



## The 2015 Labour Party Conference

Our top takeaways for the tech, health & energy sectors





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### Corbyn's Labour: A New Age of Politics?

Jeremy Corbyn MP's first speech to Conference this week pledged to 'listen to everyone' and he expressed his desire for open debate and a kinder, more inclusive politics, but the behind the scenes manoeuvring was arguably anything but the new age of politics. Corbyn's team have sought to assert their authority quickly – the replacement of members of the National Executive Committee (overseeing the party's overall direction and policy-making process) and the decision not to debate Trident (an issue that appears set to split the party) were two prominent examples. Corbyn, however, has conceded on a few things – notably committing the party to campaign for staying in the EU despite the Eurosceptic GMB Union's proposal to hold a Special Conference before the party finalised its position on the referendum. His 'mandate for change' as he put it will especially appeal to the young and apathetic, but is likely to face significant opposition within the Party, as well as the Lib Dems, and the SNP, who want to defend their new power base.

### Labour's top team: How did they all do?

Corbyn's conference efforts were well-received by the unions, with the TUC's Frances O'Grady, and Unite's Len McCluskey, respectively praising Corbyn for covering the issues "*that really matter to working people*" and for his "*principles, honesty, fairness and dignity*". Unsurprisingly #Lab15 was all about Corbyn, but both the Shadow Chancellor and Deputy Leader managed to wrestle some media attention away from the man that was never supposed to be leader. As well as impressing with his promise of a review of how the Treasury operates, the controversial new Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP made use of the "*kinder politics*" theme and suggested that the best way of dealing with the party's surviving Blairite wing would be to "*kill them with kindness*". Tom Watson MP, Deputy Leader and all round Labour 'big beast', delivered an assured performance in the Conference's final speech to pledge loyalty to the new leader; appease Blair/Brown elements by recounting New Labour achievements; and assert that "*We have to be the party of everybody, or we're the party of nobody*".

Political Intelligence attended the Labour Party Conference and below you will find our top takeaways for the tech, health and energy sectors. Labour under Corbyn represents a new challenge to businesses of all sectors with a different approach to politics, both in style and content. Corbyn promised that the Labour Party under him "*will always put people's interests before profit*" but exactly how the party will interact with businesses is unclear at this stage.



## Tech

- **There is a growing interest in tech amongst the most senior levels of the Labour Party.** Corbyn has commissioned Deputy Leader Tom Watson MP to ensure the party itself harnesses social and digital media and labelled social media "*the point of communication of the future*".
- **The tax affairs of big tech companies will be scrutinised.** Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP used his Conference to outline 'aggressive' plans to balance the books including a close eye on the tax affairs of big companies - name-checking three major tech companies.
- **The Labour Party will campaign hard to ensure that superfast broadband reaches all.** Corbyn outlined an economic doctrine firmly rooted in infrastructure investment including "*investment in fast broadband to support new high technology jobs*".
- **The Party is gradually warming up to concepts and new avenues of tech such as financial technology ('FinTech') and the sharing economy.** The Conservatives have already announced various measures to harness FinTech and the sharing economy, amongst other things and the Labour Party are now steadily familiarising themselves with these too. Uber is an issue for Labour however – Labour's London Mayoral Candidate Sadiq Khan MP tweeted his support for Transport for London's proposals to restrict the use of Uber in London.
- **The Digital Economy Minister Chi Onwurah MP will campaign hard for tech start-ups.** Jeremy Corbyn has commissioned Shadow Business Secretary Angela Eagle MP and Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Owen Smith MP to look at the ways the UK Government supports the self-employed and helps them grow their business. Tech start-ups and online platforms that are home to self-employed and microbusinesses now have an exciting opportunity to engage with the various members of the Shadow Cabinet, including Chi Onwurah, the leading Labour thinker on tech. As mentioned before, the Uber issue and Labour's reaction to it is one issue to watch.
- **The key word for the Labour Party is inclusivity.** The Labour Party want to ensure that tech works for everyone, including those sections of the population who may not be as digitally literate as the rest. This was especially apparent during a fringe event on digital banking and FinTech and ensuring that these technologies worked for everybody.



## Health

- **Heidi Alexander versus Jeremy Hunt is one to watch.** Despite being Shadow Secretary of State for Health for mere weeks and surprised at her own elevation to the role, Heidi Alexander MP delivered composed and confident performances in fringe events and a well-received speech to conference. She represents a different challenge to Hunt compared to her predecessors.
- **The Shadow Health Team will 'defend' the NHS.** The NHS, the institution that the Labour Party is so emotive and protective about, will be used as the focus of Labour's attacks against the Conservatives. Buoyed by her campaign to save Lewisham A&E, Alexander has warned the Tories to "get prepared for the fight of [their] life"
- **Labour will align with junior doctors and the BMA** to reject the proposed changes to junior doctor contracts. This was apparent at the fringes which members of the Labour Health Team spoke at and the BMA's Mark Porter and Heidi Alexander spoke in unison on the issue.
- **Parity for mental health will be a big focus under Corbyn.** The appointment of Luciana Berger MP as Shadow Minister for Mental Health attending Shadow Cabinet reflects the importance that Jeremy Corbyn has afforded the issue - an issue that he chose to mention in his Conference speech.
- **NGOs and charities will be heard by the Shadow Health Team.** Alexander repeated her desire to listen and hear from all types of NGOs and charities when developing policymaking. Such bodies will enjoy the ear of the Shadow Health Team and can expect their views to be put forward at the despatch box.

## Energy

- **Labour will NOT renationalise the energy sector.** Contrary to the headline grabbing claims during Corbyn's leadership campaign to bring the big six energy companies, and the national grid, under public control, Labour are NOT in fact planning on renationalising the energy sector.
- **However, Labour will “democratise” the energy sector.** Pledging to "democratise" things is usually a pretty safe bet for ensuring Conference Hall applause. This time round was no different and new Shadow Energy Secretary Lisa Nandy's pledge scored highly on the Conference clap-o-meter. "Localise" would have been a more accurate (but less clap-worthy) term, but nonetheless Labour's support for community-owned clean energy projects is a step in the right direction.



- **Sound performance from the new Shadow Energy Secretary.** Lisa Nandy MP needed a strong Conference performance to make up for her relative inexperience in the sector. In the short term Nandy will need to further stamp her authority on the Labour energy brief at a time when the Party's policy position is in flux.
- **The rise of Alan.** Alan Whitehead MP has become a shadow minister for Energy and Climate Change. Whitehead is arguably Labour's most knowledgeable MP when it comes to renewable energy and energy efficiency. Long-serving chair of the leading All-Party Parliamentary Group for energy, PRASEG, Whitehead's well overdue promotion to the Shadow front bench will add credibility to Labour's energy policy offering.
- **Jez calls for a "Green New Deal".** Despite not focusing on Energy and Environment in his speech to Conference, Jeremy Corbyn did warn that the "global environment is in peril" and reassert his commitment to delivering more ambitious climate policies. Crucially, he did stress the Party's commitment to the green economy and backed a "Green New Deal" to boost investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

## Political Intelligence

For further information on the opportunities and challenges that the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn presents or if you'd like to discuss your current plans for this Parliament and ways in which Political Intelligence could support your organisation's public affairs activity, then please contact us on 020 3397 3300 or contact our Group Managing Director [Nicholas Lansman](#) for further information.