

News / September 2021



Iain Anderson, Executive Chairman - iain.anderson@cicero-group.com

September is here, the summer is behind us, and students are back at school. That can only mean one thing: it's back to business for everyone. Ahead of us is the party conference season! The conferences haven't returned to fully in person yet and most will be a hybrid of virtual and in-person events, but they always offer an opportunity to gauge the state of the main parties. The spotlight will be on Keir Starmer as he will give his first speech in person to the Labour party conference since becoming party leader. For the Conservatives, this will be about pushing ahead on a manifesto paused by COVID. In this edition of the newsletter, we also look ahead to another crucial conference taking place in Glasgow in November: COP26. There are still doubts over whether it will be in person or virtual. A physical meeting is likely to lead to better results and after the summer we have seen with extreme temperatures and wildfires it's clear that global action is needed now more than ever.

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UK Politics: It's Party (Conference) Time!

By the UK Public Affairs team

Conference season is upon us and while this year one of the staples of the British political calendar is once again disrupted by the pandemic, it remains a good time to check in with the different parties and see how they are getting on. As we emerge from 18 months of lockdowns, this year's party conferences will likely be the starting point for a return to post-COVID-19 politics as usual.

Conservatives

by Matt Gillow, Senior Account Executive

For a governing party with such a big majority in the House of Commons, the Conservative Party continues to be fraught with factional tensions – and these are usually brought to the fore during Conference season, as backbench MPs and Ministers alike compete for grassroots attention.

Though perhaps disagreements within the Party have settled following decades of differing opinions over the European Union, the debate over vaccine passports, the cost of Net Zero, and the age-old interventionist versus free-market Conservative battle continues to cause friction within the Parliamentary Conservative Party.

Indeed, a handful of backbench MPs continue to refuse to attend this year's Conference in Manchester in protest over the Party's insistence that only double vaccinated registrants will be allowed to attend.

Though voices of dissent within the Conservative Party are muted, Boris Johnson's honeymoon period is now over. With a looming reshuffle rumoured to be on the horizon, keep one eye on the Conference fringes, where ambitious backbenchers will look to burnish their credentials for promotion.

COVID-19 will naturally loom large, but Conference season will likely signal something of a return to normal for the Conservative Party, with factional disputes emerging once more and reshuffle hopefuls playing politics.

Labour

by Dan Julian, Account Manager

This year's gathering will be the second with Keir Starmer as leader, but crucially the first time he will be addressing the Party faithful in person. After a moderately successful speech last year, many in the Party now see this month's conference as the opportunity for Starmer to reset his leadership and present a new vision to the country. As the UK emerges from the pandemic, Starmer and his Party will need to up their game if they are to steal a march from the Government. So far Labour has trailed in every poll since the end of January.

While that may have been understandable at the height of the vaccine roll-out, excuses are running out for Starmer, and his newly installed team need this Conference to go well in order to calm the nerves of jittery MPs. Crucial will be the performance of the new Shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, who has the unenviable task of setting out Labour's stall on the economy – traditionally the party's Achilles heel with voters.


Lib Dems

by Lizzy Tomlin, Account Director

Did you know the Scottish Lib Dems elected a new leader on 20 August 2021? Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP was elected after a month-long election contest where he was the only person to have put himself forward to succeed Willie Rennie. It got some pick-up in the news, mainly regional, but overall, it barely made a splash.

It encapsulates the problem currently facing the Lib Dems at the moment. Coverage of the Party is low because not many people are listening to what they have to say.

Nevertheless, no matter how low the Party's ratings



are or how little coverage the Party receives, their conferences are always buoyed by enthusiastic Party members who just simply LOVE the Lib Dems. It's a lovely yellow bubble of like-minded socks-and-sandal wearing members who understand the demise of the Party but still adore it.

