



Head of External Affairs Candidate Information

September 2026

The Institute of Cancer Research

About our organisation

We are one of the world's most influential cancer research institutes with an outstanding record of achievement dating back more than 100 years. We are world leaders in identifying cancer genes, discovering cancer drugs and developing precision radiotherapy. Together with our hospital partner The Royal Marsden, we are rated in the top four centres for cancer research and treatment worldwide. As well as being a world-class institute, we are a college of the University of London.

We came second in the league table of university research quality compiled from the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021). We have charitable status and rely on support from partner organisations, charities, donors and the general public. We have more than 1000 staff and postgraduate students across three sites – in Chelsea and Sutton.

Development and Communications Directorate

The role of the directorate is to tell the ICR's story and focus on income generation. The ICR is world-renowned for its outstanding cancer research – and it deserves communication to match. We believe that communicating effectively about the ICR's work can help us build on our successes – attracting donors and supporters, the best staff and students, commercial partners and collaborators.

Our mission
is to make the
discoveries that
defeat cancer.

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Our values

The ICR has a highly skilled and committed workforce, with a wide variety of roles, each requiring different skills. But whether you work as a researcher, or work as part of our corporate team, your work and behaviour is underpinned by these six values. They are what bring us together as one team - as 'One ICR'.



Pursuing excellence

We aspire to excellence in everything we do, and aim to be leaders in our field.



Acting with Integrity

We promote an open and honest environment that gives credit and acknowledges mistakes, so that our actions stand up to scrutiny.



Valuing all our people

We value the contribution of all our people, help them reach their full potential, and treat everyone with kindness and respect.



Working together

We collaborate with colleagues and partners to bring together different skills, resources and perspectives.



Leading innovation

We do things differently in ways that no one else has done before, and share the expertise and learning we gain.



Making a difference

We all play our part, doing a little bit more, a little bit better, to help improve the lives of people with cancer.



Our values set out how each of us at the ICR, works together to meet our mission – to make the discoveries that defeat cancer. They summarise our desired behaviours, attitudes and culture – how we value one another and how we take pride in the work we do, to deliver impact for people with cancer and their loved ones.”

Professor Kristian Helin
Chief Executive

Head of External Affairs

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Job description

Department / division:	Development and Communications
Pay grade / staff group:	Professional Services Grade 2
Hours / duration:	Full Time (35 hours/week)
Reports to:	Head of Communications and Deputy Director
Responsible for:	Senior Media Officer, Advocacy Manager, Public Engagement Manager
Main purpose of the job:	The Head of External Affairs is responsible for leading the External Affairs team (currently four people), ensuring the ICR continues to secure high value media coverage to raise awareness of the ICR, enhance our reputation, and support our fundraising objectives. The postholder is responsible for developing and implementing the ICR's media relations strategy (within the wider directorate strategy), managing crisis communications and reputational risk, and overseeing the ICR's public affairs and public engagement programmes. The postholder is responsible for managing and maintaining productive and collaborative relationships with partner press offices and communications teams – particularly at our clinical partner and main research funding charities. As a senior member of the Communications team, within the wider Development and Communications directorate, the postholder will also contribute to the effective management and planning of our communications activity and provide advice and training to senior staff and colleagues at the ICR.

Duties and Responsibilities

Lead the ICR's External Affairs team, which is responsible for media relations, advocacy and public engagement.

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Develop a proactive strategy for media relations, involving a mix of press releases, exclusives, targeted pitches and reactive media
Manage the ICR's media relations operations and ensure it is effective at communicating about the ICR's research and other aspects of its work
Understand and meet the needs for media coverage from within the ICR – particularly aiming to maintain a regular drumbeat of discovery
Ensure ICR press releases are of a high quality, communicate effectively about the organisation's work and maximise the opportunity for coverage
Develop and maintain strong relationships with journalists at target media, and exploit these to generate high-quality coverage of the ICR's work
Identify and lead on major media relations projects such as the creation of television documentaries and podcasts
Work closely with the Head of Fundraising Communications and Engagement to develop and implement a plan for media coverage in support of the ICR's fundraising objectives
Work closely with the Head of Business and Engagement in the ICR's Business and Innovation office to ensure we maximise the media potential of our industry partnerships and raise awareness of this work
Work with the Advocacy Manager to maximise media coverage on the ICR's policy priorities and agreed policy lines
Build strong relationships with counterparts at partner organisations, including The Royal Marsden, Cancer Research UK and Breast Cancer Now
Work constructively with partners to maximise the chances of publicity for joint media activity
Build productive working relationships with the ICR's researchers
Provide expert advice and media training to senior staff and colleagues as necessary
Oversee a streamlined system of sign-off and make judgments according to the ICR's protocol about who to involve and when
Oversee the ICR's policy and public affairs programme to ensure it is delivering against the ICR's strategic objectives
Ensure the External Affairs team provides useful and timely intelligence and analysis of relevant political, policy and other external developments, and use this intelligence on influencing opportunities and to mitigate reputational risks
Produce high quality briefings and other written materials for external and internal audiences
Oversee the ICR's public engagement programme and support the Public Engagement Manager to identify opportunities for productive collaboration with colleagues in the directorate and wider ICR
Lead on emergency preparedness in the media and more widely on reputation management and crisis communications
Represent the ICR at events, particularly in relation to external affairs activities

