

Recruitment Pack: Head of External Relations

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Introductory message from the Chief Executive

Thank you for your interest in the role of Head of External Relations.

We are delighted to provide you with an application pack and it is hoped that the information provided will be of interest and help you with your application process.

Plunkett UK is an established charity dating back to 1919, but our focus is firmly on the present and ensuring our work remains relevant to the communities we seek to represent. Our new strategy (2026–2031) sets out our vision for thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities throughout the UK, and our belief that community ownership is one of the most powerful ways to make that vision a reality. **Over the next five years, our work will focus on three strategic priorities: stronger community business, stronger movement and stronger Plunkett.**

Plunkett has always been an organisation that adapts and evolves to ensure its relevance to society and is making the most difference to people, place and planet. I joined the organisation in 2007 and was appointed CEO in 2017. I can honestly say, I have never known Plunkett's support be in such demand as it is today, and this reassures me that we are on the right path.

I am particularly proud to be leading Plunkett through its next chapter. Our new strategy will see us balance growth with long-term sustainability to create a stronger and more resilient rural community business sector, while building a more visible, united and influential movement of community businesses and their supporters. We will also strengthen Plunkett, building a financially sustainable, resilient and capable organisation that can lead the movement for the long term. This will include developing a more diversified income model and ensuring the experiences of rural community businesses shape national conversations and are represented with a stronger, more influential voice.





With these exciting ambitions ahead of us, we are looking for new staff to join us who are passionate about our work and want to be part of the journey ahead. It doesn't matter what your role is at Plunkett; we are one team, working together to achieve our goals. Our values – fair, accountable and collaborative – sit at the heart of how we work, and everyone has a voice at Plunkett. If successful, you will be encouraged to use yours, contributing to our culture as well as our future growth and impact. We will continue to invest in our people, culture, governance and leadership, ensuring Plunkett remains a trusted, collaborative and high-performing organisation.

As CEO, I believe in working hard, and set a culture of high quality leadership with ambitious but obtainable targets. It is also my role to ensure everyone is given the opportunity to learn, develop and thrive. But I also strive to create an environment which is fun and rewarding to be part of.

Finally, thank you once again for your interest in Plunkett UK and the position available. I hope that this introductory letter has given you a clear sense of our culture and ethos as well as a feel of what we are looking for. If you decide to apply, we do appreciate how long it takes to apply for jobs and you can be sure we will take time and care in reading your CV and supporting statement.

We look forward to hearing from you and exploring your future with us through our selection process.

Yours faithfully,

James Alcock
Chief Executive



Information about the role

Job Title:	Head of External Relations
Location:	Woodstock, Oxfordshire. We value in-person collaboration and this role is primarily office based, with flexibility available where appropriate and regular travel across the UK.
Reporting to:	Chief Executive
Responsible for:	Communications Manager, Policy Manager, Partnerships Manager, Partnerships Manager (Suppliers and Membership)
Salary Range:	£40,000 - £65,945
Contract:	Full-time and permanent

About Plunkett UK

Plunkett UK, the operational name for Plunkett Foundation, is a national charity supporting people in rural areas to set up and run successful businesses in community ownership.

What is a community business?

Community-owned businesses are owned and controlled by community members, who each have an equal and democratic say in how the business is run. These businesses range from village shops and pubs to community farms and woodlands.

Why do we believe that community businesses are a ‘Better form of Business’?

For over a century, Plunkett has seen the power of community ownership create thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities. Our mission is to help rural communities create and sustain community-owned businesses and to connect them through a stronger community business movement that delivers better business for people, the economy and the environment. We achieve this by helping community businesses in our five priority areas of impact:

- Provide a wide range of services and amenities that communities value and need – enabling people to live independently, particularly in areas of market failure
- Stimulate the rural economy through localised supply chains
- Create access to employment and training and volunteering opportunities – often supporting people who are excluded from the labour market
- Tackle climate change through environmentally responsible behaviours
- Promote equity, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all

Once trading, community-owned businesses rarely fail, having a five-year survival rate of 98% and over twenty-year survival rate of 94%.

How we work:

Plunkett operates as one team. This means that every member of staff is expected to support Plunkett as a whole, and as and when required, this means helping others to meet important targets or complete organisation-wide initiatives. As such, there will be times when you are asked to work on tasks outside of your job description – but it also means that the whole of Plunkett is there to support you when required.

We strive to live up to our values, and be fair, accountable and collaborative in the way that we work – both internally and externally – and we welcome applications from like-minded individuals. As a member of the Plunkett team, you will demonstrate a knowledge, understanding and commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion and its application in all that we do.