It's therefore a shame that Lib Dem Conference this year will be held entirely virtually. There will be no Glee Club (a cringey singalong/karaoke event), no opportunity for Ed Davey to woo his members over a warm white wine, and no yellow bubble to keep spirits alive and leaflets through letterboxes. And it's needed now more than ever - the Lib Dems' 2020 annual report recently showed membership has fallen in a year by 22.5%

Nevertheless, the Party is keen to keep up the momentum it gained following the Chesham & Amersham by-election, where Lib Dem member activity swelled and was, ultimately, successful. Let's hope a virtual conference enables the Party to keep spirits high and momentum to conquer the 'Blue Wall' at the next election.

SNP

by Blair Campbell, Account Manager

While the campaign for a second independence referendum has gone quiet in recent months, the SNP's National Conference is set to bring the issue back to the forefront of the Party's political agenda. SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon will likely attempt to assuage concerns from factions within her Party that plans for a second referendum have been shelved. Independence has been labelled as one of three key policy themes for the conference, with proposals around plans for another referendum including the timing of a draft referendum Bill likely to cause significant debate.

Alongside the focus on independence, climate change will also feature prominently at the conference motivated by Glasgow hosting the COP26 climate summit in November. The SNP's ambition to brandish its green credentials have been boosted by the partnership agreement struck with the Scottish Greens and Sturgeon will seek to push forward with the Party's green agenda at conference.

Beyond the thematic focus of the conference, the optics of presenting a united Party after recent controversies will also be high in the priorities of the SNP's top brass. Following several months of negative news

reports around the Party's handling of donations that led to internal recriminations and the resignation of its National Treasurer Douglas Chapman, the conference will present an opportunity to refocus members around the cause of independence and position the SNP as the vehicle to achieving it.

For more information about Cicero/amo's public affairs services, please contact:

Lizzy Tomlin, Account Director, Public Affairs
elizabeth.tomlin@cicero-group.com

By Sophie Duley, Account Executive

'Coals, cars, cash and trees' is the latest rhetorical flourish to come from Number 10, but with just under two months to go until the COP26 climate summit, evidence of concrete action from governments around the world appears few and far between. Coupled with the damning reception to reports that COP President-Designate Alok Sharma flew to 30 countries in just seven months, the UK Government clearly has some way to go before they are able to achieve an international consensus in November.

Environmental action is no longer the proverbial can for the Government to kick down the road. Stark images of uncontrollable wildfires in Turkey and Greece are tangible and hard to ignore, and this is filtering through to the public's political consciousness. A shrewd populist, Boris Johnson will be keen to respond to this increased awareness and we may see political support begin to intensify domestically, bolstered by the long-awaited publication of the UK's comprehensive Net Zero Strategy – which is expected before COP26.

However, public and political concern does not necessarily translate to concrete action and the world's top diplomats face some major hurdles at the negotiating tables in November. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) recent Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) on the impacts of global warming stated starkly and unequivocally that human activity is changing the climate in monumental and irreversible ways, and now global pressure is mounting to achieve an international consensus in November. Thus far it has been challenging to pinpoint the exact intention of such a consensus, but there has been a consistent recognition of the critical need to "keep 1.5°C alive" – the current target for increases in temperature as set out in the Paris Accord – particularly in light of

the IPCC's report. Sharma has emphasised that the incoming Presidency will explore options for how the 'Glasgow outcome' will respond to any gap in 2030 ambition, including exploring the proposal for a roadmap towards keeping 1.5°C in reach.

Climate change is the looming threat to both our economy and society. Whether or not international consensus is achieved to the necessary extent in Glasgow, there will inevitably be an influx of new regulation in the UK and in nations across the globe. Business leaders must engage with policies that help countries to deliver on their emissions targets while protecting jobs, preventing energy poverty, and further driving economic growth. COP26 allows businesses to get an early insight into the direction of such regulation allowing them to work collaboratively towards a better future.

The sheer scale of climate change presents both business risk and opportunity. Companies that follow this year's COP - and all ensuing summits - will have a competitive advantage, staying ahead of emerging trends and keeping informed of regulation and innovation.

