

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH



Head of Communications and Public Affairs Candidate Pack

June 2026

“All known life depends on plants, yet approximately 45% of the world’s plant species are threatened with extinction. In this context, the skills, ambition, and ingenuity of botanic gardens are more crucial than ever. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a global leader in plant research, education, and horticulture, dedicated to shaping a better future. We are the custodians of the National Botanical Collection, provide high-quality scientific evidence to drive impactful conservation action, and enrich individuals and communities through transformative learning and engagement.”

Professor Julia Knights

Regius Keeper, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh





A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIUS KEEPER

Thank you for your interest in the Head of Communications and Public Affairs role here at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is home to one of the richest living plant collections on Earth and is Scotland's scientific centre of global excellence in plant science, horticulture, education and conservation. We welcome nearly one million visitors annually to our four gardens; Logan in Dumfries and Galloway, Benmore in Argyll, Dawyck in the Scottish Borders, and Edinburgh. We also have an ambitious programme of capital refurbishment underway across our Edinburgh estate through the transformative Edinburgh Biomes programme, including the restoration of our iconic Palm Houses and a new sustainable Energy Centre.

This pivotal role sits at the heart of our organisation and will drive our approach to strategic communications, engaging external audiences and raising our profile on a national and international stage. This is an exciting opportunity to help shape the next phase of our corporate strategy, strengthening key policy and press relationships and promoting our expertise to deliver real impact in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change.

As well as the opportunity to make a tangible impact at a globally-facing organisation, this role comes with a competitive salary, generous pension, excellent training, and an incredible work environment, based in Edinburgh with engagement across our four stunning botanic gardens.

Thank you in advance for your interest.

Julia
Professor Julia Knights
Regius Keeper (CEO), Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh



OUR ORGANISATION

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a world-leading centre for plant science, horticulture, conservation, education, and public engagement. Founded in 1670 as a physic garden for the study of medicinal plants, it attracts over one million visitors each year and holds one of the world's most diverse botanical collections.

Through a wide network of national and international partnerships we pursue our mission to Explore, Conserve and Explain the World of Plants, addressing global biodiversity loss and climate change.

Funding is drawn equally from Scottish Government Grant-in-Aid and self-generated income, reflecting our dual role as a public institution and an enterprising organisation. The continued growth of commercial activity, philanthropic support, and consultancy work is a key strategic priority for ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.





OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Guided by the strategy *Responding to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency (2021-2026)*, our work focuses on:

- **Understanding plant and fungal diversity for the benefit of society:** our scientific research seeks to understand the threats facing species and biomes, and how they respond to environmental change. We develop strategies and actions to conserve biodiversity both in Scotland and around the world.
- **Conserving and developing botanical collections:** we curate and enhance the National Botanical Collection as a living scientific and cultural heritage resource, and we support the development of botanical collections globally – particularly in partnerships with countries across the Global South.
- **Engaging and educating people:** we build global capacity to respond to the biodiversity and climate crises by sharing scientific, horticultural and conservation expertise through education and public engagement, inspiring people of all ages to value and protect the natural world.





OUR COLLECTIONS AND COMMUNITY

At the heart of our mission are the National Botanical Collections - the Living Collection, Herbarium and Library and Archives – which underpin science, horticulture, learning and conservation. The Living Collection is curated across four Gardens – Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan, spanning Scotland's varied climates. Together they hold around 13,500 plant species, many rare or threatened, making us a global leader in conservation horticulture and ex situ plant conservation.

- Edinburgh: a 72-acre garden just a mile from the city centre showcasing nearly 60,000 plants and featuring the world-renowned Rock Garden and Chinese Hillside. The Edinburgh Garden is also home to a network of historic and modernist public Glasshouses, sitting alongside our mission-critical research glass houses, currently being restored through the Edinburgh Biomes Project.
- Benmore: set in the dramatic Argyll landscape, this 120-acre mountainside garden is famed for its rhododendron and conifer collections of global significance and is a key visitor attraction for the west coast, sitting at the gateway to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.
- Dawyck: in the heart of the Scottish Borders, Dawyck is the most continental of our four sites and is an internationally renowned arboretum, playing a key role in conservation and climate resilience.
- Logan: on the mild Rhins of Galloway, Logan showcases tender southern hemisphere plants not generally seen growing outdoors this far north, alongside other temperate and maritime species in a striking exotic setting.

