



The 2015 Conservative Party Conference

Our top takeaways for the health, tech and energy sectors

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The Prime Minister's Speech

This was a focused speech by the Prime Minister – re-energised by the election victory and confident enough to launch a sustained attack on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn MP, despite never mentioning his name, and even a cheeky dig at Lord Ashcroft's recent book about him. Cameron repeated the mantra of the Conservative Party being the only party for working people, appealing directly to Labour voters who feel abandoned by the party, and sought to address the biggest societal issues – poverty, equality, integration and extremism – head on.

The conference could have easily been a platform for the likes of Osborne, May, Gove and Johnson to jockey for position as Cameron's successor, however there was none of this. The Prime Minister made it clear will be taking difficult and defining decisions – on the EU referendum, asylum, cuts to working tax credits, airport capacity and delivering the manifesto pledge of a '7 day NHS'. Although there was clear cohesion within the party during the conference there is one clear issue that will hang over the party for the entire parliament- who will succeed Cameron?

Our main takeaways from #CPC15

The 2015 Conservative Party Conference was a confident one, but not victorious. The party realise that there is a real opportunity with Labour moving so far to the left, but are also clearly concerned that a lot of national and internal issues may affect the next 5 years. The speech from the conference that gained significant attention was that of Theresa May, who focused extensively on immigration evidently to appeal to the core Conservative supporters.

The Conference began with the news of Lord Adonis' appointment to chair the newly created independent National Infrastructure Commission with Adonis pledging to sit on the crossbenches to ensure that the Commission will be politically neutral. This was quite the coup for George Osborne and yet another encroachment into Labour territory. The speeches by Osborne, Johnson, May and Gove stood out for different reasons and each of those individuals will leave an indelible mark during this Parliament.



Health

- **A strong NHS needs a strong economy.** This is a pre-election sentiment that was reiterated throughout the conference by the Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt MP, during his main address and Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair of the Health Select Committee, at a number of fringe events. Many bodies representing medical professionals felt that this slogan should be 'a strong economy needs a strong NHS'.
- **The party are determined to deliver on their manifesto pledge of a '7-day-NHS'.** This was a tense topic during the fringes, with doctors and nurses in the audience voicing real concern about the lack of information from the government as to how they hope to achieve this. However, Jeremy Hunt made it clear in his main address that this pledge is something his department will be pursuing.
- **Still lots to learn from Mid Staffordshire.** Jeremy Hunt spent a lot of time reiterating that government and the NHS still have much to learn from the incident at the Mid Staffordshire hospital. There were increased calls from Hunt that we must 'learn from our mistakes'.
- **'Draconian' action on 'junk food'?** Jeremy Hunt branded childhood obesity a "national disgrace" at a fringe event and promised "draconian" action on junk food. He hinted at a tougher stance on the regulation of food companies and this will become far clearer within the forthcoming obesity strategy. Hunt was keen to highlight that a Conservative Government did not want to tell people how to live their lives and did not want to be a 'nanny state' except for when it came to children.

Tech

- **Surveillance is still a hot topic.** Numerous fringe events focused on data; whether it be health data or communications data. Many spoke about the prospect of the Investigatory Powers Bill appearing before parliament again. The broad feeling was that the government shouldn't be playing catch up in an emergency situation and should have access to a certain amount of people's private information (telephone conversations, emails and so on), but how much they should be granted access to remains the cause of contention.
- **The Party is far more comfortable with disruptive tech like FinTech and the sharing economy.** Tech fringes were prominent at the conference and the Party is naturally more comfortable with concepts such as the sharing economy (having previously commissioned a review into the sector) and FinTech (with Eileen Burbidge recently appointed as Special Envoy for the sector). Indeed, FinTech companies themselves seem relaxed with the Conservative Government and not overtly worried that regulatory barriers will rear their head at them.



- **...But the Uber issue threatens to split the party.** The Mayor of London is trapped between a rock and a hard place when dealing with Uber, as the TfL proposals to restrict Uber go against the very free-market principles upon which the Conservative Party was founded on. Speaking at a fringe event, Syed Kamall MEP, who came second to Zac Goldsmith MP in the Conservative London Mayoral Candidate, voiced his anger at “so-called Conservatives” who knock Uber and said that the Party should back Uber. The Uber issue will certainly be debated during the 2016 London Mayoral campaign and it will be interesting what position Goldsmith himself adopts.
- **Digital economy.** A recognition that there is still a lot more to be done in terms of opening up silos in Government so that the public can really feel the benefits of the digital economy within public services.

Energy

- **‘Real teeth’ for the energy ombudsman.** Amber Rudd MP, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, announced on Monday that the Energy Ombudsman would be given ‘real teeth’ to investigate ‘systemic issues in the industry’. This was praised by consumers and MPs, who feel that previously the ombudsman has not been able to take enough action.
- **Tories get “tough on subsidies”.** In an unconvincing attempt to defend renewable subsidy cuts, Amber Rudd said, “I support cutting subsidies - not because I am an anti-green Conservative, but because I am a proud green Conservative on the side of the consumer.” After the speech, Rudd selected #ProudGreenConservative to communicate her position to the Twitter crowd. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it failed to gain much traction - at the time of writing Rudd remains the sole user of that hashtag.

A National Infrastructure Commission will be established. The Chancellor, George Osborne MP, confirmed plans to establish a new National Infrastructure Commission in a bid to fast-track the building of new energy and transport infrastructure across the UK - a move largely welcomed by industry and green groups. However, parliament will still have final say – will the commission really result in an end to NIMBYISM?

- **Energy efficiency targets scaled down.** Rudd proudly announced that the Government would insulate a million more homes over the next five years. Whilst this sounds like an impressive figure, it shouldn’t be forgotten that insulation rates are in fact dramatically lower now than a few years ago and that the Green Deal and ECO scheme (in their original forms) insulated a million homes in 2 years.



Political Intelligence

For further information on the 2015 Conservative Party Conference 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.