



Communications Officer

Contract	35 hours per week, flexible working, initially for 1 year
Salary	£ 24,313 (NJC pay scale 18, SC6) + £3,405 Inner London Weighting + 7% non-contribution pension (employee pays 1%)
Location	Home based
Reports to	Head of Policy and Profile
Functional links	Director, Administrator and all LCN staff
Start	As soon as possible

ROLE PURPOSE

There are 40 Law Centres across England and Wales providing free legal advice and representation to thousands of people who would otherwise have no access to legal services. Law Centres champion human rights and equality and challenge exclusion, discrimination and inequality, using the law to achieve social change. The Law Centres Network (LCN) is the national voice of Law Centres.

To that end, LCN requires a Communications Officer who will work with the Head of Policy and Profile to assist with day to day communications and profile raising of Law Centres and of issues important to their local communities.

ROLE DESCRIPTION

Working with the Head of Policy and Profile, this post will be responsible for the ensuring that LCN maintains Law Centres' public profile and develops new material, activities and platforms to be used in its external communications. This role will monitor new and emerging media platforms that will assist the public to understand the role of Law Centres and the services they provide.

Communications

- Assist Head of Policy and Profile to manage LCN's external communications strategy and its outlets, including press and broadcast, social media, website, print and others
- Produce and disseminate representative and effective content through these channels
- Manage media enquiries and, where appropriate, serve as a spokesperson for LCN
- Cultivate relations with reporters, producers and editors and lead on promoting Law Centre stories and press releases to them
- Assist Head of Policy and Profile to manage LCN's external reputation, the Law Centre brand and promotional material using it, and associated intellectual property
- Collect evidence to support the case for Law Centres, legal assistance and access to justice, including research, data, evaluations, case studies and client testimonials
- Support Law Centres to undertake their own communications work, including responding to news media calls for speakers
- Maintain and develop LCN's visual assets and increase their use in routine communications

Other

- To attend out-of-hours meetings where necessary
- To undertake other tasks as directed appropriate to the post and to assist LCN in achieving its objectives
- To carry out the functions of the post with proper regard for LCN's Equal Opportunities Policy
- To always act in an ethical manner that upholds the good reputation of LCN and its member Law Centres

THE PERSON

Experience and Knowledge

Experience of working with multi-channel media and producing timely, high quality outputs

Experience of press office work, generating stories and handling enquiries

Understanding of the current policy climate in the legal advice sector

Understanding of what Law Centres offer their clients and communities

Understanding of the role legal assistance can play in addressing disadvantage and advancing social justice

Experience of working in partnership with other individuals or agencies

Skills and Abilities

Excellent oral and written communication skills: ability to present complex information clearly and engagingly

Excellent presentation skills and ability to write promotional materials and attractive social media content to a high standard

Excellent interpersonal skills, awareness of group dynamics and the ability to work effectively with individuals and groups

Good organisational skills, including the ability to manage a busy and complex workload with a national scope

The ability to think on your feet and stay calm under pressure

Personal Qualities

Motivated by the mission of the LCN and Law Centres

A team player who will contribute to the overall success of the LCN and Law Centres

Willing to travel to Law Centres / other locations across the UK as required

Commitment to equal opportunities and social inclusion

BACKGROUND

The Law Centres Network (LCN) was established in 1978 as a national collaboration by Law Centres to co-ordinate activity and to be the voice of Law Centres. Over 40 years on, LCN continues to pursue its original purpose and as such, it strives for a just and equal society where everyone's rights are defended. We do this by supporting Law Centres across the UK to use their legal skills as a tool for social change. We aim to support and sustain Law Centres, to support the continued growth of the network of Law Centres, and we campaign for social justice on behalf of Law Centres and their clients. We do this by:

- Supporting our 40 member Law Centres with a range of activities: our role is to plug the gap and help Law Centres stay ahead. These services include training; helping Law Centres develop user-led service design approaches; fundraising assistance and consultancy; compliance and development consultancy; crisis support and assistance; and bringing Law Centres together to share learning, collaborate and support one another
- Growing the network: although Law Centres assist over 200,000 people each year, there are many thousands of people in need of legal assistance who do not have access to a Law Centre. We identify areas where Law Centres could be established, supporting groups to establish them or existing organisations to become Law Centres; and initiating new Law Centre services for particularly vulnerable groups
- Advocating for social justice: we work closely with Law Centres to use our shared experience to advocate for the expansion of access to justice, challenge adverse public policy decisions, influence legal aid and other relevant policies, and represent Law Centres at all levels of Government.

Our work contributes directly to that of Law Centres. Without Law Centres, hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people a year would have no meaningful access to justice, would be unable to resolve their problems and so would be held back in their lives from taking up opportunities and realising their potential.

Without LCN, each Law Centre would be trying to meet these demands alone, rather than pooling resources to find better ways of maintaining and developing services. Law Centres are uniquely positioned as the only not-for-profit specialist advice organisations giving lawyer-led advice and representation on a variety of social welfare law issues. As their umbrella body, LCN is the only organisation that supports them in this. Our communications work keeps our clients and communities and their interests at the heart of our external messaging.

About the need for the work

It is important that we communicate the value of the work that Law Centres do. Firstly, people in need of their assistance need to know that it is there for them. As only 1 in 6 people thinks of legal problems they encounter as such, this means our communications need to be as clear about legal problems as we are about the solutions that Law Centres provide. Doing this well can reduce the amount of people misdirected, shorten their path

to assistance, and reduce the burden of wrong referrals on Law Centres, meaning that they can focus on helping the people they can help.

The need for Law Centres' work is certainly there. Even before the pandemic, the UK had over 14 million people living in poverty, of which over 4 million children and some 1.5 million who are destitute. A decade of austerity policies has increased demand for our assistance (by 400% in welfare rights alone), as both entitlements and routes to redress were hit. For the time being, Brexit and Covid-19 are two major and unprecedented factors are expected only to widen hardship. Already the digitalisation of the justice system, now accelerated by social distancing, is leaving many people excluded.

Over the same period, Law Centres have been challenged by a 40% drop in funding, and since 2013 legal aid no longer covers many problems that are key to our work: welfare and employment rights, housing disrepair, school exclusions and immigration, among others. Hundreds of thousands of cases every year are no longer being helped by legal aid to challenge wrong decisions or denial of services or entitlements. We think this is the wrong choice for government to make. To us, access to justice for all, regardless of the ability to pay, is as fundamental as universal healthcare and social security.

To push back against this, we are building a movement for social change, to make the UK a more equal society, founded on social justice and the rule of law. To many these are abstract concepts: our challenge is to make them concrete if we are to gain their support. This means communicating the everyday work of Law Centres to show its practical benefit to people – just how it helps protect homes, lives and livelihoods. It means analysing and explaining the wider impact that resolved legal issues have for life chances, for health and for the resilience of local communities. Justice and access to it may not be the only component helping people thrive, but they are an essential part of the mix. With a unique role to play in this, Law Centres are needed now more than ever.
