

RANDALL'S

» Political monitoring with a human touch

Conservative Party
Conference 2023: roundup
briefing

Conservative Party Conference 2023

1-4 October 2023

Introduction

At his first conference as Leader of the Conservative Party, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was on a mission to redefine his premiership. With his party languishing in the polls and a general election on the horizon, [his speech](#) set out new dividing lines, not only with Labour but also with the thirteen years of Conservative government that precede him. Framing himself as a leader intent on change and unafraid to make difficult long-term decisions, he depicted Labour as the “walking definition of the thirty-year political status quo I am here to end”. It is a tough sell for a Prime Minister who, despite his brief tenure in Number Ten, has for four years been a government minister for the party that has led the country for well over a decade.

The fate of flagship infrastructure project HS2 dominated conference. Despite an [eleventh-hour plea](#) from the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street not to “cancel the future”, the axe finally fell during Sunak’s keynote speech. HS2 will be halted and its £36 billion budget will be reinvested in [Network North](#), a patchwork of alternative transport projects spanning rail, road and local transport (which is seen by some as a [spending trap](#) for Labour). Tied into Sunak’s “long term decisions for a brighter future” was the promise to reform school leavers’ qualifications and an interventionist pledge to end smoking by incrementally increasing the legal purchase age for cigarettes.

Whether this conference has done enough to settle his restive party remains to be seen. For Sunak, conference was an opportunity to reset the narrative and revive his party’s electoral fortunes. For his [potential successors](#), it was a chance to court the party faithful, raise their profile and push their agenda. A [Great British Growth Rally](#) with Priti Patel, Jacob Rees-Mogg and former Prime Minister Liz Truss drew excited crowds to the fringe, while Home Secretary Suella Braverman received a [standing ovation for her speech](#) railing against what she called a “privileged woke minority”. The fact that one of the Conservatives’ own London Assembly Members, Andrew Boff, was [escorted out of the venue](#) for an apparent heckle during that speech is a sign of a future plagued by rifts which may come to define the party if they lose the next election.

Over the coming months, the Prime Minister has a chance to solidify his change agenda, with a [new King’s Speech](#), autumn statement and an expected reshuffle. “Be in no doubt,” he told conference, “it is time for a change. And we are it.” At the next election, the public will decide whether or not they agree with him.

Key speeches and announcements

Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party

- [Prime Minister Rishi Sunak](#)
- [Prime Minister: “It is time for a change – and we are it”](#)

Business and trade

- [Secretary of State for Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch](#)
- [Regulators under the spotlight in new Post-Brexit review](#)
- [Government takes action to tackle late payments to SMEs](#)

Cabinet Office

- [Minister for Veterans’ Affairs Johnny Mercer](#)

Culture, media and sport

- [Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Luzy Frazer](#)

Education

- [Secretary of State for Education Gillian Keegan](#)

- [Conservatives take tougher action against unions to support students](#)
- [Conservatives crack down on mobile phones in schools](#)

Energy security and net zero

- [Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero Claire Coutinho](#)

Environment, food and rural affairs

- [Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Thérèse Coffey](#)

Foreign affairs and defence

- [Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly](#)
- [Defence Secretary Grant Shapps](#)
- [Defence Secretary reveals £4 billion for the UK's new hunter-killer submarines](#)
- [Shapps announces new UK support for NATO's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo](#)

Health and social care

- [Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Steve Barclay](#)
- [Health Secretary to change NHS Constitution to protect women](#)
- [New medical schools to train more NHS doctors](#)
- [New £30m fund to speed up NHS tech adoption](#)

Home affairs and justice

- [Secretary of State for the Home Department Suella Braverman](#)
- [Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Alex Chalk](#)
- [Government to strip partner-killers of parental responsibility](#)
- [Life means life for even more of society's worst killers](#)
- [UK to explore putting prisoners in foreign jails](#)

Leader of the House of Commons

- [Leader of the House of Commons Penny Mordaunt](#)

Local government, housing and levelling up

- [Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove](#)
- [Thousands more social housing tenants to benefit from homes that are warmer and cheaper to heat](#)

Science, Innovation and Technology

- [Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology Michelle Donelan](#)
- [Science and Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan announces 3000 AI scholarships](#)

Transport

- [Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper](#)
- [Transport Secretary slams brakes on Labour's anti-car measures](#)

Treasury

- [Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt](#)
- [Chancellor to announce National Living Wage boost and benefits reform to 'make work pay'](#)
- [Chancellor Jeremy Hunt: 'Conservatives are taking the long-term decisions for a brighter future'](#)

Work and pensions

- [Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Mel Stride](#)

Women and equalities

- [Women and Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch](#)

Devolved nations

- [Secretary of State for Scotland Alister Jack](#)
- [Alister Jack urges Scottish Government to respect devolution settlement](#)
- [Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Douglas Ross](#)
- [Douglas Ross: If you don't live near the M8, you're part of the SNP's 'forgotten Scotland'](#)
- [Secretary of State for Wales David TC Davies](#)
- [Labour must prioritise getting Wales moving again, not waste time on vanity projects – Welsh Secretary](#)
- [Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris](#)

Policy announcements

While the Conservative Party is in government, its annual conference is a chance to broadcast its political agenda. This contrasts with Labour's approach to conference, where it constitutionally adopts members' motions and, while in opposition, typically sets out new policies for the coming year. Despite the fact Conservative conference is not focused on policy development, it is a place where new policies are announced. Policies announced in ministerial speeches during this year's conference are compiled in the table below.