Science, Conservation and Learning

Together, our Horticulture and Science teams collaborate to understand and conserve biodiversity, restore habitats, and develop sustainable plant management practices. The Living Collection provides the foundation for discovery science, conservation translocations and climate adaptation.

Training and skills development are central to our work. Through specialist degree and diploma programmes, short courses and online learning, we nurture professionals who go on to lead in horticulture, plant science, conservation and del-research education worldwide.

Community and Visitors

The four Gardens within Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh are places of beauty and tranquillity, where visitors experience the restorative power of nature. From moments of quiet reflection to vibrant seasonal displays, they promote health, wellbeing and inspiration, deepening people's connection with the living world. The Gardens also inspire curiosity and creativity through education, art and community engagement.

A dedicated community of horticulturists, scientists, educators and volunteers share a passion for plants and a commitment to public benefit, conservation and environmental stewardship. Together, they create welcoming spaces that celebrate the diversity of life and the vital role plants play in sustaining it.

Our Estate

Our four Gardens are set in over 270 acres of land, with several historic Grade A listed buildings, heritage glasshouses and other structures of significance. We have a complex portfolio of over 130 buildings ranging from administrative offices and scientific laboratories to education facilities, visitor centres and horticultural buildings, covering a footprint of more than 3,000 square metres.

For further details visit rbge.org.uk

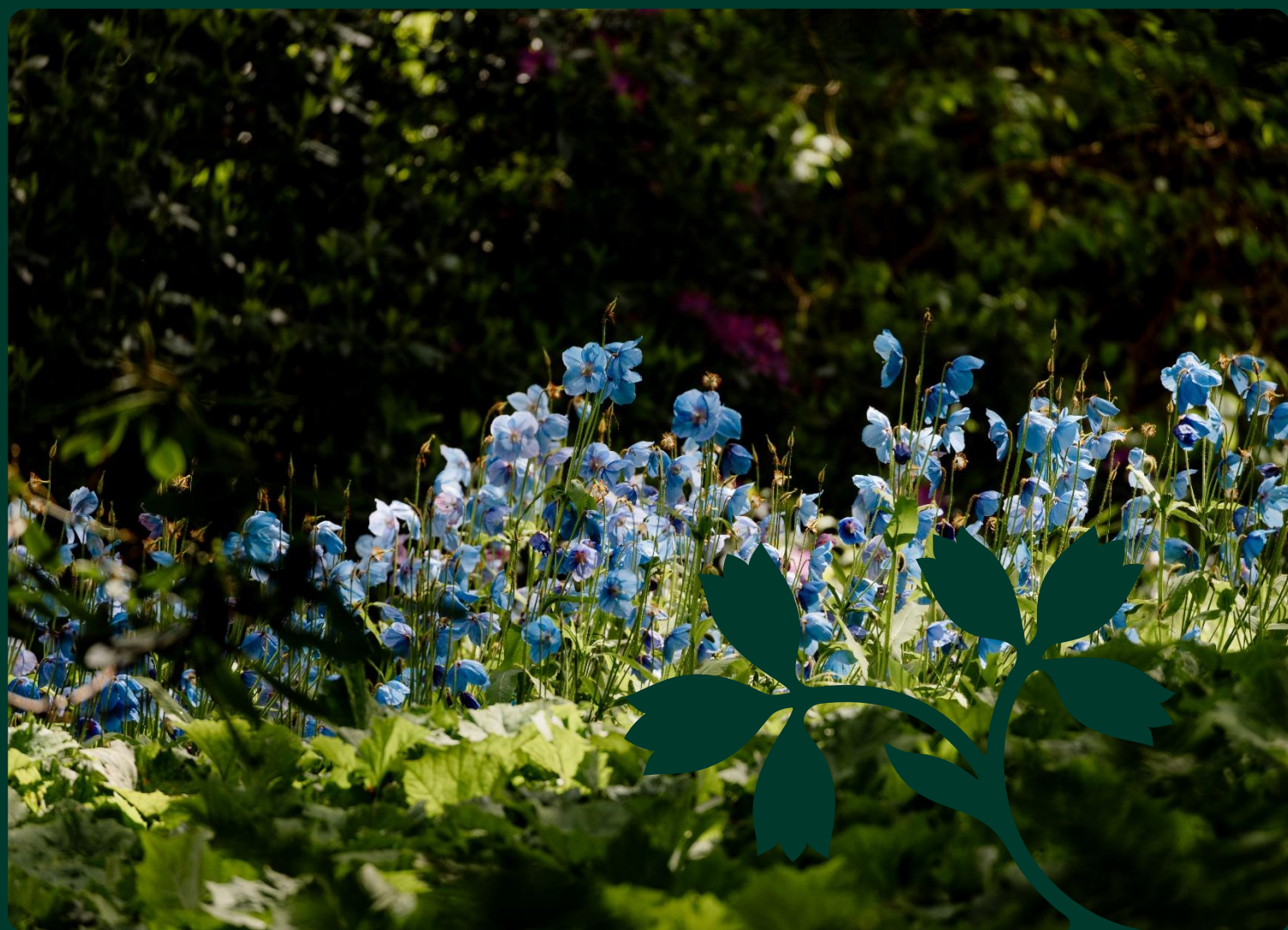


Vision

A positive future
for plants, people
and planet.

Mission

To explore, conserve
and explain the world
of plants.



THE ROLE

The Head of Communications & Public Affairs is a pivotal role at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) promoting our world-leading work in science, conservation, horticulture, and education.

Working as an active member of the Senior Leadership Team, this role will lead the organisation's approach to strategic communications, seeking opportunities to engage external audiences, disseminate key messages, and raise RBGE's profile on a national and international stage through press and media engagement.

With oversight of the communications and publishing functions, this role will also provide key support to the Regius Keeper and the Executive Team in shaping engagement and communication strategies with political stakeholders across the Scottish and UK governments.

This is an exciting opportunity to make a real impact in the next phase of RBGE's corporate strategy, strengthening key policy relationships and promoting RBGE's expertise to deliver real impact in the fight against the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Main Duties