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Contribute to the effective management and planning of the ICR's communications activity alongside senior colleagues in the directorate
Deputise for the Head of Communications as necessary
Manage resources within budget, and meet and achieve continuous improvement in productivity and professional excellence across our external affairs work
Willingness to work occasional unsociable hours (including providing out-hours-media support)

General

A passionate belief in our mission and a genuine interest in and willingness to engage with the ICR's scientific research.
All staff must ensure that they familiarise themselves with and adhere to any ICR policies that are relevant to their work and that all personal and sensitive personal data is treated with the utmost confidentiality and in line with the General Data Protection Regulations
Any other duties that are consistent with the nature and grade of the post that may be required.
To work in accordance with the ICR's Values.
To promote a safe, healthy and fair environment for people to work, where bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.
This job description is a reflection of the present position and is subject to review and alteration in detail and emphasis in the light of future changes or development.

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Person specification

Education and Knowledge

Degree or equivalent professional media, public affairs or communications experience	Essential
Extensive science communication experience	Essential
Higher degree in journalism or communications	Desirable

Skills and Experience

Excellent written and verbal communication skills	Essential
Highly scientifically literate	Essential
Instinctive understanding of news values	Essential
Strong leadership skills	Essential
Ability to think strategically	Essential
Diplomacy and negotiation skills	Essential
Excellent planning, project management and organisational skills	Essential
Good analytical skills	Essential
Ability to work under pressure to meet deadlines	Essential
Ability to manage and prioritise workload	Essential
Ability to work in and lead a team	Essential
Demonstrable interest in the communication of science and medicine	Essential
Demonstrable interest in health and science policy	Essential
Demonstrable interest in public engagement and schools outreach	Essential
Senior-level media relations experience	Essential
Management experience	Essential
Experience of delivering PR projects or media activity in support of policy objectives	Essential
Excellent media contacts and a good understanding of the UK media, with experience of leading proactive and reactive media work	Essential
Experience of delivering projects with internal or external partners	Essential
Experience of reputation management and crisis communications	Essential
Experience of developing and implementing crisis communications plans	Highly desirable
Experience of working in the not-for-profit sector	Highly desirable

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A strong understanding of research/science and health policy, political and policy making processes, and the higher education sector, and the ability to use this knowledge to successfully influence policy and debate	Highly desirable
Experience of delivering or overseeing a public engagement programme	Highly desirable
Established networks within the media for securing coverage around celebrity supporters	Highly desirable
Experience of producing written content for the web (e.g. blog posts)	Highly desirable
Experience of producing and editing video and audio content	Desirable

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Benefits

We offer a fantastic working environment, great opportunities for career development and the chance to make a real difference to defeat cancer. We aim to recruit and develop the best – the most outstanding scientists and clinicians, and the most talented professional and administrative staff.

The annual leave entitlement for full time employees is 28 days per annum on joining. This will increase by a further day after 2 years' and 5 years' service.

Staff membership to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) is available. The USS is a defined benefit scheme and provides a highly competitive pension scheme with robust benefits. The rate of contributions is determined by USS and details of the costs and benefits of this scheme can be found on their website. If staff are transferring from the NHS, they can opt to remain members of the NHS Pension Scheme.

We offer a range of family friendly benefits such as flexible working, a parents' group, and a maternity mentoring scheme. Other great benefits include interest free loans for discounted season tickets for travel and bicycle purchases, access to the NHS discounts website, a free and confidential Employee Assistance Programme which offers a range of well-being, financial and legal advice services, two staff restaurants, and access to a gym and sporting facilities at our Sutton site.

Further information

You may contact Talent for further information by emailing talent@icr.ac.uk. This job description is a reflection of the current position and is subject to review and alteration in detail and emphasis in the light of future changes or development.