

Senior Policy Manager / Associate Director - Education

(with a specialism in either a) skills/higher education policy or b) schools policy)

About Public First

Public First is a public policy consultancy which offers solutions to complex policy problems faced by clients. We are a boutique, high end organisation that works in a few distinct areas of specialism and offers unparalleled expertise within these areas.

Across our business, we focus on a few main areas of work, each headed up by a highly-experienced Head of Practice:

- Education and Skills
- Levelling Up
- Technology
- Energy and Environment
- Data and Impact
- Social Policy
- Polling

Within each area of work, and more generally, we offer a range of services. We are, in effect, part think tank, part strategic advisory consultancy, part polling company, and part communications and public affairs agency:

- *Policy and research* – we offer research and analysis, economic modelling, writing of publications, thought leadership, and strategic counsel on public policy issues.
- *Opinion research* – we offer accredited British Polling Council quantitative research including opinion polls, and a wide range of Market Research Society qualitative opinion research methods including focus groups and cognitive interviews.
- *Communications and campaigns* – we offer a full service of campaign work including grass roots campaigning execution for clients, as well as more traditional media and communications support including press releases, op-ed drafting and placement, select committee training and media training, and event/launch management.

Our team comes from the most senior levels of government, the civil service, political campaigns, think tanks, opinion research and the media. We are united by a belief in the power of understanding, shaping, and using public opinion to influence public policy. Put simply, we put intellectual energy behind solving some of the trickiest economic and social problems in the UK today. And we want you to join us.

Education at Public First

Education is one of the major areas of specialism for Public First. Many of the most senior team at the company have worked in and around government or the opposition in education policy for the last twenty years or more. Between us, we have advised Prime Ministers, Leaders of the Opposition, Education Secretaries and their Shadows, and numerous junior Ministers.


We work across all phases of education. Our clients include universities and multi academy trusts, national and local government, charities, foundations, trade associations, and businesses large and small who work in education. Across the practice, we have worked with some of the most well recognised names in the education space in the past three years.



You can see brief profiles of the team here: <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/team>

We organise the practice into three main areas:

- **Schools:** We work with individual schools, multi academy trusts, education charities, and foundations, with projects covering most areas of the schools policy landscape. Examples of previous projects include our [Commission on Teacher Retention](#); the [Youth Mental Health Coalition](#); and our work on the [National Tutoring Programme](#).

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- **Higher education:** We work with a number of UK universities and mission groups, covering most aspects of post-18 education, as well as research and innovation policy, in UK HE. We are increasingly looking to grow and expand our profile overseas. Previous projects include our work on [public attitudes to tuition fees](#), [public understanding of R&D](#), [polling on international students](#), and our evaluation of the [Office for Students Uni-Connect](#) programme.
 - **Skills:** We work on a number of projects across the broader skills landscape, for large corporates or regional and national bodies, across a broad range of sector areas. Previous examples include our work for [Phoenix Insights](#) on tackling economic inactivity; the [Yorkshire Financial Services Commission](#); and our report for the [Prince's Trust on Green Skills](#).

We are looking for someone with an interest, and expertise, in one or more of these areas.

The role

We are looking for someone with expertise and experience in education policy to join the team – either as an Associate Director (with 5+ years relevant experience), or a Senior Policy Manager (with 2-3+years relevant experience).

You are likely to be someone who has spent time professionally in education within a frontline role, such as a teacher, or in a policy role covering education such as in a university, in government, a think tank, or a charity, or a membership organisation, or in consultancy or private business. That said, please do not overly worry about if you have the 'right' level of experience or background. We recruit for skill and fit within the organisation – and will work with the people we make offers to, to ensure that they are supported within the company in a way that suits everyone.

