

SCOTTISH AUTISM

Embracing difference,
leading change

**Director of the Centre
for Practice, Policy &
Research
Recruitment Pack**

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in this role. This is an exciting time to join our Executive Leadership Team as we develop a new strategy building on preliminary work already agreed and set out later in this pack.

We are looking for an exceptional leader with a good understanding of autism gained professionally, through lived experience or both, to lead our Centre for Practice, Policy and Research. Someone who can extend our reach in developing and promoting excellent autism practice both internally and externally including internationally. The role, however, extends beyond autism practice alone and leads our national and local policy influencing work, research, learning and development and Elevate our external training and consultancy service.

A key strand of your work will be to help us to enrich the lives of autistic people by ensuring their voices are heard through our Voice and Participation change programme. This will involve culture and practice change across Scottish Autism as well as learning from some key pieces of research we are involved in.

We strive to push out the boundaries of quality across the sector through influencing national policies and strategies as they affect autistic people and the social care sector as a whole.

Scottish Autism provides a diverse range of general and specialist advice to over 8,000 autistic people, their carers and professionals through our advice line, One Stop Shop and online learning and practice development services. We also provide commissioned/regulated services to around 500 autistic people throughout Scotland including residential care, housing and outreach support, specialist transition support and young peoples' services. It is in these services that most of our 1,000 staff work and where your role and those of your teams will have no small impact.

If your interest is heightened but you would like to know more you can contact me on 07783 141732 by calling or by text.

Dorry McLaughlin
Chief Executive

Who we are

Our Vision – For the future

A world where autistic people are understood and enabled to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives as valued members of the community.

Our Mission – What we are focused on doing

Is to enable autistic people to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Our Values

Collaboration

We work with others and value their opinions.

Compassion

We work with each other and our supported individuals with care and kindness.

Change Makers

We never stand still, we move positively forward, always focused on quality and being the best.

Contribution

We love what we do, we never lose sight of our purpose and we actively contribute to our teams, organisation and community.

Our Strategy (under review)

Strategic Direction

- Voice and Participation to run through everything we do. Services must be co-designed, co-produced and co-delivered with autistic voices at their heart.
- The Centre for Practice, Policy and Research and Autism Services must collaborate to model and evidence our specialism, result in exemplar services and effect societal, political and cultural change.

Strategic Focus

- The Autism Advisory Panel is one mechanism for voice and participation in strategy, governance, and service design and delivery.
- Growth in reach must balance financial sustainability, workforce capacity, and demonstrable outcomes and impact.
- Emphasis on quality excellence in services, acknowledging challenges in regulated environments.
- Service mix to include commissioned (regulated & non-regulated) and non-commissioned offers, shaped by autistic voices.
- Whole-person approach and collaborative pathways endorsed.

Strategic Priorities

Education

- Post New Struan School closure explore high-impact, needs-led, sustainable education models.
- Explore and develop partnerships to lead change for autistic young people. For example, develop a partnership comparable to the Autism Education Trust.
- Focus on transitions and innovative “test-and-learn” pilots.

Digital Enablement

- Strengthen digital capacity and capability to improve digital security and maximise the potential of Artificial Intelligence and data use.
- Milestones to be set for digital development with transparency in investment implications.

Governance

- A light-touch review of governance arrangements including Articles of Association, committee model, risk management, Autism Advisory Panel integration.
- Achieve clarity on Board vs Committee vs Executive Leadership Team roles.

External Policy & Influence

- Ensure our asks in our Manifesto “Seizing the Moment” are achieved post the Holyrood 2026 election:
 - Deliver Learning Disability, Autism & Neurodivergence Bill.
 - National Neurodevelopmental Pathway Guarantee.
 - Improve education support; end informal exclusions.
 - Reform social care sector.
 - Remove autism from Mental Health Act.
- Develop and prepare for longer-term thought leadership in education, diagnosis, research, public awareness, Diversity Equity and Inclusion.



About the Role: Director of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research

Location

Alloa/Home Working – travel throughout Scotland as required.

Salary

£85,700 (increased to £90,000 after a year) and car allowance of £7,092 per year (pro rata for part time).

Full Time (37hrs per week). We will consider applications for a part time contract (minimum 4 days per week).

We are looking for a strong leader who is able to play a key role in our Executive Leadership Team – helping shape strategy for your own directorate but also contributing to the development and implementation of our corporate strategy. Leading your team and reporting to the Board as well as a diverse range of stakeholders, you will be able to communicate at all levels and take people with you.

Leading the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research the role is about developing quality autism practice through internal research and external collaboration in order to influence national policies and strategies. We are looking for an exceptional leader who is comfortable communicating and networking at local, national and international levels and who can build strong networks and alliances.

