



Universities
UK

SEPTEMBER 2026

Deputy Director, Public Affairs

Recruitment pack

Contents

A message from our CEO, Vivienne Stern	2
Who are we?	3
Role description	4
Person specification	7
Working at UUK: Benefits	9
Equality, diversity and inclusion	11
Staff engagement and wellbeing at work	12



A message from our CEO, Vivienne Stern

Universities UK (UUK) is the collective voice of universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We bring them together to pursue a common cause: thriving universities, serving society.

My journey at UUK started as a Parliamentary Officer and I have progressed through the organisation from there, with the opportunity to work across a range of different teams, up to becoming CEO. This is testament to the fact that at UUK we support our people to succeed, helping us achieve our ambitious goals as an organisation as a result.

At UUK we believe that supporting our people to succeed involves prioritising wellbeing at work and being an inclusive employer. We employ a total of around 160 staff across the UUK Group. In our 2025 staff survey, we scored highly for caring about our employees and treating them with fairness and respect. We also have active staff networks, an equality, diversity and inclusion champions group, and mental health first aiders, who all play an important role in making UUK a friendly, safe and inclusive place to work.

I am continually inspired by the passion and talent of the team at UUK. If you care about higher education, its ability to transform people's lives and its impact on wider society, then, in my opinion, there is no better place to do it than here.

Who are we?

At Universities UK, we harness the power of the UK's universities and create the conditions for them to thrive. We are the collective voice of 142 universities, bringing them together to pursue a common cause: thriving universities, serving society.

This mission forms the core of our [strategic plan](#) which runs to 2030 and sets out our ambitions for the sector. Our influence, convening power, and insight will enable our universities to:

- transform the lives of more people from the UK and around the world through high-quality education.
- drive greater growth and prosperity through the knowledge and skills they generate, creating places that allow communities to flourish.
- be globally competitive centres of research, at the forefront of making ground-breaking discoveries with the power to change our world.

To help them achieve this we will:

- secure sustainable funding that enables our universities to serve society better.
- build trust and confidence that our universities are a national asset to be proud of and are acting in the best interests of society.



Role description

Post title: Deputy Director, Public Affairs

Responsible to: Director of Communications

Direct reports: Senior Public Affairs Manager; Public Affairs Officer; Communications Assistant

Salary: £76,283 – £84,758 (dependent on experience) (E Regional)

Location: London

The team: Communications

Job summary: Universities UK operates a hybrid working framework involving the opportunity to work from home and in the office. There will be a small number of roles where employees will be required to work from an office, but typically the majority of employees will be able to work remotely on average 60% of their working week. All employees are welcome to use their contractual office for their whole working week if that is their preference.

This leadership position – part of the Communications Group and Universities UK's (UUK) senior management teams – plays a central role in setting UUK's lobbying priorities, agreeing the strategy to achieve them and, ultimately, winning political change to enable thriving universities serving society.

The post-holder will act as a strategic advisor to senior leadership on where UUK should focus its political capital, coordinate political influencing activity across the organisation and membership, and ensure organisational focus remains on achieving our agreed priorities.

They will be able to build and mobilise political and stakeholder networks, able to orchestrate influence across a large well-connected membership and capable of motivating and organising a high performing team.

The post-holder will have excellent contacts in Westminster. They will be experienced at determining and influencing where public affairs resource is concentrated and making trade-offs between competing priorities. They will know how to build systems and processes for stakeholder management, prioritisation and impact measurement, and be able to build relationships with key political influencers.

An interest in higher education policy and issues affecting the sector is desirable.