Communications & Public Affairs

Strategy: Lead on the development and delivery of new strategies bringing public affairs and communications activities together to create influence and impact across RBGE's diverse stakeholder audiences, securing high-quality, positive press coverage in UK-wide and international outlets and building influence and advocacy in Scottish and UK government spheres.

Relationships: Leveraging your existing network of newswires and mainstream media, cultivate and maintain strong external relationships for the benefit of the organisation, engaging with key individuals and groups including senior press contacts, peer institutions, policy makers and political stakeholders to widen audience reach for key messaging and partnership work.

Impact: Define and monitor key metrics to assess the success and impact of communications and public affairs initiatives, setting targets for growth in reach and engagement and aligning activity and resource to respond to key priorities.

Policy: Lead on intelligence gathering and analysis of relevant policy developments and media debates to identify opportunities to promote RBGE's research, education, conservation and horticultural activities.

Reputation Management: Oversee reputation management strategies providing expert advice to senior colleagues underpinned by the development of robust processes to enable swift and effective responses in comms scenarios.



Internal Communications: Support the ongoing work to strengthen RBGE's internal communications activity, developing channels and processes to maximise impact with available resource.

Collaboration: Work closely with the Head of Philanthropy and Head of Supporter Engagement & Marketing in the Development & Communications division to ensure messaging is appropriately aligned across press, marketing, supporter engagement and major donor comms activities.

Publishing

Strategy: Work with the Director of Development & Communications and the wider Executive Team to refresh and reinvigorate the strategic approach to publications, setting a clear vision and direction to guide the future approach to new publications and to appropriately prioritise team resource.

Publication pipeline: Evaluate existing processes for the creation of new books ensuring projects are strategically aligned, appropriately resourced, and will deliver return on investment by targeting identified audiences; support the publications function in managing existing projects and liaising between authors, publishers and printers to deliver publications on schedule and within pre-agreed contract terms.

Partnerships and suppliers: Lead on contract negotiations and coordination with suppliers such as distributors and external publishers; engage with the Botanics Trading Company to explore commercial opportunities for licensing and collaborative projects.