Job description

Job Purpose

The Head of External Relations will lead delivery of Plunkett UK's Stronger Movement strategic priority, strengthening the organisation's visibility, influence, membership and external relationships. The postholder will lead Plunkett UK's communications, marketing, membership and partnership activity, ensuring the organisation is better understood, more visible and more influential among the audiences that matter most to our mission, while helping to build a stronger and more connected rural community business movement.

A particular priority for this role will be to strengthen Plunkett's communications and marketing. We have a strong story to tell, but we know that our impact, expertise and role within the rural community business movement are not always sufficiently recognised by community businesses, funders, policymakers, corporate partners and other stakeholders. The postholder will bring strategic leadership, initiative and creativity to how Plunkett presents itself, helping ensure our work is understood and our voice is heard.

The role will also provide clear ownership of Plunkett's membership strategy, bringing together activity that is delivered across different teams and ensuring we develop a compelling proposition that grows membership, strengthens the movement and contributes to Plunkett's income.

Working closely with the Chief Executive, the postholder will also help build and maintain strong relationships with key stakeholders across government, funders, membership suppliers, partners and the wider social economy. They will provide strategic oversight of Plunkett's policy and research work, ensuring our Policy Manager is well supported and that activity remains closely aligned with Plunkett's strategy.

Principal Responsibilities

1. Strategic Communications and Marketing

This will be the primary focus of the role. Responsibilities include:

- Develop and lead Plunkett's communications and marketing strategy, ensuring it supports our organisational priorities, strengthens the visibility and influence of community ownership, and drives the development and adoption of a shared identity for the rural community business movement.
- Strengthen Plunkett's brand, reputation and external positioning, ensuring we are recognised as the UK's leading organisation supporting rural community ownership and the trusted voice of the rural community business movement, while maintaining consistency across communications and stakeholder engagement.
- Build a stronger and more consistent organisational narrative that communicates clearly why Plunkett matters, the impact of community ownership and the role community businesses play in creating thriving, inclusive and resilient rural communities.
- Ensure communications and marketing are proactive, audience-led and targeted effectively at community businesses, funders, policymakers, corporate partners and other priority audiences.
- Lead the development of campaigns, thought leadership, media, digital communications and marketing activity that increase Plunkett's visibility, influence and reach.
- Ensure communications and marketing contribute directly to organisational priorities including membership recruitment, fundraising, corporate partnerships and business development.
- Provide clear leadership, challenge and direction to the Communications team, creating a culture of initiative, creativity, ownership and continuous improvement.
- Monitor the effectiveness and reach of communications and marketing activity and use insight to continually improve performance.

2. Lead Plunkett's Membership Strategy and Proposition

The postholder will provide clear organisational ownership of the design, development and performance of Plunkett's membership offer.

- Develop and lead Plunkett's membership strategy, setting clear ambitions for recruitment, income and contribution to movement building.
- Ensure a compelling membership proposition for both start-up and established trading community businesses, including access to specialist support, resources, peer learning, supplier benefits and procurement opportunities that help members save time and money.
- Work with colleagues responsible for corporate and supplier partnerships to strengthen the range and value of member benefits and ensure they are effectively promoted and used.
- Use member insight to continually evolve the membership proposition and ensure it remains relevant to community businesses at different stages of development.
- Take overall accountability for membership performance and income, working across teams to ensure agreed objectives are delivered.
- Establish and lead a cross-organisational Membership Working Group, bringing together staff and, where appropriate, trustees who have a role in growing membership and strengthening the movement.

3. Provide Strategic Leadership for Policy, Public Affairs and Research

Plunkett already has specialist policy expertise in place. The Head of External Relations will therefore focus on strategic direction, support and alignment rather than day-to-day delivery.

- Provide strategic oversight of Plunkett's policy, public affairs and research programme, ensuring it supports the organisation's wider strategy and movement-building ambitions.
- Support and coach the Policy Manager, enabling them to lead the operational delivery of policy, advocacy, member consultation and research.
- Work with the Chief Executive and Policy Manager to agree Plunkett's priority policy positions and ensure they are informed by member insight — reflecting our principle of 'listen first, act second'.
- Represent Plunkett at senior-level meetings with politicians, civil servants, funders and sector leaders where appropriate.
- Ensure research, evidence and policy insight are used effectively across communications, fundraising, membership and organisational decision-making.

