

NIHR HEAD OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS



Salary Grade: 9

Reporting to: NIHR Director of Communications

Reference: MHNCC1706

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Overview of the Role

NIHR is the nation's research arm for health and social care. Funded by the public, for the public, we target cutting-edge research where it can make the biggest difference to people's health and happiness. On any day, our research could discover a new vaccine that saves thousands of lives and brings billions into our economy. Or make a revolutionary new treatment available and affordable for everyone. Together, we drive life-changing research for the health and wealth of the nation.

This pivotal role is part of NIHR's Communications Programme Board, leading a major area of our work as we transform our whole approach to NIHR communications over the coming months and years. You will drive our strategic communications framework across the whole of the NIHR, working hand in hand with senior officers from the Department of Health Science (DHSC) Research and Evidence Directorate and other senior health leaders.

You will report into the NIHR Director of Communications and your activity is informed by, and agreed with, DHSC.

As Head of Strategic Communications, you will lead NIHR's strategic communications approach – critical to the new NIHR Communications Strategy. You will be responsible for leading key elements of the NIHR Communications Strategy, including overall NIHR communications planning, monitoring and evaluation, and the creation and delivery an integrated audience plan.

You will be a senior communications strategist with specialist expertise, knowledge and professional credibility in leading integrated communications plans – including creative campaigns - that shift understanding, attitudes and behaviours and build engagement in health and care research among diverse people and communities across the nation, as well as stakeholders in the NHS and broader health and social care system.

Working with health and care organisations, staff and professional groups, you will be a highly skilled senior communications leader with strong influencing skills.

The RDNCC is one of a number of contracts through which Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) research funding is distributed. The DHSC is currently undertaking a tender process to determine where some functions within these contracts will be hosted. It is expected that this role, and others within the same RDNCC function, will need to move to a new employing organisation from the start date of the new DHSC contract (expected to be from April 2027). This change of employment would be managed under a 'TUPE' process.

This role requires some national travel.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Duties and responsibilities for all RDNCC Grade 9 roles

Provide visible and dynamic leadership and management for the effective coordination and delivery of the NIHR Communications Office services, meeting all contractual requirements and in line with organisational strategy, policies and priorities.

Full planning responsibility across the function to effectively deliver the strategy, setting overall standards and identifying future opportunities that may require the service to be adapted, and leading your function through service development and change.

As a member of the NIHR Communications Programme Board, provide collective organisational stewardship and support the development of organisation-wide strategies and policies, and lead on associated national implementation programmes and transformational change initiatives.

Line management of staff members, which will include undertaking staff reviews to identify training and development needs, and establishing how those needs will be met, and managing performance against agreed objectives. You will ensure the same review processes take place for all staff with the defined function via appropriate line management arrangements and that skills and capabilities exist to meet current and future business needs.

Responsible for the effective management of a significant budget and associated resources to optimise service delivery and ensuring value for money.

Proactively develop a profile both internally and externally to the NIHR, initiating and leading groups in order to influence events and opinions that are critical to the achievement of strategic aims and objectives.

Make independent decisions and advise NIHR decision-making bodies, both of which will impact the achievement of NIHR strategic goals and future direction. Identify optimal solutions to complex problems which require analysis of multiple and sometimes conflicting factors.

Duties and responsibilities specific to this role

Developing, delivering and evaluating a NIHR's strategic communications approach through leadership of the NIHR's cross-centre strategic communications and campaigns team.

Monitoring delivery of the annual communications plan agreed with DHSC, to include achievement of key success indicators and budget management.

Providing leadership and oversight of NIHR's strategic communications, planning, evaluation and audience plan.

Strengthening communications partnerships, including with NIHR infrastructure, NHS bodies, charities and the devolved administrations.

Leading NIHR-wide communications to support the transformation of clinical research delivery, working in partnership with NIHR and DHSC leadership and external partners.

Strengthening capabilities, capacity, and ways of working of communications function, providing opportunities for career development.

