



Department
for Work &
Pensions

SCS1

Deputy Director Head of News and Strategic Comms

Job Reference:

OWPF

Closing date:

Tuesday 22nd April 2025
at 12 noon

Salary:

This post is SCS1 level.
The salary range is circa.
£100,000.

Welcome from Syma Cullasy-Aldridge

I came to DWP because I believe the work we do makes a real difference. I am looking for someone dynamic and passionate to bring together our external communications and planning, to help deliver both DWP's priorities and first-class communications to the public.

The Department for Work and Pensions impacts millions of people and families, right across the country. DWP Communications plays a critical role in managing the reputation of DWP internally with colleagues and externally in the media, stakeholders and to customers.

I am looking for an outstanding Head of News and Strategic Communications to join our Senior Civil Service team in the DWP Communications Directorate. This role provides an exciting opportunity and is integral to shaping the DWP vision of the future and linking strategy and delivery in the short and long term. I want someone who is excited about how we tell our stories and works closely with the whole Department to design and deliver long-term communications campaigns which we evaluate and learn from, working with the communications leadership team.

The Head of News and Strategic Communications will lead our high-performing Press, Strategic Communications, Visits and External Affairs team.

The Department's work is often national news, and your team will be responding to breaking news stories, planning proactive press activity while ensuring there is join up across the Department to deliver. This role will find the best ways to inform the public, media and stakeholders about the work of the Department and will be audience and insight driven to ensure we are communicating effectively.

I am looking for someone with excellent judgment, a strong understanding of how the news cycle works, an ability to tell the compelling story of the DWP, solve problems creatively under pressure and someone who has experience as a strong, motivational and innovative leader.

We are committed to making the DWP Communications Directorate truly inclusive and welcome applications from people from all backgrounds, including those who have not worked in the Civil Service before.



Syma Cullasy-Aldridge

Director of Communications

Click the video below to hear from Syma Cullasy-Aldridge about the role [YouTube Link](#)



About DWP

Our mission is to improve people's quality of life both now and in the future.

The Department for Work and Pensions touches the lives of every citizen in the country at some point in their life.

As the UK government's largest public services provider and at the heart of the government growth mission, we support people into work, help disabled people live more independent lives and provide the financial foundations for a secure old age through the State Pension.

We are passionate about making a sustainable and positive impact on people's lives every day by providing a modern, fair and affordable welfare system. We seek to be an exemplar of the Modern Civil Service so that we can better deliver for citizens and meet the challenges of tomorrow.

At DWP, people are at the heart of what we do. We are guided by our departmental values: we care, we deliver, we work together, we adapt, and we value everyone. We promote "I can be me in DWP" to create an atmosphere that is inclusive, allowing everyone to feel valued for being themselves, and allowing them to work to their fullest potential. We aspire to be a truly inclusive employer and welcome applications to help us reflect and understand how to best serve our customers.

There has never been a more exciting time to work at DWP.

Watch the video below to see what it's like working in DWP, or use this link - https://youtu.be/enNv0kHk_-4



What are our Values?



We care



We deliver



We adapt



We work
together



We value
everybody

DWP's Employee Benefits

We have a broad benefits package built around your work-life balance which includes:

Working patterns to support **work/life balance** such as job sharing, and compressed hours



Generous annual leave – at least 25 days on entry, increasing up to 30 days over time (pro-rata for part time employees), plus 9 days public and privilege leave



Support for **financial wellbeing**, including interest-free season ticket loans for travel, a cycle to work scheme and an employee discount scheme



Health and wellbeing support including our Employee Assistance Programme for specialist advice and counselling and the opportunity to join [HASSRA](#) a first-class programme of competitions, activities and benefits for its members (subscription payable monthly)

Family friendly policies including enhanced maternity and shared parental leave pay after 1 year's continuous service



Funded **learning and development** to support progress in your role and career. This includes industry recognised qualifications and accreditations, coaching, mentoring and talent development programmes



An **inclusive and diverse environment** with opportunities to join professional and interpersonal networks including Women's Network, National Race Network, National Disability Network (THRIVE) and many more



To find out more about working in DWP take a look at our pages on the [**Civil Service Careers**](#) [page](#) [here](#)



SCS1

Deputy Director Head of News and Strategic Comms

DWP is looking to fill a Deputy Director Head of News and Strategic Communications role.

