

Executive Assistant/Chief of Staff



Reports to: Kiran Gill, CEO

Start date: As soon as possible

Location: London

Contract: Full-time, permanent

Salary: Depending on experience, in salary range £25 - 36k (+6% employer pension contribution)

Interview dates: Week commencing 9th August

Closing Date for Applications: Midnight on Sunday 1st August

The Challenge

Every day 41 of England's most vulnerable children – equivalent to more than a full classroom of pupils – are permanently excluded, with disastrous personal and societal consequences.

These are the country's **most disadvantaged**: 4 times more likely to have grown up in poverty, 7 times more likely to have special needs, 10 times more likely to have mental health problems and 20 times more likely to be interacting with social services due to safeguarding concerns. These children are at serious risk of knife crime.

Once they are excluded, life chances are bleak. **Less than 2%** of excluded pupils finish school with the qualifications they need in maths and English; 50% are immediately not in education, employment or training (NEET) straight after GCSEs. This small group of pupils goes on to make up half of the prison population, and is more likely to reoffend. It is estimated that each excluded child will go on to cost the state £370,000 in extra education, health, welfare and criminal justice spending. For last year's cohort of excluded pupils, that's a total cost of **£2.9bn to the Exchequer**.

Yet **too little is known about how to break this tragic cycle**. While some parts of the school system have seen an evidence-led revolution, there has been insufficient research and teacher training in how to measure or move outcomes for these most complex and vulnerable pupils. This impacts teacher satisfaction. Increasing numbers are leaving the profession, disillusioned and disempowered by this lack of expertise.⁹ Meanwhile, the numbers of young people whose lives are written off through school exclusion continues to rise, year on year.

Our Vision

The past does not have to determine the future. **The Difference** is a new education charity, founded to improve the life outcomes of the most vulnerable children by raising the status and expertise of those who teach them. By 2030 we want a new story on school exclusion:

1. **People - The best teachers working with the children who need them most** – A third of the 350 schools for excluded pupils in the country have benefitted from a *Difference Leader* leading improved practice and outcomes for excluded children in their setting; and are part of a growing Community of Schools through which The Difference learns more about effective practice and policy to improve life chances of excluded young people.
2. **Practice - An evidence base of what works with the most vulnerable shared widely** – The *Inclusive Leadership Course* has shaped the strategic approach of over 1,000 of the 3,500 secondary schools nationally, leading to lower incidence of school exclusion in individual schools. Meanwhile research findings, school tools and development experiences by The Difference inspires hundreds of teachers each year to join *The Difference Community*, learning from what works to improve children's safety, wellbeing and learning.
3. **Policy – Changing incentives are reducing exclusion and improving preventative investment** – Schools whose outcomes buck the trend for vulnerable children are identified, facilitated and amplified by The Difference, influencing other schools and policy-makers. Local, multi-academy-trust wide and national policies which help and hinder excluded pupils are identified through our research; and changed through our advocacy relationships.

Our Journey

The Difference was born out of a year's research into school exclusions, with think-tank IPPR in 2017. In that year, the Founder & CEO – [Kiran](#) – gave up her job on the commitment of a small handful of funders to support this research. In the year which followed, she hired the founding team who took The Difference from concept to reality and began working with our first teachers and excluded young people.

In 2021, The Difference is needed now more than ever. During lockdown, children experiencing domestic violence, loss and trauma, isolation and worsening mental health rose. These experiences could easily fuel challenges at school escalating towards exclusion. Yet public debates around exclusion are polarising and meanwhile the schools serving excluded pupils are facing under-funding. The Difference has seen excellent impact from the early years of its work; but there is more work ahead in capturing our impact, continuing to lobby in the centre-ground, and growing the capacity of our unique and powerful team to keep driving towards lower exclusions in England.

From next academic year The Difference Executive team need a new colleague to support them across the whole organisation's work: orchestrating the rhythm of the year with internal and external work and events; managing correspondence with a growing number of externals; coaching the Directors to use their time strategically to have the most impact; and working closely with our trustee team to oversee the continuously improving work of the charity. Could you make this difference?