Deputising for the NIHR Director of Communications as needed, to include liaison with the NIHR leadership team and the Senior Management Team in DHSC's Science Research and Evidence directorate.

Other duties

These duties provide a framework for the role and should not be regarded as a definitive list. Other reasonable duties may be required consistent with the grade of the post.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Essential requirements for all RDNCC grade 9 roles

- Experience of managing a similar function or set of similar interdisciplinary services in a multifaceted organisation and actively optimising those services collaboratively in line with organisational need and customer feedback.
- Experience of managing a team at a senior level, conducting staff reviews, managing performance, identifying and addressing development needs across a function or service area.
- Experience of managing a significant budget and associated resources in line with organisational policies and ensuring value for money.
- Experience of working as part of a senior leadership team to provide organisational stewardship, collectively ensuring all organisational services are complementary and the needs of all customers and staff are understood.
- The ability to support and drive forward transformation programmes in a positive and proactive way, and to motivate support and coach colleagues through substantial organisational and cultural change.
- The ability to work collaboratively, with evidence of successfully developing and maintaining effective working relationships with a wide range of internal and external partners and stakeholders.

- Negotiation, communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to articulate priorities, and effectively to engage and influence others.

Essential requirements specific to this role

- Senior communications experience within a large, complex or distributed organisation, ideally in a healthcare setting, with the ability to forge internal partnerships and exercise influence without authority.
- Experience of developing and leading a strategic communications framework and creative communications plans – including campaigns - that shift understanding, attitudes and behaviours.
- A strong track record of providing communications advice to senior leaders, gaining their respect and trust, and forging mutually beneficial partnerships with external organisations.
- Knowledge of current and emerging communications tools and experience of developing channel strategies that integrate earned, owned and paid for media, digital marketing and leveraging of partner channels

Additional information

NIHR Research Delivery Network

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). NIHR works in partnership with the NHS, universities, local government, other research funders, patients and the public. The NIHR funds, enables and delivers world-leading health and social care research that improves people's health and wellbeing and promotes economic growth. NIHR is a major funder of applied health research in low and middle-income countries. Further information on the NIHR can be found at www.nihr.ac.uk.

As part of NIHR, the Research Delivery Network (RDN) supports the effective and efficient initiation and delivery of funded research across the health and care system in England for the benefit of patients, the health and care system and the economy. The scope and purpose of RDN is to support:

- Clinical trials and other well-designed health and social care research studies (including studies that are delivered outside of an NHS setting);
- Public health studies that require the recruitment of individuals within an NHS setting (that is, acute, ambulance, mental health, community or primary care) or an episode of care which involves contact with the NHS.

The whole of England will be supported through 12 NIHR Regional Research Delivery Networks (RRDNs). The RRDNs will work with the national Research Delivery Network Coordinating Centre (RDNCC) to provide a joint RDN leadership function so that the NIHR RDN as a whole functions as a single organisation with a shared vision and purpose across England.

The University of Leeds is the provider of the RDNCC, working with and on behalf of DHSC. The University will be the employer for this role.

University of Leeds

Inclusion

At the University of Leeds, we are committed to providing a culture of inclusion, respect and equity of opportunity that attracts, supports, and retains the best students and staff from all backgrounds. Whatever role we recruit for we are always striving to increase the diversity of our community, which each individual helps enrich and cultivate.

Information for disabled candidates

Information for disabled candidates, impairments or health conditions, including requesting alternative formats, can be found on our [Accessibility](#) information page or by getting in touch with us at hr@leeds.ac.uk

Criminal record information

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975

A criminal record check is not required for this position. However, all applicants will be required to declare if they have any 'unspent' criminal offences, including those pending.

Any offer of appointment will be in accordance with our Criminal Records policy. You can find out more about required checks and declarations in our [Criminal Records](#) information page.

Working at the University of Leeds

To find out more about the benefits of working at the University and what it is like to live and work in the Leeds area visit our [Working at Leeds](#) information page.