

Policy and Values

- **Do you feel you are in broad agreement with current party policy?** Y / N
- **Can you communicate Lib Dem policy clearly and persuasively?** Y / N
- **Can you show how your Lib Dem values and beliefs affect the way you live your life?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

The Policy area of the Party website contains briefings covering key policy areas. In addition, a pocket guide to policy is available from [Lib Dem Image](#). You can learn more about how policy is formed and keep up to date with new developments by attending regional and federal conference.

Communication skills

- **Are you able to use different styles of communication for different audiences and occasions?** Y / N
- **Do you enjoy talking to people and addressing their concerns?** Y / N
- **Do you look for opportunities to tell people about what the Lib Dems are doing for them?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

There is Party training available in this area – please contact us for details of what is coming up in the near future. Many people are nervous about things like public speaking, and training can be of great benefit in building skills and confidence.

Media

- **Do you feel able to communicate appropriately with journalists?** Y / N
- **Are you able to think on your feet and respond quickly and appropriately to questions on topical matters?** Y / N
- **Do you make the most of media opportunities in order to maximise Party profile?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

There is Party training available in this area – please contact us for details of what is coming up in the near future. In addition, watching or listening to

politicians being interviewed can be very helpful – both to pick up tips and to see what to avoid!

Inter-personal skills

- **Do you take the time to understand other people's views and needs?** Y / N
- **Are you able to deal effectively with conflict and opposition?** Y / N
- **Do you make an effort to be friendly and approachable when meeting new people?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

There is Party training available in this area – please contact us for details of what is coming up in the near future.

Campaigning

- **Do you have recent experience of participating in an election campaign?** Y / N
- **Do you have the ability to see how national issues can be linked with areas of local concern?** Y / N
- **Can you show that you are organised and able to plan ahead?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

The Campaigns department run training at regional and federal conferences to help you keep up to date with new techniques and advice. Council by-elections are a great way to get some campaigning experience all year round – you can find out what's happening near you on the [Flock Together website](#).

Leadership

- **Do you have experience of leading a group of people?** Y / N
- **Are you able to inspire and motivate people to keep going, even when things are getting difficult?** Y / N
- **Are you able to listen to and take account of a diverse range of views and opinions?** Y / N

Building skills in this area

Look out for areas where you can gain experience of leading a group of people both in your professional and personal life.

This questionnaire is designed as an aid to deciding when to apply for approval, and there is no recommended number of questions to which you should answer, "Yes". If, however, you find that you have answered "No" to more than one question in any category, we would strongly advise you to undertake further development in that area becoming to assessment.

You can contact your Candidates' Chair (please see the sheet of contact details above) for details of help available in your region or state, and the Candidates' Office, on candidates@libdems.org.uk, for details of training at conference and across the country.



East Saltdean and Telscombe

FOCUS

Keep up to date: www.leweslibdems.org.uk

**How it stands
in our area**

**Lib
Dem
21**

**Con
18**



LIBERAL
DEMOCRATS
www.libdems.org.uk

Ind 2

Lab 0

Number of Councillors on Lewes District council

Calls for openness over the future of our Tye

Calls for Town Council to make their future plans clear

Concerns were raised in November 2009 when Mayor Ron Maskell stated at a public meeting that the Conservative run council were considering selling the Tye. He said, "Selling the Tye is on the agenda for the Policy and Resources meeting next week."

A news item in The Argus of November 13th concluded "The council will now consider a range of options on how best to manage the site (The Tye) including selling it on."

Liz Lee and Simon Doyle worked hard over the ensuing months to ensure that the Tye was not sold. Ultimately, prior to the East Saltdean town council by-election in October 2010 the Conservatives were forced to

confirm that they had abandoned plans to consider selling the Tye.

Simon Doyle said, "Local people feel a real sense of ownership and had not appreciated that the Tye could be sold without their say so."

The Liberal Democrats have always maintained that the town council should retain ownership of the Tye on behalf of local people. Liz Lee said, "We will continue to work to ensure that the Tye can never be sold without full consultation with local residents."

