

# Senior External Affairs Officer

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Reports to: External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs)

Location: London

## Purpose

The postholder will be responsible for supporting the NHS Confederation's external affairs function on a day-to-day basis, including its stakeholder, parliamentary and government engagement, as well as managing and contributing to wider communications plans and playing an active role in our media relations, as required.

As such, it is an integrated communications role and will require the postholder to contribute to the delivery of our external affairs strategy so that we can build and maintain our strategic connections and profile, share intelligence, and influence policy on behalf of our members.

## Scope

The NHS Confederation is the membership body for the NHS, which brings together and speaks on behalf of all parts of the health system.

Our membership spans the full range of organisations that provide and commission services, including acute, community, mental health, and ambulance service trusts; clinical commissioning groups; primary care networks; GP federations, and integrated care systems. We work across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and have a European Office focused on Brexit and international learning opportunities.

Also, the NHS Confederation is contracted by the Department of Health and Social Care to provide the NHS Employers service, which acts on behalf of employers within the NHS provider sector in England. This places us in a strong position to influence workforce policy development and implementation.

Through our networks we speak on behalf of providers and commissioners across the different sectors, but we are also uniquely placed to articulate the interests of the whole healthcare system. Our strength lies in the diversity of our membership and our ability to bring together all parts of the health and care system to develop solutions to major challenges.

## About the role

Reporting to the External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs), the Senior External Affairs Officer will be responsible for supporting our public affairs work, ensuring we are abreast of key political and stakeholder developments and that we maintain strong relationships with a broad range of bodies and individuals at the highest levels. This includes those across Government and Parliament, the Arm's Length Bodies, professional representative organisations, patient groups, and think tanks.

You will play a key role in supporting our external monitoring activities, as well as in drafting briefings for the chief executive, chair, and other senior colleagues on emerging developments and ahead of engagement opportunities. These could include appearances before parliamentary committees; our involvement in the annual political party conferences; and, for meetings and other events with MPs, government officials and other partners, in collaboration with colleagues.

You will have opportunities to support our major campaigns and communications activities for some of the coalitions that the NHS Confederation hosts, in addition to contributing to the delivery and coordination of broader communications plans.

Also, you will support the drafting, scheduling, and issuing of correspondence to our strategic partners on a range of matters, including our corporate mailouts and letters (for example, in support of our publications and announcements, our invitations to external events, and to relay feedback raised by our members to key decision-makers), using your political, stakeholder and healthcare policy insight.

The post is part of the external affairs unit, which is responsible for managing the NHS Confederation's public profile, member communications and strategic relationships, supporting the organisation to influence nationally on behalf of its members. The unit brings together mainstream media relations, national stakeholder engagement, parliamentary and Government relations, social media delivery, member communications and planning.

As such, the role will also require the postholder to play an active role in our media relations work, as required and in collaboration with colleagues. This could include responding to enquiries from journalists, preparing briefings for senior spokespeople ahead of interviews, and drafting and pitching stories and other content to mainstream outlets. Additionally, the postholder will be expected to form part of the press office on-call rota alongside other colleagues in the team, for which an additional allowance will be provided.

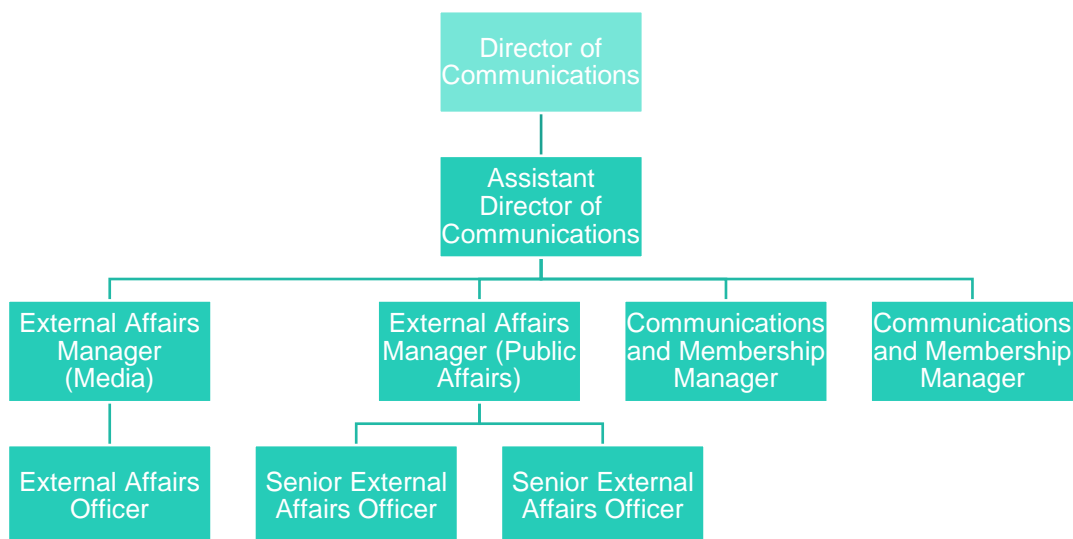
Working as part of the team, you will contribute to the delivery of the external affairs unit's and wider organisation's strategic priorities, ensuring that both member intelligence and communications evaluation mechanisms are central to our approach.

## Structural Chart

The communications and membership operations directorate is responsible for planning, developing, and disseminating strategic and tactical communications for the NHS Confederation and its associated networks to ensure the organisation meets its corporate objectives and the needs of its members, working closely with a range of partners to do so.