4. Build Plunkett's External Relationships and Influence

- Work alongside the Chief Executive to develop strong relationships with key external stakeholders including government, funders, social economy partners, membership suppliers and strategic partners.
- Identify opportunities to raise Plunkett's profile, influence and reach through partnerships, networks and collaboration.
- Ensure Plunkett presents itself externally as a modern, ambitious and commercially aware organisation.
- Develop and oversee Plunkett's partnership strategy, ensuring corporate, supplier and strategic partnerships contribute to member value, movement growth, organisational influence and income generation.
- Provide strategic leadership and support to colleagues responsible for corporate partnerships, fundraising and business development, ensuring external messaging and positioning support income generation.
- Represent Plunkett confidently at events, meetings and, where appropriate, in the media.

5. Strategic Leadership

As a member of Plunkett's Senior Leadership Team, the postholder will:

- Lead External Relations business planning, budgets, KPIs and performance reporting.
- Provide clear leadership and support to those whose roles contribute to membership and external relations objectives.
- Contribute to organisational strategy, decision-making and culture.
- Identify opportunities to increase Plunkett's influence, reach and income while protecting its reputation, charitable purpose and apolitical position.

Person Specification

Essential Experience

We are particularly looking for someone whose experience, energy and passion lean towards strategic communications and marketing.

You will bring:

- Significant experience of developing and leading successful communications and marketing strategies.
- A strong track record of strengthening organisational profile, positioning and brand with diverse external audiences.
- Experience of leading communications teams and creating a culture of initiative, creativity and accountability.
- Experience of designing or developing membership, customer or supporter propositions would be highly advantageous.
- Strong experience of stakeholder engagement and relationship building with senior external audiences.
- An understanding of public affairs, policy and advocacy, with sufficient confidence to provide strategic leadership and represent Plunkett at senior levels.
- Experience of working across organisational boundaries and influencing colleagues over whom you may not have direct management responsibility.
- Strong commercial awareness and an understanding of how communications, marketing and membership can contribute to income generation and organisational sustainability.
- Experience of leading multidisciplinary teams and managing budgets and performance.

Desirable

- Experience of developing partnerships, networks, membership organisations or stakeholder communities.
- Knowledge of community ownership, rural development, co-operatives and social enterprise.

Skills and Attributes

You will be:

- **A strategic communicator** – able to turn complex ideas into clear, persuasive and memorable messages.
- **Marketing-minded** – focused on audiences, positioning, reach and converting awareness into action.
- **Creative and proactive** – bringing ideas, energy and momentum rather than waiting for direction.
- **A strong leader and coach** – able to inspire colleagues, build confidence and create ownership.

- **Collaborative** – comfortable working across teams and through other managers to achieve shared goals.
- **Commercially aware** – able to connect external relations activity with membership growth, partnerships, fundraising and wider organisational sustainability.
- **Politically astute** – confident operating with senior stakeholders while maintaining Plunkett's independence and apolitical stance.
- **A relationship builder** – able to develop trusted relationships with members, funders, policymakers, partners and suppliers.
- **Accountable** – committed to Plunkett's principle of listening first and acting second, using evidence and insight to guide decisions.

To apply for the role

Please submit an up-to-date CV and covering letter, including a supporting statement of no more than 2 sides of A4 outlining your suitability for the role according to the job description.

Please send your application to: hr@plunkett.co.uk

Closing date for applications: 9am on Monday 28 September 2026

Interview date: w/c 5 October at our offices in Woodstock

Use of AI: It's 2026, and most of us use AI to help with writing in some way. We get it – and to be transparent, AI helped us put this pack together too! But when it comes to your cover letter, we want to get a sense of you: *what motivates you, what you care about, and why this role speaks to you.*

AI can be great for sparking ideas, but it can also smooth out personality and replace it with generic phrases. So, feel free to use it as a tool – but don't let it take over. We'd much rather read something genuine and personal than something perfectly polished but anonymous. A cover letter with your real voice is far more valuable to us than one that sounds like it was written by a bot.

Optional video response: As part of your application, we'd love to invite you to share a short video responding to the question: **"Tell us what excites you most about this role."**

This is simply a chance for us to get to know you a little better and to hear, in your own words, what has drawn you to the role and to Plunkett UK. There's no need for anything polished or formal – we're just interested in what genuinely motivates you.

If you'd like to take part, please upload your video following instructions in this secure link: [Instructions for video upload – Fill in form](#)

Data protection

Files uploaded via this link are stored securely by **Plunkett UK** and accessed only for recruitment purposes, in line with our data protection policies.