This is a key senior leadership role within one of the highest-profile operational government departments. You will lead a team of approximately 32 people, managing Press Office, Visits, External Affairs, and Strategic Communications. This role involves shaping external communications, ensuring alignment with policy areas and advising ministers and senior officials. You will manage media relationships, anticipate reputational risks, and develop long-term strategic communications plans.

The role requires strong leadership, a proactive approach to news management and the ability to drive both immediate and long-term communications strategies that align with the department's priorities and objectives.

Grade: SCS Pay Band 1

Salary: Circa. £100,000

Existing Civil Servants will be appointed in line with the Civil Service pay rules in place on the date of their appointment, this will usually be the salary minimum or within 10% of their existing salary for those applying on promotion. Individuals appointed on level transfer will retain their existing base salary.

Pension: Alongside your salary, the Department for Work and Pensions contributes 28.97% towards you being a member of the Civil Service Defined Benefit Pension scheme. [Find out what benefits a Civil Service Pension provides.](#)

Location: London

As a member of the Senior Civil Service, you are expected to spend a minimum of 60% of your working time in person in the office or face to face with colleagues on official business. Regular travel to other sites will be required. Please be aware that this role can only be worked in the UK and not overseas.

Security clearance: Successful candidates must hold, or be willing to obtain, security clearance to SC level. Find out more information [about the vetting process here.](#)

Contract type: This role is being offered on a permanent basis. The role is subject to a minimum assignment duration of 3 years.

Working pattern: 37 hours per week, excluding lunch breaks.

This is a full-time role. Flexible working arrangements are welcomed and will be considered. You should discuss your needs with the hiring manager if you are invited to interview.

Role Responsibilities

This is an exciting new senior leadership role at the heart of one of the government's most high-profile departments.

As the Head of News & Strategic Communications, you will shape and drive the department's external communications, ensuring a clear, coherent, and compelling narrative across all DWP priority areas. This role provides a unique opportunity to work at the intersection of news, media relations and strategic communications within a high-performing government department at the start of its journey, delivering on both immediate and long-term goals.

You will lead a team of c32 people with four direct reports covering Press Office, Visits, External Affairs and Strategic Communications working at pace in a complex and fast-moving environment. You will provide expert advice to ministers and senior officials, manage relationships with the media and stakeholders and develop strategies to ensure DWP's communications are proactive, aligned and effective.

This role is about both reacting effectively to the news agenda and setting the agenda, ensuring that DWP's work is understood by the public, stakeholders and the media. It requires a leader who can bring structure and coordination across a broad range of policy areas, ensuring communications support the department's overarching objectives and ministerial priorities. Responsibilities include:-

- Develop and drive a joined-up communications strategy bringing clarity and consistency across the department's delivery and news areas. Ensure communications are audience focussed and insight driven to maximise effectiveness.
- Lead the development and delivery of long-term strategic communications plans in line with DWP priorities and government missions, ensuring that policy and communications are aligned to deliver a coherent departmental narrative. Anticipate and manage reputational risks, ensuring a proactive rather than reactive approach to news management.
- Advise the Department's senior leaders on media handling, reputation management and stakeholder engagement.
- Continue to build and develop capability within the Press, Visits, External Affairs and Strategic Communications ensuring propriety and the Civil Service Code is observed.
- Oversee the department's 24/7 news operation, ensuring rapid, accurate and effective responses to media inquiries and issues. You and your team will continue to build and maintain strong relationships with national and regional media.
- Lead and manage a high-performing team ensuring excellence in news management, external affairs, visits and strategic communications.
- A track record of inspiring leadership, in particular evidence of creating an inclusive environment and developing a high-performing diverse team where all staff can progress and develop.

Person Specification

The successful candidate must be able to demonstrate their knowledge, experience and skills against the following essential criteria:

Essential

- Significant Executive level, Deputy Director-level or equivalent experience and a proven track record in news, media and strategic communications, in a complex environment, such as media, a large business or government. They will have a deep level of knowledge of media and communications.
- Proven leadership skills, with experience of managing large, multidisciplinary teams in a fast-paced, high-profile setting.
- Excellent political awareness and judgment, with the ability to advise and influence at the highest levels.
- A track record of delivering impactful strategic communications, bringing structure and clarity across multiple policy areas.
- Strong stakeholder and influencing skills, with experience of working with senior stakeholders, for example ministers, CEOs, senior officials, and media organisations.
- Outstanding written and verbal communication skills, with the ability to craft compelling narratives and clear messaging.
- Resilient, agile leader, willing to lead both from the front and from within, they will have proven adept at leading out and upskilling cultural and ways of working communications across complex businesses.
- Proven outcomes focussed experience with a collaborative leadership style.