Our Values

- **Strong relationships** - We prioritise genuine relationships over transactional interactions, and know that this requires deliberate relational practice and achieves the best outcomes. We see those we work with as people first and their roles second; and know this greater trust allows us to take more risks, gain more feedback and have greater impact. Working through a network of relationships allows us to achieve more than we could do alone.
- **Internalised locus of control** - We work hard to reframe difficult situations to discover what *we* have within our power in terms of solutions. We take it upon ourselves to walk towards challenges and can take a high level of ownership and agency in our work and its continuous improvement. We never shout “fire” without first picking up our own bucket.
- **Scientific approach** - We take a diagnostic approach to unpicking causes of problems. We are loud and proud of our failures, recognising failing fast and often is key to finding the best solutions. We test solutions and are willing to use data and feedback to make adjustments and choose new directions. We look for a measurable shift in outcomes before we declare we are having an impact.
- **Not squeamish about structural inequalities** - We believe patterns of inequality can and should be disrupted. We strive to be clear-eyed about how these inequalities work, and both the individual practice and system-changes required to address them. We push ourselves to overcome awkwardness in talking about this; and to begin with acknowledging our own biases and blind spots.
- **Value voices of dissent and difference** - We are brave enough to share our minds with others; and nurture that bravery in our collaborators. We build feedback loops to learn from others' perceptions – especially if they differ from our own. We don't mind disagreement, are wary of group-think and seek out different perspectives to make our work stronger.
- **Asset-based** - We work hard to avoid deficit thinking and aim to start with what's strong, not what's wrong. We are careful not to frame our colleagues and stakeholders - particularly young people and families – as othered victims but instead to recognise their agency and to talk with and about them with empathy and respect. We build relationships with, feedback loops from, and recruit into our teams, people who have the assets of insights into our delivery work and the

young people we work with.

The Challenge Ahead: Executive Assistant/Chief of Staff

The Difference is a growing charity, in both the size of its team and the reach of its delivery. As our delivery and team both grow, we must develop our ability to manage competing strategic priorities and their demands on our time, and to communicate and collaborate effectively across a wider group of colleagues, Trustees and external stakeholders. This requires a high level of coordination, strategic time management, and internal communication that we have not needed until now - qualities which we hope you will help to foster and grow.

As the Chief of Staff/Executive Assistant, you will work closely with the CEO and Directors to develop a deep understanding of the organisation's strategic goals, how they interrelate, and the operational approaches designed to achieve them. Through this understanding, you will support the Exec team to manage their time and input towards the charity's goals; ensure effective communication across The Difference team, and with external stakeholders; as well as personally delivering on key projects across the charity.

Key Tasks Required of this Role

Strategic support for CEO & Directors

- **Play a strategic role in balancing competing priorities**, to ensure that sufficient time is given by CEO and Directors to each of the organisation's four objectives.
- **Manage the CEO's diary on an ongoing basis** to ensure it continuously reflects current priorities, and responds to emerging needs.
- **Support the CEO in preparing for meetings** - through both written and verbal briefings - and ensure communication of key headlines to relevant team members.
- **Coordinate Directors' meetings**, supporting the creation of agendas, and helping to determine how questions and topics are prioritised across the year.
- **Support on the delivery of cross-organisational projects**, focusing on topics such as team development; ways of working; culture and values.

Internal Communication & Collaboration

- **Own and maintain** an accurate **organisational calendar**, ensuring teams are aware of one another's capacity across the year, and can plan accordingly.
- **Deputise for the CEO in internal meetings**, to ensure that adequate briefing can be given to the CEO meaning ongoing oversight is not lost when external meetings are given priority.
- **Project manage key cross-organisational events**, such as conferences and school visits, ensuring timely input from all relevant team members.
- **Develop shared processes & norms** to nurture constructive communication with internal & external stakeholders

Board

- **Project manage production of board papers**, including support with writing them, and ensuring timely input from across the Difference team.
- **Plan and coordinate Board meetings**, including supporting the CEO and Chair to set agendas, and ongoing communication with all Trustees.
- **Take and distribute Board minutes**, and ensure timely follow up on any actions.

