Universities Scotland

Senior Policy Officer

Recruitment pack

November 2026

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A message from UUK 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.



A message from US Director, Claire McPherson

Universities Scotland is part of the UUK family. Our staff team works to ensure Scotland's 19 higher education institutions have a strong collective influence on government and politicians. We work creatively on policy co-creation and on campaigning to promote our members' contribution to building a better world.

Based around the Edinburgh office, the staff team works on a hybrid basis as part of the UUK group, with a high level of policy autonomy which reflects the highly devolved nature of Scottish higher education. We lead engagement with the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, and stakeholders, and on shaping the narrative, policy, and funding outcomes for our members as specific to Scotland. Scotland's size means that we have close relationships with all the key partners, and that our university members are frequently in the spotlight. What that means for my colleagues, whatever their role, is that there's a real opportunity to be hands-on and to make a difference on behalf of this world-leading sector.

Who are we?

Scotland's universities are world leading. Our mission as Universities Scotland is to support them. We do this by campaigning for conditions that help increase their impact locally, nationally and globally.

The success of Scottish higher education is built on a spirit of collaboration. The free flow of ideas and knowledge depends on it. Which is why we've been fostering close relationships between UK universities for more than a century.

Universities Scotland and Universities UK are the collective voice of 142 universities across the UK, and 19 in Scotland. Our universities have world-leading reputations for excellence in teaching and research, making a huge difference to people's lives.

Universities Scotland is the national council for Scotland's universities, operating as part of Universities UK and alongside Universities Wales. Colleagues at Universities Scotland are employees of Universities UK. Day-to-day, you'll find we work with a high degree of autonomy as relevant to the Scottish context, but always with that connection to colleagues in UUK and the wider UK context for higher education.

Together with our members, we aim to shape policy that allows universities to deliver the greatest impact possible for students, staff, the economy, and the communities they serve. By demonstrating these benefits, we're helping UK and Scottish universities build trust with policymakers and the public.

Role description

Post title: Senior Policy Officer

Responsible to: Deputy Director (Policy)

Salary: £43,836 - £48,707 (dependent on experience)
(Band C National)

Location: Edinburgh

Team: Universities Scotland

Job summary: Universities Scotland is the representative organisation for Scotland's 19 higher education institutions (HEIs). We are highly influential in ensuring that politicians, government, and its agencies make decisions that promote higher education and its contribution to our economy, culture, and society.

We are seeking an energetic and creative individual to fill an exciting Senior Policy Officer role, leading on research, innovation, and regional economic development. The role is a rare opportunity to operate at the heart of Scottish higher education, working closely with Principals and senior colleagues in universities, government, funding agencies, and other representative bodies.

Universities Scotland is a team of 16 staff covering all aspects of policy that affect a complex, >£5 billion sector. We aim to be a confident, creative organisation, with an emphasis on learning and integrity. In developing evidence-based policy proposals and the promotion of our messages, we aim to achieve a positive and significant impact for our members.

You will have a strong ability to assimilate and analyse large amounts of evidence, understanding members' and stakeholders' priorities, and developing policy proposals that can influence our key audiences. You will have the capacity to be authoritative and persuasive in your presentation to senior audiences within and outside Universities Scotland.

The successful applicant will have the flexibility to build and maintain a wide range of stakeholder connections; understand diverse issues and perspectives quickly; build strategic connections between varied policy areas; and work with our specialist public affairs and communications team to turn evidence into persuasive stories. You will also work more broadly across our team to deliver on key policy and advocacy issues across our responsibilities.

This role is based at our office in Edinburgh, but our team works on a hybrid basis between the office, homeworking, and attending meetings in the sector and with other stakeholders.