The Director of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research has leadership of the Centre and for the effective delivery and development of:

- Voice and Participation
- Research
- Autism practice
- Engaging and responding to national and local policies and strategies
- Elevate – training and consultancy services
- Learning and Development

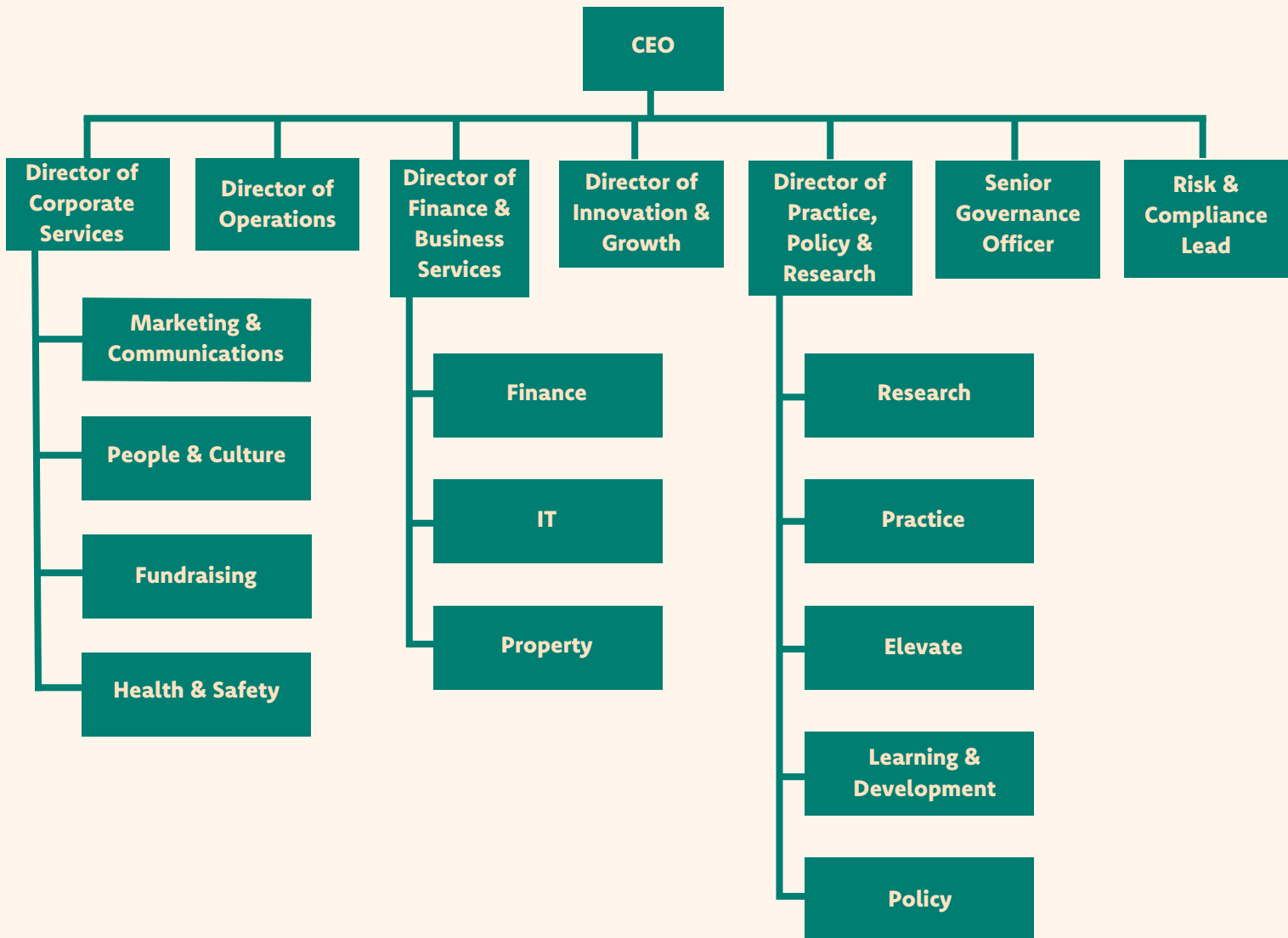
As a member of the Executive Leadership Team, reporting to the Chief Executive, this role:

- Works collaboratively to ensure the delivery of Scottish Autism’s vision, mission, values and strategy.
- Has strategic leadership for the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research and ensures all areas directly support Scottish Autism’s strategy.

- Maintains an external focus and builds appropriate relationships and partnerships.
- Represents Scottish Autism, acting as an ambassador to enhance its reputation.

Scottish Autism has a small subsidiary, A-ND with a focus on children’s services in the North-East and Highlands of Scotland which is also covered by our centralised services. The scope of this role which has the potential to increase over time, includes:

- An annual budget of approximately £950,000.
- A directorate comprising c.18 staff with 5 direct reports.



Key Responsibilities

Strategic Input

- Work with the Chief Executive and other ELT members to develop the short, medium and long-term strategies for all the functions of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research.
- Provide strategic advice, information and expertise to senior colleagues and the Board in respect of the work and priorities of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research.

Leadership

- Build, maintain and manage a high performing team by providing leadership, role clarity, building autonomy and career development in a coaching and developmental style.
- Build and promote effective cross functional working as a cultural norm.
- Leading across functions in driving advanced autism practice, a learning culture and reflective practice.