Business and trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle late payment of invoices and long payment terms supporting the small businesses. • Broaden the powers of the Small Business Commissioner, enabling it to undertake investigations and publish reports where necessary on the basis of anonymous information and intelligence, and rename it to reflect its role. • Strengthen the Prompt Payment Code so that business signatories must reaffirm their commitment every two years to stay on it. • Extend the Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance Regulations. • Promote the benefits of digital payment technologies. • Launch a review of regulators to seek out post-Brexit regulatory advantages, uncovering what works well, what can be improved in regulators' agility and performance, and how complexity and duplication can be reduced.
Education and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the Advanced British Standard, a Baccalaureate-style qualification for 16-19-year-olds, bringing together A Levels and T Levels into a new, single qualification. • Expand the existing schoolteacher recruitment and retention premium to all Further Education Colleges. • Double payments for teachers in key subjects granting up to £30,000 tax-free over the first five years. • Provide new funding to help students successfully re-sit English and Maths GCSEs. • Adopt an evidence-based approach to maths, inspired by the success in transforming literacy outcomes with phonics. • Introduce Minimum Service Levels in Higher Education to curtail strikes. • Ban mobile phones in schools.
Energy security and net zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate £80 million to insulate thousands of social homes, saving families on average £240 each year.

Foreign affairs and defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £4 billion investment to progress the development of the most advanced nuclear-powered attack submarines in the Royal Navy's History. • Send RAF Typhoons to Poland to bolster the deterrence against Russia. • Authorise full deployment of a battalion-sized UK Strategic Reserve Force to NATO's Kosovo peacekeeping mission.
Health and social care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the age of sale of cigarettes by one year each year (for the generation born on or after 1 January 2009) to prevent cigarettes being legally sold and create a smoke-free generation. • Consult on restricting the availability and appeal of vapes, including restricting flavours, disposability, packaging and point of sales displays. • Provide £30 million per year and new powers to fine rogue retailers who sell tobacco and vapes illegally and introduce enhanced age verification online. • Establish three new NHS medical schools to boost the number of NHS doctors with over 200 extra undergraduate places from 2024. • Medical school places to double to 15,000 by 2031 via the Long-term Workforce Plan.
Home affairs and justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enact Jade's Law and legislate so that those who murder their partners lose their parental rights. • Extension of Whole Life Orders will be applied retrospectively to those who have committed the crime but are yet to be sentenced. • Introduce new legislation to allow for the movement of prisoners to jails in other countries.
Science, innovation and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an £8 million increase to the number of AI scholarships. • Ensure very hard-to-reach rural homes and businesses can access state-of-the-art satellite broadband. • Introduce a £60 million pound Regional Innovation Fund. • Increase overall investment in British research and development to £20 billion by 2024.
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancel HS2 Phase 2 and HS2 East, and instead invest: £3 billion to connect the major cities of the North, £12 billion to better connect Manchester and Liverpool, £5.4 billion for road resurfacing in the North and Midlands and £2.8 billion for the South, £700 million to reopen Beeching-cut railways, £2.5 billion for a West Yorkshire mass transit system, £4.7 billion funding in smaller transport infrastructure in Northern towns, £1 billion for Bus Service Improvement Plans across the North and Midlands, £1 billion to electrify the North Wales Main, and improving the A75 with an undisclosed amount of finance. • Restrict "over-zealous" use of traffic management measures, including by cutting off councils from the DVLA database. • Change DfT's guidance to underline that 30mph is the default speed limit on urban roads. • Stop councils profiting from traffic offences. • Restrict 24-hour bus lanes • Introduce a new national parking platform, ending the need to install numerous apps.

Treasury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate Civil Service recruitment cap to prevent it from growing and introduce an Equality and Diversity Audit to ensure training is value for money. • National Living Wage boost in April 2024 to £11.64 an hour. • Introduce a law to ensure banks do not discriminate against lawfully held views.
Women and equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government will consult on key changes to the NHS Constitution to strengthen protections for women. • Consult with patients following concerns about protection for single sex wards and same-sex intimate care requests. • Sex-specific language now restored to online NHS advice pages.
Work and pensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Living Wage boost in April 2024 to £11.64 an hour.

For further information, please email team@randallsmonitoring.co.uk

© 2023 Randall's Monitoring | All rights reserved