Simon Doyle and Liz Lee will continue to press the town council to ensure the long term future of the Tye rests with local residents.



Lib Dems working hard for you

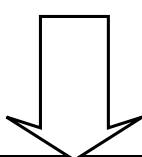
Huge support for Lib Dems locally

In a hard fought town council by-election in October 2010 Lib Dem candidate Simon Doyle narrowly missed out on being elected by just 4 votes.

This represents a massive swing in support from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats. Many local residents lent their support to Simon in recognition of the hard work on behalf of local people that he and the Lib Dem team have carried out over many years.

The Town and District council elections in May will be a straight fight between the Lib Dems and Conservatives.

Labour are
out of the
race across
East Saltdean



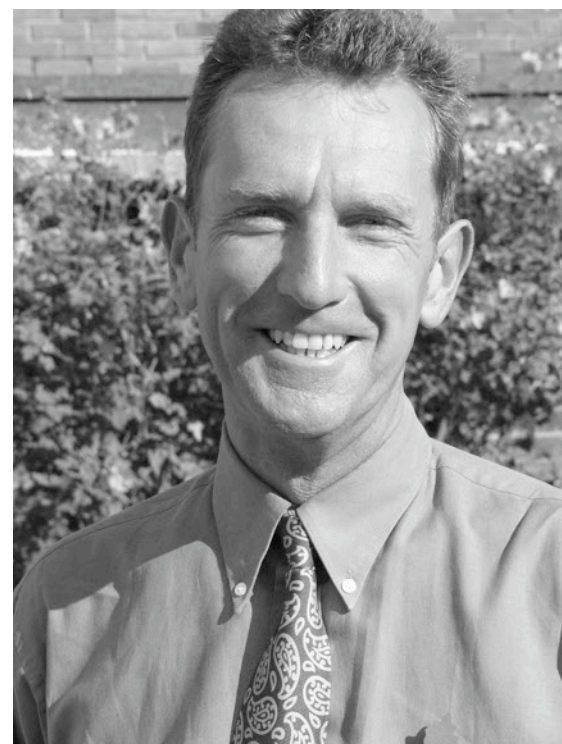
**Lab
112**

**Lib
Dem
264**

**Cons
268**

It's a straight fight between
the Lib Dems and
Conservatives in our area.

How you voted in East Saltdean



a record of action.....a promise of more

Coalition

In the 6 months since the Coalition was formed and the Lib Dems entered Government much has been achieved. The Lib Dems in Government have achieved amongst other things.

- Putting money back in your pocket by raising the level at which money is taxed.
- Restoring the link between pensions and earnings.
- A step towards electoral reform with the fairer votes referendum.
- Getting tough on banks by taxing bankers more and making them curb bonuses.
- The introduction of the new pupil premium which will give more money to schools with



**LIBERAL
DEMOCRATS**

Success

poorer pupils to spend on what they need.

- The scrapping of ID cards

The Lib Dems have been playing an important role in the Government during these tough financial times. The Labour Government left our country in an economic mess with the national debt rising by £427 million a day.

Tough decisions have had to be made and we have not been able to introduce all our policies.

Your local Lib Dem team is still working hard for you all year round. If there is anything we can help with please get in touch using the form below

Local concerns over state of roads

Many local people have contacted us regarding the poor state of repair of our roads in Telscombe and East Saltdean. This has been made worse by the recent sub zero temperatures.

Liberal Democrats have contacted East Sussex County Council on behalf of local residents highlighting the problems and petitioning for improvements.

Let Simon and Liz know which roads locally are causing you problems.

Low attendance from your Councillors

In May 2007, you elected three Conservative District Councillors to represent you at Lewes District Council. Local people have been appalled to learn of the attendance records of these councillors at Full Council meetings. Councillor James Page has attended just 25% and Councillor Ron Maskell just 50% of Full Council meetings this financial year so far. How can these councillors represent your interests when they do not even attend meetings?

Last year their attendance records for Full Council meetings were 40% and 60% respectively. They were both paid their full councillor's allowance. How can they justify this?