Delivery and Impact

- Develop and embed internally innovation in autism practice in particular in Voice and Participation and new models of care and support which are recognised and appreciated by the people we support, regulators and other stakeholders.
- Influence policy at a national and local level as it affects autism and the social care sector as a whole.
- Develop Elevate our training and consultancy service that meets business plan objectives.
- Develop and maximise research opportunities that support the improvement of autism practice.
- Show visible leadership across the whole of Scottish Autism to ensure a well understood vision and a one team culture is achieved.
- Support, develop and performance manage the Practice Development Manager, Policy and Media Manager, Researcher in Residence and Senior Practice Learning Advisor.
- Oversee and take accountability for ensuring that a full set of compliant policies and procedures are maintained and recommended to the Board within agreed cycles.

Compliance and Control

- Work with the Chief Executive, ELT and Board members to ensure effective governance and accountability across the Directorate.
- Provide appropriate and timely information and metrics, supporting an open and transparent dialogue across Senior Leaders and non-executives, setting high standards of probity.
- Lead of learning and development for the organisation ensuring compliance and alignment with our organisational goals and values and promoting excellent practice and voice and participation.
- Ensuring strong recording through our learning system, reporting, monitoring and systems are meeting needs and that training and learning is being delivered and developed to match needs across geographies.

- Ensure the risks within the Directorate’s activities are identified and mitigated effectively and that decisions are made within a robust risk assessment framework.
- Ensure compliance with key policy and procedure in areas such as health and safety; equalities and diversity; data protection; codes of practice and all other statutory requirements, which are routinely checked for compliance.

Performance Management

- Provide support and development to the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research team to ensure it is structured and resourced to deliver the strategy.
- Lead a strong performance culture and commitment to excellence with a focus on end to end quality services.
- Anticipate changes and plan for the delivery of new priorities in line with agreed plans.
- Plan, monitor and analyse key metrics for the day-to-day performance of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research to ensure timely and efficient completion of tasks.

External Relationships

- Maintain and develop effective professional networks that will add value to Scottish Autism’s work and ensure that it is viewed as an influential and reliable partner.
- Work with and influence external partners at a national and local level to raise the profile of Scottish Autism and the work of the Centre for Practice, Policy and Research and to maximise opportunities for the development of innovative service practice.
- Develop long term relationships with policy makers and sector leaders to influence sector debate and thinking.

No leadership role profile can be entirely comprehensive, the post holder will be required to undertake additional duties from time to time, in line with the above responsibilities, as required by the Chief Executive.



Person Specification

Qualifications

- Degree level education or equivalent through relevant experience.

Experience

- Substantial senior leadership experience of practice and/or policy development in an autism or neurodivergent associated field.
- Some experience of developing or using research.
- A good understanding of the social care sector.
- A track record of developing and planning the work of a multi-functional department.
- A demonstrable track record of the promotion of human rights and building the voices of marginalised groups in a social care, community or similar setting.
- A strong track record of leading, engaging and motivating colleagues through transformational periods of change.
- Experience of working collaboratively with external bodies and organisations.
- Experience of using strategic learning and development in teams.
- Experience of reporting to Boards. (Desirable)

Skills/ Approach

- Able to manage multi-disciplinary and complex stakeholder relationships.
- An ability to use and develop relationships as a tool for change.
- Excellent presentation and interpersonal skills with an approachable style that generates confidence and understanding.
- Media skills/ training (Desirable).
- Excellent written skills and an ability to share ideas, write proposals and respond to consultations and similar.
- Strategic thinker with well-developed business skills and able to translate strategy into action.
- Acts as a change agent, constantly seeking new ideas from multiple stakeholders to improve our practice and drive quality.
- Aligned with Scottish Autism's values and is inspired by our vision and mission.
- Would be proud to work for Scottish Autism and who will actively seek to contribute to making life better for the individuals we support and their families, and the colleagues that work with us.
- Optimistic, tenacious and seeks to solve problems through solutions thinking.
- Recognises the good things they see and is positive and encouraging with their team and beyond.
- Has the ability to reflect and take a big picture view and contribute to the ELT on a wide range of experiences.
- Has the ability to build high levels of trust, openness, honesty, collaboration and support across teams.
- Has strategies for own wellbeing and awareness of others'.

Recruitment Timetable

- The recruitment and selection process will take place on two days – **16th June 2026** and **25th June 2026**.
- Longlisted candidates will be asked to attend for approximately one hour on the first day and then, if shortlisted, for approximately two hours on the second day.
- We will advise you in advance what the selection process will entail but the second day is likely to involve a presentation and interview with an opportunity to visit a service and meet the Executive Leadership Team.



How to apply for the role

Interested candidates should provide their CV and covering letter to Danielle.Dowley@scottishautism.org by Thursday 4th June.

Your covering letter should demonstrate your motivation and passion to work with Scottish Autism, as well as giving an overview of the skills and experience you will bring to this role.

You can contact Dorry McLaughlin, Chief Executive, on 07783 141732 if you would like an informal discussion about the role.

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