Desirable Skills & Experience

- Experience working in Whitehall, or a similarly complex organisation or environment.
- Relevant professional qualification and membership of professional bodies, such as PRCA, CIM or CIPR, as well as the Government Communications Service profession are desirable but not essential.

Selection Process – Part 1

1. Application Process

To apply for this post, you will need to complete the online application process outlined below no later than 12 noon on Tuesday 22nd April 2025.

- A CV setting out your career history, with key responsibilities and achievements. Please ensure you have provided reasons for any gaps within the last two years;
- A personal statement (maximum 1250 words) explaining how you consider your personal skills, qualities and experience provide evidence of your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the essential criteria in the person specification.

Failure to submit both documents will mean the panel only have limited information on which to assess your application against the criteria in the person specification.

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to the Department for Work and Pensions on this appointment. Candidates should apply for this role through Saxton Bampfylde's website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **OWPF**.

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and Personal Statement and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

*The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

2. Longlist

Longlisted candidates will be invited to meet with Saxton Bampfylde for a preliminary interview sometime during w/c 05/05/2025 and 12/05/2025.

3. Shortlist

A shortlist of the applications will take place in w/c 19/05/2025.

4. Assessment

If you are shortlisted, you will be asked to take part in a Stakeholder Engagement Exercise and Individual Leadership Assessment in advance of the interview. These assessments will not result in a pass or fail decision. Rather, they are designed to support the panel's decision making and highlight areas for the panel to explore further at interview. Saxton Bampfylde will explain the details of the assessments to shortlisted candidates.

Shortlisted candidates may have the opportunity to speak to the Vacancy Holder Syma Cullasy-Aldridge, prior to the final interview. This is an informal discussion to allow candidates to learn more about the role and is not part of the assessment process.

It may be that candidates are also asked to speak to the Secretary of State as part of the assessment process.

Selection Process – Part 2

5. Interview

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend a panel interview in order to have a more in-depth discussion of your previous experience and professional competence in relation to the criteria set out in the person specification. You will be given an article to read 45 minutes before your interview and will be asked to prepare a 5-minute presentation at the start of your interview based on the article that you read. Full details will be provided prior to the interview.

Your interview will be a face-to-face. The interview panel will be chaired by Syma Cullasy-Aldridge who will be supported by additional panel members. The final panel interview will be a blended interview, covering Behaviours and Experience. A blended interview aims to be more of a conversation exploring the candidate's capability for the role.

6. Offer and Feedback

Regardless of the outcome, we will notify all candidates as soon as possible. We will offer the opportunity to discuss feedback for all candidates who reached interview.

A reserve list will be held for up to 12 months, which we may use to fill future similar vacancies for candidates who are considered appointable following interview.

Expected Timeline

Closing Date

Tuesday 22nd April @
12 noon

Longlist
Interviews

w/c 5th and 12th May

Shortlist Meeting

w/c 19th May

Assessments

w/c 26th May

Interviews

w/c 9th June

We will try and offer as much flexibility as we can, but it may not be possible to offer alternative dates for assessments or interviews. You are therefore asked to note the below timetable, exercising flexibility through the recruitment and selection process, to meet the dates given. Please note that these dates are only indicative at this stage and may be subject to change.

Selection Process – Part 3



Reasonable Adjustments

At DWP we value diversity and inclusion and actively encourage and welcome applications from everyone, especially those that are underrepresented in our workforce. We consider visible and non-visible disabilities, neurodiversity or learning differences, chronic medical conditions or mental ill health. Examples include dyslexia, epilepsy, autism, chronic fatigue or schizophrenia.

If you need a change to be made so that you can make your application, you should contact Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com as soon as possible, before the closing date to discuss your needs.

Disability Confident Scheme

The Civil Service embraces diversity and promotes equal opportunities. DWP is recognised as a Disability Confident Leader, demonstrating the departmental commitment to attracting, recruiting and retaining disabled people and supporting them in achieving their full potential. We run a Disability Confident Scheme (DCS) for candidates with disabilities who meet the

minimum selection criteria for the advertised role. To be considered for an interview, you must have:

- a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term (over 12 months) adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities; or a long-term health condition; **and**
- demonstrated that you meet all the minimum qualifying criteria set out in the advertisement for the post at the application and testing stages.