The directorate's work is divided into several units, including external affairs; content (digital and editorial); membership operations and insight; and programme communications (including supporting the delivery of the NHS Employers contract for communications).

The following chart covers the external affairs unit:



## Accountabilities

### Government and Parliamentary engagement

- Support our monitoring of key developments in parliament and from government, working with colleagues to ensure that updates and briefings are shared internally and with our members in a timely manner and to a high standard. This includes liaising with external monitoring agencies, when needed.
- Support our communications with MPs and government officials. This includes facilitating meetings, drafting correspondence, and coordinating content for briefings so that issues and developments affecting our members can be progressed and accurately relayed.
- Support our involvement in the political party conferences and other key engagements opportunities with MPs.
- Maintain up to date knowledge and contact lists of our key contacts across government, including the Department of Health and Social Care, as well as with MPs.
- Support the organisation's formal responses to relevant government consultations, parliamentary inquiries, and other influencing opportunities, in conjunction with colleagues across the business. This includes coordinating briefings for spokespeople with a wide variety of colleagues and liaising with parliamentary clerks and Government communications colleagues.

## Stakeholder relations

- Work with the External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs) to support the organisation to build and maintain effective relationships with a broad range of stakeholders, both corporately and at the most senior levels. This includes with the Royal Colleges, professional representative bodies, think tanks, civil service departments, Arm's Length Bodies, and patient charities.
- Support the delivery of communications activities across the stakeholder coalitions that the NHS Confederation hosts, in conjunction with the External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs) and the Assistant Director of Communications.
- Monitor key developments across our most important stakeholders, including consultations and other engagement opportunities, ensuring that updates and briefings are shared with colleagues and our members in a timely manner and to a high standard, so that opportunities to influence policy developments are identified and explored fully.
- Support the drafting of communications intended for our corporate stakeholders, alongside other members of the external affairs team. This includes supporting our corporate publications and other announcements, so that our strategic partners are aware of our work and we can exert influence.
- Contribute, and when required, manage elements of engagement plans. This could include plans to support the work of the stakeholder coalitions that the NHS Confederation hosts and our cross-membership projects, such as campaigns.
- Alongside the External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs) and the Assistant Director of Communications, advise the chief executive, chair, and directors on their direct engagement with key stakeholders, including in helping them to prepare for key meetings and events, and helping to support the organisation's commitment to diversity.
- Work with External Affairs Manager (Public Affairs) to deliver processes that allow us to monitor and evaluate the impact of our public affairs work.
- Organise and support high quality events to engage, obtain insight and enable discussion between members, stakeholders, and other decision-makers. This could range from seeking speaker suggestions for events, to facilitating parliamentary / stakeholder receptions, conference events or policy-orientated roundtables.

## Media relations

- Support the external affairs team to provide a highly effective press office service, including its reactive and proactive elements, which is well regarded by mainstream media, our staff, and members.
- Support the drafting of media statements, press releases, opinion pieces and other materials intended for journalists, as required and alongside other colleagues.
- Support NHS Confederation spokespeople with their engagement with the media, including in helping them to prepare for interviews, as required.
- Liaise directly with journalists, as required in responding to enquiries and in pitching opportunities that will positively portray the experiences of our members and our policy positions.
- Contribute to the use of our corporate social media channels to communicate our policy positions, support our announcements and campaigning, and engage our external audiences in our work.
- Form part of the on-call rota for media enquiries outside of normal business hours, which is shared across the external affairs unit.

## Person Specification

Attributes	Essential criteria	Desirable criteria
Experience	<p>At least three years' experience of having worked in a public affairs role, within central or local government, or in a political environment.</p> <p>Experience in contributing to communications or influencing plans that meet organisational objectives, alongside a broad range of colleagues and stakeholders.</p> <p>Experience of providing advice to senior spokespeople.</p> <p>Experience of political and stakeholder monitoring.</p> <p>Experience of producing written communications to a high standard and within deadlines, including official correspondence and drafting briefings on policy developments.</p>	<p>Experience of working within healthcare communications and/or for a membership body.</p> <p>Experience of working in a complex policy environment, with multiple stakeholder relationships to support.</p> <p>Some experience of media relations.</p> <p>Experience in communicating through social media channels in a professional context.</p>
Knowledge	<p>Good understanding of government and parliamentary processes.</p> <p>Good knowledge of MPs, government, and senior stakeholder contacts.</p> <p>Knowledge of and interest in the health and social care environment, politics, and current affairs more broadly.</p>	<p>Knowledge of the NHS Confederation's work and its membership landscape</p> <p>Knowledge of how the media works.</p>
Skills	<p>Strong attention to detail and analytical skills.</p> <p>Good oral and written communications skills.</p>	

	<p>Confident stakeholder engagement and relationship management skills, including with MPs and with senior staff.</p> <p>Flexibility and ability to manage competing demands effectively and to a high standard, as well as in reprioritising work at short notice, when required.</p> <p>Ability to use initiative and know when to seek senior input.</p> <p>Excellent IT skills, including use of Microsoft Office, content management systems and corporate databases (CRM systems).</p>	
Other	<p>Strong work ethic and commitment to working as part of an integrated team.</p> <p>Willingness to travel according to business need. Our offices are in London and Leeds, with most staff currently working remotely currently due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Able to work flexibly, including outside of standard hours when required and as part of an on-call rota.</p>	

Last reviewed: September 2021