Main responsibilities:

- Use political judgement to provide strategic counsel to the organisation, especially the Chief Executive and board, on UUK's political influencing priorities and where the organisation should deploy its political capital.
- Orchestrate the political influence of UUK and our membership and mobilise it to achieve our agreed political priorities, including working effectively with the Deputy Director of Communications and Campaigns, especially on policy focused communications.
- Provide strategic leadership to the work of the Public Affairs team, devising and implementing strategies that support the delivery of UUK's political priorities (in line with our strategic plan) and its wider approach to repositioning the conversation about UK universities.
- Ensure that UUK has the relationships warranted by an organisation representing 142 institutions that are pivotal to driving growth in every part of the country. Own those relationships where appropriate or ensure that others do, including creating opportunities for the CEO and elected members to build and deploy their influence.
- Oversee our work coordinating the All Party Parliamentary Group for universities.
- Identify emerging political risks for the sector, devising and implementing strategies to proactively mitigate them.
- Take a proactive and creative approach to building effective coalitions with stakeholders that enable UUK to achieve its short, medium and long-term political priorities.
- Continuously develop the four strong Public Affairs team, actively participate in UUK's senior management group helping to shape the direction of the organisation and drive forward our Equality, Diversity and Inclusions priorities.
- Report to the Board on political engagement priorities and impact, facilitate opportunities for board members to participate in UUK's political affairs activity where appropriate, and support, coordinate with and advise distinct public affairs teams in Universities Scotland and Universities Wales as necessary.

- Deputise for the Director of Communications as required.

Compliance and governance

- to take responsibility for own health and safety in line with UUK H&S policy and current legislation and undertake such responsibilities as they relate to any employees, volunteers or contractors for which the post is responsible.
- to ensure compliance with UUK's internal procedures and all external legal requirements.

Personal effectiveness

- to take responsibility as far as is practical for own personal development to ensure that personal knowledge and skills are updated to ensure effectiveness in meeting work objectives.

General

- to show respect to colleagues, external partners and stakeholders, and to understand and adhere to UUK's Equal Opportunity policy, UUK Staff Standards of Conduct, and UUK's organisational capabilities.
- to work collegially, and to support all the teams which the post has contact with, in achieving the organisation's objectives.
- any other duties commensurate with the grade and level of responsibility of this post, for which the post holder has the necessary experience and/or training.
- This job description will be reviewed and amended in the light of changing professional demands. A job description is not a rigid or inflexible document but acts to provide guidelines to the duties expected while in post.

Last reviewed: *September 2026*

Person specification

Essential skills:

Essential skills	Assessment
A. WORK BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE Experience of successfully advising senior leaders, boards or executive teams on political strategy and prioritisation.	Application form
A. WORK BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE Experience of devising and delivering political influencing campaigns, including using public affairs techniques to impact public policy and coordinating networks and building stakeholder advocacy.	Application form / Interview
B. SKILLS AND APTITUDES REQUIRED Ability to determine and influence where public affairs resource should be concentrated, advising on trade-offs between competing priorities.	Application form / Interview
B. SKILLS AND APTITUDES REQUIRED Ability to work within and to lead a team - to mobilise resources and motivate staff, put in place the right systems and processes and evaluate impact to drive continuous improvement.	Application form / Interview

C. SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

Strong political contacts and experience of exerting influence through parliament and during the legislative process.

Application form / Interview

D . PERSONAL QUALITIES

A demonstrable commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

Interview

Demonstratable experience of embedding inclusivity into your work.

Application form / Interview

Desirable skills:**Desirable skills****Assessed by****A. WORK BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE**

Educated to degree level or equivalent qualification

Application form

C. SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

Knowledge and experience of the Higher Education sector and policy development.

Application form / Interview

D . PERSONAL QUALITIES

Flexibility to the needs of the organisation, including attendance of Party Conferences, evening and breakfast events when required.

Interview

Working at UUK: Benefits

If you care about higher education, its ability to transform people's lives and impact wider society, joining our team is a great opportunity.

Universities play a huge part in our everyday lives, and we want to help them make even more of a difference. We bring together leaders of UK universities to discuss higher education issues and represent and campaign on their behalf to the government, business, the media and beyond.

People drive our success, and we value everyone's work.

Universities UK operates a hybrid working framework involving the opportunity to work from home and in the office. There will be a small number of roles where employees will be required to work from an office, but typically the majority of employees will be able to work remotely on average 60% of their working week. All employees are welcome to use their contractual office for their whole working week if that is their preference.