Video guidance

- **Length:** Up to 2–3 minutes
- **Format:** MP4 (preferred)
- **Recording:** Phone, tablet, or laptop
- **File name:** Please use the style **FirstName_LastName_Head of External Relations_Video** e.g Alex_Taylor_ Head of External Relations_Video

Accessibility and alternative formats

We want this process to be welcoming and accessible for everyone. If a video isn't right for you, that's absolutely fine. You're very welcome to include a **written response** instead (up to **300 words**) as part of your application. ***Choosing either option will not disadvantage your application.***

Our commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Our approach to EDI goes beyond 'protected characteristics' to thinking more broadly about inclusion. Every individual will think and feel differently and we believe that these differences should be embraced, and individual needs taken into account. Additionally, the makeup of the rural communities we work with leads to their own particular diversity and exclusion challenges and opportunities compared to urban areas. Our commitment to EDI, both internally and externally, has been tailored to Plunkett and the communities we serve.

Plunkett benefits

Pension

Plunkett UK operates a workplace pension scheme. Plunkett currently contributes 6% of your gross basic salary to the scheme.

In addition, a salary sacrifice scheme is available which gives you the option to exchange part of your salary for pension contributions. This is an 'opt in' scheme which means you will not be automatically enrolled into this scheme.

Life Insurance

Plunkett operates a non-contributory life insurance scheme. In the event of the death of an employee, the insured sum (currently 3 times salary) will be payable to the named beneficiary(ies). This scheme is arranged with MetLife for the benefit of permanent full-time and part-time employees between the ages of 18 and 65 only.

Living Wage

We believe in rewarding staff fairly for the jobs that they do, and fostering a positive working environment, and we believe that our salaries and terms and conditions reflect this. We are a Living Wage-accredited employer, meaning all our staff and contractors are paid at least the Living Wage.

Annual Leave

The average UK holiday entitlement including public holidays is 33.5 days.

Plunkett's holiday entitlement is **35 days**. All Full Time Plunkett employees are eligible for 27 days' paid holiday in addition to the 8 statutory bank holidays (Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Bank Holiday, Spring Bank Holiday and Summer Bank Holiday). Part Time Employees' holiday entitlement is calculated on a pro rata basis

Long Service Leave

Plunkett provides long service leave as follows:

- An additional two days awarded following five years' service
- A further two days after ten years' service
- A final two days after fifteen years' service i.e. maximum 33 days paid holiday excluding statutory holidays and calculated pro rata to the hours you work.

Birthday Bonus

In addition to holiday entitlement, we offer an additional day's leave on or around staff birthdays. This is a discretionary benefit which is reviewed annually.

Volunteering Days

We offer staff the opportunity to volunteer for up to 14 hours per annum within their working time. This may be used in their own community, at a community business or by serving on a board of trustees for a charity of their interest.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

An EAP is a confidential service offering support and guidance on a wide range of personal or professional issues that may affect your health and wellbeing. This is a discretionary benefit.

Flexibility in working

We offer ad-hoc flexibility on request to enable staff to accommodate personal events and appointments and commitments as required. To arrange this please speak to your line manager. With effect 2 October 2024 this includes flexibility to manage your contracted working hours between the hours of 8 am till 18.00 pm (Monday to Friday).

Training

Plunkett believes that well trained employees are key to business success and is committed to developing its staff. Training needs will be discussed with your manager during annual performance reviews, but you are encouraged to discuss training with your manager if / when the need arises. A generous annual training budget is developed based on individual, department and organisational needs.

Mental Health First Aider (MHFA)

Plunkett considers your wellbeing and mental health to be very important. We have invested in colleague training; Mary Boullin is our current MHFA.

Christmas Party

Plunkett organise and fund an annual 'staff only' event provided during working hours.

Office environment

We provide a pleasant and modern working environment. This includes a well-equipped kitchen which provides tea/coffee and milk free of charge; a breakout area for lunch and breaks; and a garden area which is maintained by staff volunteers. The office is also based a short walk from services in Woodstock and surrounded by public footpaths offering local walks in the open countryside and Blenheim Palace parkland.

Parking/Transport

Woodstock is served by good public transport links and the office has some on-site parking.



The Quadrangle, Banbury Road, Woodstock,
Oxfordshire, OX20 1LH

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www.plunkett.co.uk

Plunkett Foundation is a registered charity, numbers CC 313743 (England and Wales) and SC 045932 (Scotland). It is a company limited by guarantee, registered number 00213235.

 **Plunkett UK**
Rural Community Business