Main responsibilities:

Research and Innovation (approx. 65% of the role)

- Representing Scottish university interests in the development and implementation of key Scottish and UK Government research and innovation policy frameworks.
- Formulating and securing sector endorsement of collective policy positions in relation to emerging policy areas, enabling engagement with government, funders, and other external stakeholders.
- Supporting members to advocate for the value and impact of the Scottish Funding Council's Research Excellence Grant (REG), Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG), Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund (KEIF), and other strategic investments in research and innovation.
- Working closely with colleagues at Universities UK, influencing development of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) strategies and funding streams, including the continuation of policy for a dual support system that works for Scotland;
- Influencing the development and operation of performance frameworks such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF);
- Working with US members and Scottish and UK agencies to raise awareness and understanding of the opportunities created by investment in university research and innovation;
- With US's Senior Policy Officer (International) and Universities UK International, supporting the sector's engagement with the Trusted Research and Secure Innovation policy agenda;
- Explaining and promoting the role of universities in the Scottish innovation ecosystem;
- Working with members, developing sector responses to consultations and evaluations, e.g. from the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government, and the Scottish Funding Council, relating to investment in research and innovation;
- Promoting the contribution universities make to public services (including through the NHS), government reform, and evidence-based policymaking;

- Developing and delivering, in consultation with the US Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) Convener, an annual research and innovation work plan;

- Planning and executing RKEC meetings, agreeing priority issues, speakers, and other matters with the Convener, and drafting papers as required;

- Working with the US Policy Assistant, and with colleagues at the Scottish Funding Council, delivering an annual joint meeting of the US and SFC Research and Knowledge Exchange Committees;

- Maintaining a strong working relationship with RKEC sub committees, including attending meetings and providing analysis and input as required; and

- Organising ad hoc meetings and events to support members' engagement with ministers and key policy makers from government agencies and funding agencies.

Regional economic development and engagement policy (approx. 35% of the role)

- Working with the Principal Lead Member for regional economic development and engagement, promoting the role universities play in local and regional ecosystems, and undertaking advocacy activities to ensure that US members are sighted on, and able to shape, key policy developments;

- Leading engagement on behalf of the university sector with Scottish and UK Government policymakers responsible for regional devolution policy, and engaging with funders and enterprise agencies on the sector's critical contribution to driving economic growth;

- Leading development of an evidence base on universities' place-based economic, civic, and cultural impacts;

- Increasing the profile of universities' contribution to regional economies, working collaboratively with the US Public Affairs and Communications Team; and

- Planning and executing meetings of the Regional Economic Development and Engagement Network, agreeing priority issues, speakers, and other matters with the Lead Member, and drafting papers as required.

Other duties

- Assisting in the arrangement of Universities Scotland events and externally focused activities as appropriate;

- Helping to respond promptly to enquiries from universities or other stakeholders;

- Representing Universities Scotland at external events, meetings, and conferences where appropriate; and

- Deputising for the Deputy Director in their absence.

Compliance and governance

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

Personal effectiveness

- Taking responsibility as far as is practical for your own personal development, ensuring that personal knowledge and skills are updated to enable effectiveness in meeting work objectives.

General

- Showing respect to colleagues, external partners and stakeholders, understanding and adhering to UUK's Equal Opportunity policy, UUK Staff Standards of Conduct; and UUK's organisational capabilities;

- Working collegially, and supporting all the teams the post has contact with, in achieving the organisation's objectives; and

- 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: *November 2026*

Person specification

Essential skills:

Essential skills	Assessment
QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING An honours degree, or equivalent (SCQF level 10 or above).	Application form
SKILLS AND APTITUDES REQUIRED Highly numerate, with the ability to use data to make a well-evidenced case.	Application form / Interview
Strong written and oral communication skills, including the ability to make a persuasive argument.	Application form / Interview
Excellent interpersonal skills, including the ability to develop and maintain productive working relationships with a wide range of people and organisations within HE and beyond, including senior staff in universities and government.	Application form / Interview
Ability to work cooperatively in teams, and with different kinds of people, contributing to team decisions and maintaining team relationships by supporting others.	Application form / Interview
Ability to develop an understanding of new policy areas and to add value to the organisation's work in those areas.	Application form / Interview
Sensitivity to the political and policy context and working in a membership organisation.	Application form / Interview
Ability to work confidently with core Microsoft Office packages, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and CoPilot.	Application form / Interview