Our ideal candidate would be someone who had:

- **Experience working in education policy.** The single most important thing we will be looking for is someone who understands, and can write clearly about, education policy. We are relaxed about where this expertise may have come from, or how many years' specific experience you have in this field.
- **Familiarity with government, policymaking and politics.** This could have been gained through direct experience in politics and government, or through adjacent sectors. Regardless of the route, successful candidates will need to demonstrate above all that they understand how policy is developed.
- **Expertise in particular areas of education.** We are knowledge junkies! We want a culture of expertise within the organisation, and to learn from each other about all



elements of policy within education (and other areas, as well).


- **The ability to communicate clearly, incisively, and precisely.** This includes the ability to translate complex policy topics into accessible language, and confidence when presenting conclusions from your work to senior stakeholders such as clients, policymakers or other experts.
- **Experience managing cross-functional projects.** You should feel comfortable working with colleagues and clients to deliver multifaceted research projects on time, and to a high standard. An ideal candidate will have demonstrable experience managing complex projects and/or campaigns.
- **The ability to handle quantitative data.** Public First employs economists and expert data modellers but all staff are expected to be able to work with large datasets and raw numbers, or have the enthusiasm and motivation to learn how to do so.

At Associate Director (AD) level, you will likely have 5+ years relevant policy experience, and be able to comfortably and confidently own a portfolio of clients and projects (with support from Directors and Head of Practice). Examples of responsibilities at this level include:

- **Client and project management:** ADs work with significant autonomy and manage a number of projects and client relationships across the practice. They have day-to-day responsibility for client and project management, overseeing progression and ensuring outputs are delivered at a high quality and on time.
- **Research and policy expertise:** ADs have a clear specialism within the education policy brief, and are responsible for scoping projects, drafting policy reports and briefings, as well as undertaking in-depth research. This includes an ability to understand and undertake research using qualitative and quantitative methods (with support and training provided, as required).
- **New business and client development:** ADs contribute to and support the wider development of new business across the firm, and proactively maintain and build strong networks across relevant sectors.

At Senior Policy Manager level, you will likely have 2+ years of experience in a relevant field, and be able to produce work to a high quality and standard, supported by an Associate Director/Director with client and project management. Examples of responsibilities at this level include:

- **Project management and delivery:** Senior Policy Managers will be able to support the progress of a project and execute large amounts of the work with some supervision.



They will be able to undertake a large amount of qualitative and quantitative research (with support and training provided, as required), and support the day-to-day activity on projects and with clients.

- **Support with clients and projects:** SPMs will present themselves credibly and authoritatively to clients, including giving direct feedback both written and verbal, and regularly act where required as a point of contact, with the support of ADs/Directors as required. Will on occasion be able to deputise for an AD/Director on a project (i.e providing cover during a week of annual leave)
- **Work flexibly across the practice:** SPMs will be able to work with other team members to ensure that work is delivered at a high quality and on time – i.e liaising with the polling team regarding opinion research for a project; supporting across multiple projects in different areas of education

Location and salary

The role is London based (we have offices in Westminster) but if Covid has taught us anything, it's that we are flexible. At the moment we are all in the office Mondays and Thursdays, with flexibility for people to be in the office or at home, as is their preference, for the other days.

Given the geographic spread of many of our clients, we are also open to discussions about the post holder being permanently based in another area of the country, if they are willing to travel on occasions to be with the rest of the team.

Salary will depend on experience, but to give a sense of scale, Senior Policy Manager salaries will typically start at £38,000; and Associate Directors £54,000. We have significant flexibility for the right candidate, depending on professional background and experience.

We particularly welcome applications from disabled and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates.

If you're interested, please send a CV and cover letter (including links to any writing or external materials about yourself, if helpful or relevant) to jessica.lister@publicfirst.co.uk. Please outline clearly which areas of education policy you have most experience in, and which area of the practice (schools, skills, higher education) you'd be most interested in working in – as well as explaining what you think you could bring to the team and role.

We will be considering applications on a rolling basis until **Friday 22nd March** – and encourage applicants to submit as soon as possible.