Team resource and integration: Ensure the approach to publications is well-integrated with wider strategic priorities, supporting team members to deliver collaborative projects that are well-aligned to key projects and initiatives across the organisation.



Leadership & Governance

Team Management: Lead the Communications and Publishing functions with direct line management for the Press Manager and Publications Editors, ensuring a collegiate, collaborative environment is promoted where colleagues are supported and empowered.

Senior Leadership: Act as an engaged, active member of RBGE's Senior Leadership Team, providing advice, guidance and support across all functions of the Communications and Public Affairs division and championing the work of these teams across the organisation.

Executive Team Support: Deputise for the Director of Development & Communications where appropriate and provide direct support to the Executive Team as required, acting as the senior voice in the organisation in the development and delivery of strategic comms and public affairs activity.

Representation: Represent RBGE at external meetings, conferences, and events when required, in addition to engagement and delivery through internal meetings, committees, and working groups as senior leader and subject expert in the organisation.

Finance, Governance & Reporting: Establish procedures to ensure data, supplier contracts, and internal processes such as out-of-hours support rotas are managed and documented appropriately; take responsibility for an annual departmental budget, supporting direct reports in the creation of forecasting, operational plans, and project budgets; provide regular input into central reporting streams to capture deliverables and manage risk register updates.

Additional duties: Undertake other tasks relevant to the wider remit of this role as agreed with the Director of Development & Communications.





PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential skills

- Educated to degree-level or equivalent professional qualifications or experience.
- Substantial experience in a senior press or communications role - or with a background in journalism - with a demonstrable track record of leading high-impact communications strategies that deliver measurable results.
- Evidenced experience of devising and delivering high-impact press releases and press pitches the gain widespread media coverage across mainstream UK and international outlets such as the BBC.
- Demonstrable knowledge of the UK political landscape with experience in engaging with and influencing senior stakeholders from multiple sectors.
- Strong leadership and team management skills with experience overseeing functions across the wider strategic communications spectrum including public affairs.
- Expertise in developing PR strategies and managing media relations, with demonstrable success in securing high-quality press coverage in mainstream media.
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills, including copywriting and editing, presenting and public speaking.
- Confident relationship-building skills including experience of managing external relationships on behalf of an institution and effective communication with key influencers and colleagues in various roles.
- Excellent analytical skills, with the ability to use insights to drive decision-making and improve return on investment.
- Experience of significant budget management and financial oversight.
- Willingness to work flexibly, including attending events outside of standard working hours as required.
- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.

Desirable skills

- Experience of working as a journalist for a leading national newspaper, magazine, or news wire.
- Experience of working in the fields of science, education, biodiversity, or the environment.
- Experience of leading or engaging closely with publications activity at an organisation.
- Experience of engaging directly with and influencing senior political stakeholders.



TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

This role is based at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's HQ in the capital with some travel to our gardens at Benmore, Dawyck and Logan, and occasional travel elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We offer a generous employment package:

- Salary of £65,964-£72,658 (subject to experience)
- Membership of the civil service defined benefit pension scheme, with RBGE making a 28.97% salary contribution and pension growth of 2.32% per year.
- 25 days holiday entitlement on appointment, increasing to 30 days after 2 years' of service, with the option to buy additional holidays.
- 11.5 days of public and privilege holidays annually.
- A range of staff support mechanisms, including an employee assistance programme, cycle to work and staff discount schemes.
- A number of family-friendly options to support work-life balance, including flexible working arrangements, enhanced contractual maternity, paternity, adoption, and shared parental leave, and career breaks.
- Discounts in our shop, restaurants, and cafes.



HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please email recruitment@rbge.org.uk with:

- Your CV, maximum of 2 pages
- A covering letter, maximum 2 pages, outlining the skills, knowledge and experience you would bring to the role
- A digitally completed equal opportunities questionnaire*: [EOQ form](#)

The closing date for applications is 9.00am (BST) on Monday 20 July 2026.

First interviews will be held in Edinburgh on 30 July 2026, with second interviews taking place the following week on 5 August.

If you have any questions about the role, please contact Lauren Bradshaw at lbradshaw@rbge.org.uk

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