Liz Lee said, "Residents deserve councillors who are prepared to work hard on their behalf and actively represent their interests at Lewes District." Simon Doyle added, "It is shameful that they take their duties and responsibilities so lightly."

Get in touch with the local team

Liz
Lee



01273 305964

lizwlee@hotmail.com



Simon
Doyle



01273 307295

Simondoyle.ld@hotmail.co.uk



Putting people before politics

I can help the Lib Dems work for our area by:

- Displaying a poster at election time ☐
- Delivering a few leaflets in my street once a month ☐
- Contributing some money to cover campaign costs:
£10 ☐ £20 ☐ £50 ☐ £100 ☐ Other

(Cheques payable to 'Lewes Liberal Democrats')

The Lib Dems and their elected representatives may use the information you provide to contact you about issues you may find of interest. Some of these contacts may be automated. You can opt out of some or all contacts at any time by contacting us.

Donations of £10 or more entitle you to membership of the Lib Dems. Tick here if you do not wish to join. ☐

Name:

Address:

Tel: E-mail:.....

Please return to: East Saltdean Lib Dems, FREEPOST, 23 East Street, Lewes, BN7 2LJ.

Your views

Keep up-to-date: www.LewesLibDems.org.uk

Appendix K – List of Liberal Democrat Ministers²⁹¹

	Portfolio
Nick Clegg	Deputy Prime Minister Lord President of the Council Leader of the Liberal Democrats
Vincent Cable	Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills President of the Board of Trade
Chris Huhne	Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
Danny Alexander	Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Michael Moore	Secretary of State for Scotland
Lord McNally	Minister of State for Human Rights and Civil Liberties Deputy Leader of the House of Lords
Nick Harvey	Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Steve Webb	Minister of State for Pensions
Sarah Teather	Minister of State for Children and Families
Jeremy Browne	Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Paul Burstow	Minister of State for Care Services
Alistair Carmichael	Deputy Chief Whip of the House of Commons Liberal Democrat Chief Whip in the Commons
David Heath	Deputy Leader of the House of Commons

²⁹¹

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Democrat_Frontbench_Team#Liberal_Democrat_Frontbench_Team
(accessed 21.05.2011)

Norman Lamb	Assistant Government Whip in the House of Commons Chief Parliamentary and Political Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister
Mark Hunter	Assistant Government Whip in the House of Commons
Lord Shutt	Deputy Chief Whip in the House of Lords
Baroness Northover	Whip in the House of Lords
Lord Wallace	Whip in the House of Lords
Edward Davey	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs
Andrew Stunell	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Community Cohesion
Norman Baker	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Regional and Local Transport
Lynne Featherstone	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Equalities
Lord Wallace	Advocate General for Scotland

Appendix L - Chairmanship of Party Committees 1988-2010

Chair Federal Policy Committee (Leader)

Paddy Ashdown	1988-1998
Charles Kennedy	1998-2005
Ming Campbell	2005-2006*
Nick Clegg	2007+ **

*Between January 06 and Campbell's election there was no Chair, while Cable was interim Leader, but Webb, Brinton & Hargreaves as Vice-Chairs undertook Chair duties.

**in the run up to the general election of 2010 this role was performed by Danny Alexander and since then by Norman Lamb.

Chair Federal Executive (President)

Ian Wrigglesworth	1988-1990
Charles Kennedy	1991-1994
Robert Maclennan	1995-1998
Diana Maddock	1999-2000
Navnit Dholakia	2001-2004
Simon Hughes	2005-2008
Ros Scott	2009-2010
Tim Farron	2010+

Chair Federal Conference Committee

Willie Goodhart	1988-1992
Alan Sherwell	1992-1997
Liz Barker	1998-2003
Duncan Brack	2003-2009
Andrew Wiseman	2010+

Chair Federal Finance and Accounts Committee*

Tim Clement-Jones	1988-1998
Denis Robertson-Sullivan	1999-2000
Robin Teverson	2000-2001
David Griffiths	2002-2005
Duncan Greenland	2006+

* since February 2001 this post holder has been the Party's registered treasurer with the Electoral Commission. Although there is a separate elected post of Treasurer.