Ability to plan and manage one's own time and several projects at once, and to deliver outputs on schedule.	Application form / Interview
PERSONAL QUALITIES Willing to be flexible and positive about change.	Interview
Committed to high standards.	Interview
Demonstrable experience of embedding inclusivity into your work.	Application form / Interview
OTHER REQUIREMENTS Willingness to travel within Scotland and occasionally to other parts of the UK.	Interview

Desirable skills:

Desirable skills	Assessed by
Experience in influencing and interpreting government policy	Application form/Interview
Good knowledge of UK higher education, particularly HE policy in Scotland, and research and innovation policy at the Scotland and UK levels.	Interview

Our activities and vision

Our activities

Our core activities include:

- shaping national and international policy
- building public understanding of the quality and impact of Scotland's universities
- offering support and guidance to our members
- advocating for the Scottish higher education sector in Scotland, the UK, and overseas

Our vision

1. Sustainable Funding

Securing a sustainable financial future for Scotland's universities is our foremost priority. We will work with government, parliament, and partners to develop a long-term funding model that supports excellence in teaching, research, and innovation, while reducing vulnerability to short-term financial pressures. This includes advocating for investment that reflects the full cost of educating students, sustaining world-leading research, maintaining university infrastructure, and enabling institutions to plan confidently for the future.

2. Dynamic Policy Leadership

Universities Scotland will provide strategic leadership on the key policy issues shaping higher education and Scotland's future. We will help inform and influence national debates on skills, economic growth, public service reform, lifelong learning, technological change, sustainability, and social mobility. Through evidence-based analysis and constructive engagement, we will ensure that universities are recognised as essential partners in addressing Scotland's long-term opportunities and challenges.

3. Enhancing the Student Experience

Students are at the heart of everything universities do. We will champion policies and partnerships that support a high-quality, inclusive, and enriching student experience, from access and participation through to success and progression. This includes supporting student wellbeing, improving outcomes for learners from all backgrounds, strengthening pathways into and through higher education, and ensuring graduates are equipped with the skills, attributes, and experiences needed to thrive in a changing world.

4. Economic and Social Impact

Scotland's universities are among the country's most important civic and economic institutions. We will demonstrate and strengthen their contribution to national prosperity, regional development, and social progress. This includes highlighting the sector's role in developing talent, supporting public services, fostering entrepreneurship, advancing social inclusion, and contributing to the cultural and civic life of communities across Scotland. We will ensure universities are central to discussions about Scotland's economic future and national wellbeing.

5. Research, Innovation, and Global Connections

Research and innovation are fundamental to Scotland's competitiveness and international reputation. We will support policies and partnerships that strengthen Scotland's research base, accelerate the translation of knowledge into economic and societal benefit, and enhance collaboration between universities, industry, and the public sector. We will also promote the international outlook of Scotland's universities, supporting global research partnerships, international student recruitment, knowledge exchange, and Scotland's wider international ambitions.

6. Effective Advocacy

Universities Scotland will be a trusted and influential voice for the sector. We will advocate consistently and persuasively with government, parliament, business, the media, and wider society, ensuring that the contribution and priorities of universities are clearly understood. Our approach will be grounded in evidence, focused on solutions, and centred on building strong relationships that advance the interests of both the sector and Scotland as a whole.

Underpinning all six priorities is a commitment to partnership and transformation. The challenges facing higher education cannot be addressed by universities, government, or any single stakeholder acting alone. We will work collaboratively across the sector and with national partners to deliver sustainable reform, enhance impact, and ensure that Scotland's universities continue to be globally competitive institutions that serve learners, communities, and the economy, for generations to come.

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 31 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.

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

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

We want every member of staff to feel that they belong and 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 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.

Wellbeing at work

We care about the mental health and wellbeing of all of 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, and creating opportunities to come together to talk and take part in activities;
- Training for managers and all staff on mental health awareness; and
- 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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