For more information about Cicero/amo's public affairs services, please contact:

Sophie Duley, Account Executive, Public Affairs
sophie.duley@cicero-group.com

Crisis Communications: the thinking exec's insurance

By Ed Saunders, Senior Account Executive

We all react differently to a crisis. Whether it's panic, anger, or crying in the corner with a jacket over our heads, all these responses might have a place in handling a personal crisis but not in a corporate crisis. We have found there are a few simple steps a business can take so that when the worst happens, they don't sink.

Like boy racers, some people hold the view that while a crash or crisis is a theoretical possibility for their business it 'won't happen to them'. This is a much higher stakes gamble with poorer odds than it may initially seem. It is important to bear in mind that while it can take 20 years to build a reputation, it can take just five minutes to ruin it.

A poorly handled crisis can impact a range of vital factors for any company. These include but aren't limited to: share price; market cap; income and margin; market-share, brand-share; personal reputation, government regulation and approvals; analysts' opinions; media coverage; and staff morale and productivity. Any one of these factors can and will impact an organisation's bottom line, combined they can wreck it. Marsh Consulting, the world's largest risk management consultancy, has found every £1 invested in crisis management returns £7 in averted costs.

But how likely are these kinds of events? For some, while the risks may be apparent the likelihood of a crisis occurring may seem remote, and so the cost and time required to prepare may seem unnecessary. Unfortunately, the odds are rarely that long. In 2019, Oxford Metrica found that executives have an 82% chance of facing a corporate disaster in any 5-year period (up from 20% in 1990).

Another major question is how one prepares for the unexpected. Crises, by their very nature, aren't planned for. Therefore, the steps a business can take are broad and flexible. While a whole crisis communications approach would run for tens of pages here are a couple of the initial measures a company should look to have in place.

Recognising the importance of preparing is the first step. Those with decision-making power must be among the first on board with the concept of preparing, as it will require time and money to accomplish correctly. While the exact crisis that will arise may be unknowable, it can be helpful to prepare for the most likely scenarios: product malfunction, issues concerning senior staff, or technological breakdown. The next step is identifying who will speak for and represent the company in these high stakes' situations. Making sure the right individuals are prepared beforehand, trained on how to handle the media, and know where they need to be and what to say saves vital time.

In short, when it comes to tackling a crisis, don't wait until the horse has bolted before closing the stable door. To quote a now rather trite remark, by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.

For more information about Cicero/amo's corporate comms services, please contact:

Ed Saunders, Senior Account Executive
edward.saunders@cicero-group.com

Meet the Cicero/amo team

Ben Hope, Research Director

Ben joined Cicero/amo in August 2019 as a Research Manager and is now a Research Director in Cicero/amo's expanding international research practice.

Ben has a depth of experience delivering large scale, multi-country research campaigns. In 2018 he spent 8 months on secondment in Switzerland to facilitate the set-up of a 97-country project.

More recently, Ben has developed expertise in the pensions and savings space, working with a wide range of clients in the sector including Aegon, the Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies, Columbia Threadneedle and AXA Group.

Outside of work, Ben is a keen runner and can often be spotted at Tooting Common Parkrun on a Saturday morning. Alongside this, Ben plays 5-a-side football and is also a long-suffering Arsenal supporter.



Get in touch... Ben Hope, Research Director - ben.hope@cicero-group.com

Issie Rees-Davies, Account Executive

Issie joined Cicero/amo in December 2020 and is an Account Executive in the Corporate Communications team. She works across a variety of financial services PR briefs. In particular, she focuses on pensions and savings, cryptocurrency and banking. Issie supports media engagement in pursuit of a range of business goals.

Issie holds a BA in Politics and International Relations from the University of York and before joining Cicero/amo Issie interned at various communications agencies gaining experience in financial and health communications and public affairs.

Outside of work Issie enjoys running, swimming, and is hoping to run the London Marathon next year and is swimming the Bosphorus Channel.