[A full definition and examples of conditions can be found on this webpage.](#) You will be asked at the initial application stage if you wish to apply via the scheme

The Panel

Syma Cullasy-Aldridge, Director of Communications



Syma Cullasy-Aldridge Joined DWP in 2024 as the Director for Communications, with extensive comms experience in the public and private sectors. Having previously worked with FTSE 100 organisations as well as the third sector and think tanks, she was also previously Project Director at Future Governance Forum and Chief Campaigns Director at the CBI. Syma has led External Affairs at PUBLIC, a govtech consultancy, and has held policy and communications roles across central government, including the Cabinet Office, the Department for Exiting the European Union as well as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Andrew Brookes, HR Director People and Capability Group and Corporate Transformation Group



Andrew joined the Civil Service over 30 years ago, and following some time in Operations, has enjoyed a range of roles in HR including Capability, Employee Policy, HR Casework, Leadership Development, Pay and Reward, Resourcing and Strategic Workforce Planning. Andrew currently business partners the Directors General for Corporate Transformation Group and People and Capability Group. Andrew enjoys working for DWP. There are very few organisations in the UK where you are involved in people change and transformation on this scale and impact.

Gemmaine Walsh, Chief Operating Officer of Government Communication Service



Gemmaine Walsh is the Chief Operating Officer of the Government Communications Service (GCS), the professional body for communicators, and a member of the GCS executive leadership team. She is responsible for GCS capability, talent and standards across Government and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). Gem first joined the Cabinet Office in 2020 as Director of Transformation for a major cross-government programme with a focus in reforming and improving the GCS. Before this, Gem was the Director of Communications Group & Head of Profession at the Department for Education (DfE), having spent 18 years in various communications roles at five ministerial departments, The Royal Household, as well as Director of Marketing, Engagement & Communications at The University of Reading, and an education start-up. Gem is a collaborative leader focussed on people and driving delivery.

FAQs

Can I apply if I am not currently a civil servant?

Yes. We welcome applications from all sectors and this role is open to suitably qualified people in the external market and to existing civil servants and those in accredited Non-Departmental Bodies.

Can I claim back any expenses incurred during the recruitment process?

No. Unfortunately, we will not be able to reimburse you, except in exceptional circumstances and only when agreed in advance.

What should I do if I think that I have a conflict of interest?

Candidates must note the requirement to declare any interests that might cause questions to be raised about their approach to the business of the department. If you believe that you may have a conflict of interest, please contact Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com before submitting your application.

Does this role have an assignment duration?

This role has a minimum assignment duration of three years.

An assignment duration is the period of time a Senior Civil Servant is expected to remain in the same post to enable them to deliver on the agreed key business outcomes. As part of accepting this role you will be agreeing to the expected assignment duration set out above. Please note this is an expectation only, it is not something which is written into your terms and conditions or indeed which the employing organisation or you are bound by. It will depend on your personal circumstances at a particular time and business needs.

Dual or Multi Based Workers?

Where you have more than one permanent workplace or regularly travel to an alternate workplace and carry out a substantial range of your duties there, without a clear end date to the working arrangement or for a period expected to

exceed 24 months, you may be considered to be dual based or multi-based. HMRC consider all these workplaces to be your permanent workplace for tax purposes. Where you have two permanent workplaces this is classed as Dual Based and where you have three or more permanent workplaces this is classed as Multi Based. Where you are Dual or Multi Based, the process for booking travel and claiming travel and subsistence related expenses is different.

What is the role of the Civil Service Commission in relation to recruitment into the Civil Service?

The Civil Service has two primary functions:

- To provide assurance that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit, based on fair and open competition, as outlined in the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles. For the most senior posts in the Civil Service, the Commission discharges its responsibilities directly by overseeing the recruitment

process and by a Commissioner chairing the selection panel.

- To hear and determine appeals made by civil servants under the Civil Service Code which sets out the Civil Service values. Honesty, Integrity, Impartiality and Objectivity – and forms part of the relationship between civil servants and their employer.

What do I do if I want to make a complaint?

The law requires that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition as outlined in the [Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles](#).

If you feel your application has not been treated in accordance with the Recruitment Principles and you wish to make a complaint, you should in the first instance contact:

senior.recruitment@dwp.gov.uk

If you are not satisfied with the response, you receive you can contact the [Civil Service Commission](#).



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Thank you for your interest in this role

This is an amazing opportunity for you to become our next leader in Communications. If you are passionate about making a sustainable and positive impact to people's lives, we'd love to hear from you.

We encourage applications from all candidates who feel they would be a good fit for the role.

If you would like to discuss the role in more detail, or you require assistance with the recruitment or application process, please contact Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so).