"I joined Universities UK three months after leaving university, and I immediately felt so welcomed and supported. I've been given opportunities to develop new skills, get involved in such a variety of interesting projects and work with colleagues across the organisation. It's a really friendly place to work and I feel trusted and valued to put my own views and ideas into practice."

Sofia Henderson, Senior Content Producer

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT STAFF BENEFITS AND WELLBEING, VISIT OUR [WORKING AT UUK PAGE](#)

Staff benefits

Leave



- 27 days annual leave rising to 30 days after 3 years' service and 32 days after 5 years' service plus bank holidays (England and Wales).
- 26 days annual leave rising to 29 days after 3 years' service and 32 days after 5 years' service plus bank holidays (Scotland).
- 4 closure days between Christmas and New year.
- 2 days paid leave each year for volunteering activities.
- Up to 5 days paid carers leave in a year.

Wellbeing



- Access to 24 hour 7 day a week Employee Assistant Programme which extends access to close family.
- Virtual Medical Care – 24 hour access to GP consultations and physio.
- Mental Health First Aiders.
- Staff network groups.

Financial wellbeing



- Interest free season ticket loans after 6 months.
- Staff benefit fund loan scheme.
- 'Learn for you' – claim £100 each year tax free towards hobbies and activities outside of work.
- Funding support for continuing development, up to 2/3 of course costs paid with the remaining funded through an interest free loan recovered through monthly pay.
- Generous pension scheme (USS or SAUL depending on role).
- Salary sacrifice Cyclescheme.
- Salary sacrifice Electric Car Scheme.
- A £45 contribution every two years towards eye tests and the purchase of glasses where required.



Home working



- Hybrid Working policy – 40% of time averaged over a month to be spent in the office or meeting face to face with stakeholders, allowing 60% of time to be worked from home.
- Support for homeworking set up and furniture/equipment loan for the life of your employment with us.

External schemes



- As employees of a registered charity you will be able to access:
 - [Charity worker discounts](#)
 - [The Company Shop](#)
 - [Tickets for Good](#).
- Access to Able Futures for mental wellbeing support.
- Apple hardware discount scheme.

Our office facilities



- Tea/coffee/milk provided for refreshments.
- Kitchens available in all offices with access to fridges and microwaves.
- Shower facilities available (London and Cardiff).
- Cycle storage facilities.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

We want every member of staff to feel that they belong, can be themselves and that their opinion counts.

We can only reach our ambitious goals with multi-skilled, multi-experienced teams. Different perspectives make our work better.

What unites us is a passion for higher education and the enthusiasm to spread the message about the positive impacts UK universities have on our society.

We are committed to the equal treatment of all current and prospective employees and do not condone discrimination on the basis of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, or marriage and civil partnership. We aspire to have a diverse and inclusive workplace and strongly encourage suitably qualified applicants from a wide range of backgrounds to apply and join UUK.

An equal, inclusive and diverse place to work

Equality, diversity and inclusion help create new ideas and approaches to teaching, learning and research. With that in mind, we're building a culture where difference is valued. We're constantly evolving the programmes and tools that help all employees grow and manage rewarding careers.

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT UNIVERSITIES UK,
READ OUR [INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN](#)**

Staff engagement and wellbeing at work

Staff engagement

In our 2023 staff survey, we scored higher than similar organisations for caring about our employees and treating them with fairness and respect, and that 86 per cent felt proud to work for UUK.

Wellbeing at work

We care about the mental health and wellbeing of all our staff. Having open and honest conversations about mental health is important to us. Our commitment to staff wellbeing includes:

- Training some members of staff to become mental health first aiders so they are there for colleagues who need support and advice.
- Raising awareness by recognising Mental Health Awareness Week with external speakers, opportunities to come together and talk and take part in activities
- Training for managers and all staff on mental health awareness
- Employee Assistance support helpline.



Universities UK is the collective voice of 142 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Our mission is to create the conditions for

UK universities to be the best in the world; maximising their positive impact locally, nationally and globally.

Universities UK acts on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution



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