- **Organise and coordinate** Trustee engagement events, e.g. social dinners and school visits

External Communications

- **Manage correspondence between CEO and external stakeholders**, including categorising incoming mail, and triaging or delegating to other team members where relevant.
- **Support with social media activities** to develop and maintain key relationships, and develop an external voice of The Difference.
- **Ensure a welcoming experience of The Difference** for external stakeholders, both for those visiting the office, and those reaching out via email or social media.

Events management & administrative support

- **Manage CEO and Directors' logistics**, including travel arrangements, venue booking and processing expenses.
- **Staff elements of delivery**: e.g. Difference Leader Twilights and Summer Training; IncludEd conference.
- **Manage the office**, including ensuring meeting rooms and resources are available, and liaising between team and office staff.

Person Specification

Essential

- **Self-direction/autonomous worker** - Evidenced capacity to take high levels of ownership over your work, **proactively** anticipating problems that may arise, diagnosing need and changing course quickly; taking **initiative** within the role to ensure success.
- **Ability to take ownership over your self-development**, proactively diagnosing skills and information gaps and making use of others' expertise to continually grow your skills, and make a success of tasks at hand.
- **Strong communicator** - A clear communication style which is concise and effective - both verbally & written - as well as strong interpersonal skills.
- **Stakeholder management** - Evidence of having established, developed and managed effective relationships with a range of senior stakeholders.
- **Organisation & project management** - A track record of coordinating projects to tight timelines and a high standard, communicating proactively if timelines need to shift; as well as sharp attention to detail and thorough approach to organisation and project management.
- **Agility in problem-solving** - Ability to thrive in a fast-paced start-up environment, comfortable with making decisions in ambiguous contexts and rapidly diagnosing any need to reprioritise and change course; ability to think creatively/laterally and strategically to find the most effective solution.
- **Values** - A career or personal experience which evidences [shared values](#) with The Difference (see above) and a personal commitment to our mission to improve life outcomes for vulnerable people.

Desired

- **Experience in start-up/charity sector** - An understanding of the fast-paced nature of start-up, and/or how small charities work
- **Experience of diary management** for senior colleagues.
- **Experience of coordination across broad teams** - You may have worked in another role which sits across different functions within an organisation.

How To Apply

Please email jobs@the-difference.com no later than **Sunday 1st August at midnight**, including the following:

1. A supporting letter (**maximum two pages**) outlining how your knowledge, skills and experience meet the requirements of the role
2. Your CV including references (**maximum two pages**)
3. Your salary expectations and notice period (if applicable)
4. Confirmation of right to work in the UK
5. How you found out about the role/where you saw it advertised

For an informal and confidential discussion about the role prior to application, please contact jobs@the-difference.com, with a brief summary of your experience and questions that you have. We will attempt to offer calls to those who want, but please bear in mind that this may not be possible within our team's capacity.

We are committed to building a diverse team and strongly encourage applications from under-represented groups in the charity sector such as people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, people with experience in the care system, non-graduates and first-in-family graduates.

As part of our commitment to fairer recruitment, all applications will be assessed with names and any protected characteristics redacted.

Recommended Reading

To understand more about The Difference and what we are trying to achieve, we recommend the following:

- The [research](#) which underpins our organisation
- Our [story so far](#) and details of our founder's story as told in [Schools Week](#) and [TES](#)
- The work we undertook in our first year as a charity in our [2018-19 Annual Report](#), and the impact we have had and are having as told through our 2019-20 [Impact Report](#)
- Details of our most recent work and issues in the sector, as illustrated within our fortnightly [bulletin archive](#).