Get in touch... Issie Rees-Davies, Account Executive - issie.rees-davies@cicero-group.com

Cicero/amo's Managing Director John Rowland joins influential Public Affairs body

Congratulations to John, who joins the the Public Relations & Communications Association PRCA Executive Committee, which helps ensure transparency, enforces high standards, and promotes a wider understanding of public affairs and the contribution it makes to public life. He follows in the footsteps of Cicero/amo's Managing Director of UK Public Affairs, Tom Frackowiak.



What is it like to intern at Cicero/amo? Q&A

We were delighted to be joined by Zoe and Dylan (through Talent Tap), Quentin, Khadra, Gabriella and Taya, who all undertook internships with the public affairs and communications teams. Despite remote working they all found the experience invaluable, and we wish them well in their future careers. To find more about their experiences you can hear from Khadra below.

By Khadra, Intern, Taylor Bennett Foundation Summer Stars Programme

We recently welcomed Khadra to intern at Cicero/amo for a month in our public affairs and corporate communications teams, with the following Q&A completed at the end of her time here.

[Click here to read Khadra's account of her experience across the month.](#)

What was your favourite thing about interning at Cicero/amo?

My favourite thing has been the team culture, as everyone has been super friendly and accommodating, making me feel valued as an intern. In my first week, I had introductory meetings with different members of the Cicero/amo team, and it was so inspiring to hear their stories and passion for their roles. I believe I have met someone from every branch of the Cicero/amo team and it has been so interesting to see how each team has different areas of expertise.

Another thing I have loved about interning at Cicero has been the flexibility and diversity of tasks I have been given which has enabled me to gain a real flavour of both Public Affairs and Corporate Communications. The different tasks I have worked on have enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of key issues and complexities across sectors.

What work are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the different tasks I have completed, from research to stakeholder mapping, summarising reports and reaching out to journalists. This has allowed me to gain an unparalleled insight into Public Affairs and Corporate Communications.

I had never worked on stakeholder mapping, but throughout this internship I have been given lots of

opportunities to do so which has enabled me to quickly become skilled at an important task.

How have you found working with your team(s)?

I have really enjoyed working with each team as they are both friendly, welcoming and funny which made it super easy to fit in. What I have noticed is that both teams are a little competitive and are keen for me to state which team is best which is super funny!

Both teams are very accessible, and each member of staff has gone above and beyond in checking up on me, providing sound advice and giving feedback, which helps me improve.

I have truly enjoyed working with the Public Affairs and Corporate Communications team and it has been an invaluable experience to be part of a global strategic agency.

What is the most interesting thing you have worked on during the internship?

It's so hard to pick just one – but the most interesting thing I have worked on has to be the research on cryptocurrency, FinTech and open banking. These are areas that align with my interests, and it was so exciting to work with experts in this area and see how my research will impact strategy.

I have found all my tasks across Public Affairs and Corporate Communications dynamic and engaging!

What are your takeaways from the internship?

My key takeaways from this internship include:

- 1 Internal communication is key: Throughout this internship, I have made it a priority to keep my manager informed of my current workload, whether I am having difficulty completing a task and whether I would like to work on a different sector.
- 2 Ask questions: Asking questions about the tasks I have been given, providing regular updates and clarifying them has enabled me to make sure I am on the right path when completing tasks, to produce high-quality pieces of work.
- 3 Reach out to the team: Working remotely has made it easier for me to communicate and schedule calls with my team which has been a useful way to get feedback as well as consolidating the connection with my colleagues.
- 4 Stay connected: As I have met with most of my team in the office, I have added them on LinkedIn and will stay in touch. I am interested in how the teams will get on in the future and have no doubt they'll be hitting further milestones.
- 5 Be proactive: I have always looked for opportunities to learn and support my colleagues in their day-to-day job. This has meant I have helped achieve short turnrounds and have gained team-wide exposure is so valuable as an intern.

This internship was organised through the Taylor Bennett Foundation's summer stars programme. The Taylor Bennett Foundation is a charity that exists to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) graduates to pursue a career in communications, seeking to address the need for greater diversity in the public relations industry.

If you would like to find out more about similar opportunities at Cicero/amo, [please do get in touch](#).