

Contact: Emma Hall
Office manager
emmahall@cles.org.uk

Head of finance and operations:
Application pack

About the role at CLES

The Centre for Local Economies (CLES) is an independent economics think tank and charity. For over 40 years we have worked alongside local government, the NHS, national government, combined authorities, universities and communities to develop practical solutions to the UK's biggest economic challenges. We are internationally recognised experts in community wealth building, which we use to improve local economies, strengthen social infrastructure, accelerate innovation and support a just climate transition.

While our office is in Manchester, our team is spread across England, Wales and Scotland, reflecting the national reach of our work.

As a small organisation, relationships matter. Alongside our monthly team days, we organise regular social events throughout the year, including our annual summer residential and Christmas celebration, giving colleagues time to learn from one another and strengthen the culture that underpins our work. In line with our values and commitment to progressive employment policies we operate a four-day, full pay working week. We were one of the first think tanks in the UK to adopt this model.

As we continue to grow in influence and impact, we are looking for an outstanding head of finance and operations to help ensure CLES remains financially resilient, operationally effective and equipped for the opportunities ahead.

Joining CLES means joining a small, ambitious and collaborative team where your work will have a tangible impact. Behind every piece of influential research, every partnership and every policy change sits an organisation that works well. This role is central to making that happen.

About the role

In this new role, you will work closely with the chief executive, deputy chief executive, senior management team and colleagues across CLES. You will lead our finance and operational functions. This is a practical, delivery-focused role in a small, dynamic team. You will combine strategic insight with hands-on delivery, taking direct responsibility for our core finance and operational activities while continually improving the systems and processes that enable our work. While you will take direct responsibility for these functions, you will be supported by a dedicated finance and office administrator, who will undertake appropriate transactional tasks and routine administration.

This is a challenging and varied role which will span five connected areas. The nature of the work will change across the year, but finance and organisational performance will remain at the heart of the role.

- Finance and organisational performance.
 - Responsible for the day-to-day financial management of CLES, maintaining robust systems, accurate records and effective financial controls.

- Prepare quarterly and annual management accounts and clear, accessible financial reports for the board, senior colleagues and budget holders.
 - Prepare and file VAT returns.
 - Lead annual budgeting, forecasting and cashflow management.
 - Monitor organisational and project finances, supporting colleagues to manage budgets confidently and effectively.
 - Prepare and submit monthly payroll and pension changes to our external provider.
 - Manage routine finance processes, delegating appropriate transactional and administrative tasks to the finance and office administrator.
 - Coordinate the annual audit and support the preparation of statutory accounts.
 - Use financial information and analysis to support organisational decision-making and strengthen CLES's long-term sustainability.
- Operations
 - Responsibility for the day-to-day systems and services that keep CLES running.
 - Manage core operational systems, equipment, suppliers and contracts.
 - Lead the effective operation of CLES's IT and digital infrastructure, including management of SharePoint, liaison with external support providers and oversight of cyber security.
 - Manage office health and safety processes, facilities and the relationship with our landlord.
 - Review and improve internal finance, HR and operational processes, ensuring they remain effective and proportionate to the needs of a small organisation.
- Organisational governance and compliance
 - Work with the chief executive, deputy chief executive, board chair and trustees to support effective governance.
 - Lead the administration of the board of trustees, including the governance calendar, meeting arrangements, papers, minutes and follow-up actions.
 - Maintain the organisational risk register and support the board and senior management team to identify, assess and manage risk.
 - Maintain appropriate organisational policies, compliance records and timesheet processes.
 - Coordinate GDPR, data protection, insurance, Cyber Essentials and other relevant compliance requirements.
 - Ensure timely submission of required information to the Charity Commission, Companies House and other regulatory bodies.
- People
 - Work with colleagues and external HR advisers to help ensure that CLES remains an excellent and well-organised place to work.
 - Manage the practical administration of recruitment, onboarding, changes to employment and leavers, including interns appointed through the University of Manchester Q-Step programme.
 - Maintain accurate HR systems and records, including leave and absence information.
 - Coordinate routine people processes and act as the principal point of contact for external HR support.

- Support the development and implementation of clear, fair and progressive employment policies.
- Administer and oversee CLES's employee support programme.
- Line-manage the finance and office administrator.
- Oversee the organisation of the annual team residential, Christmas dinner and other key team events.

About you

This is a wonderful opportunity for someone who is highly organised, loves a varied and dynamic workload and can calmly and supportively empower others to be their very best. You'll be skilled in supporting and organising others, be highly detail oriented and keen to secure a role that is challenging whilst providing considerable autonomy.

The role is "hands-on," is extremely varied and will suit someone who enjoys working in a fast-paced environment and is confident with a range of current technologies. You will take great pride in delivering high quality work.

You'll possess excellent communications skills and have the ability to remain calm and reliable under pressure – even when juggling a variety of competing demands.

As a small team working across many different project areas we strive to support each other when needed. You'll be keen to work in this way, and enjoy working as part of a flexible, mutually supportive team.

Essential criteria

- Qualifications and professional experience
 - A recognised accounting qualification. Ideally fully qualified or an advanced finalist (ACA, ACCA, CIMA) though a minimum of AAT Level 4 will be considered if supported by substantial, senior-level charity finance experience.
 - A record of successful financial management in a charity, not-for-profit or other mission-led organisation, including a strong working knowledge of the Charities SORP and accounting for restricted vs. unrestricted funds.
 - Comfortable taking responsibility for day-to-day organisational finance, including accurate record-keeping, financial controls and routine transactions.
- Financial management
 - Able to prepare clear and accurate management accounts, organisational and project budgets, cashflow forecasts and financial reports for senior colleagues or a board.
 - Experience of completing VAT returns, payroll and pension administration, and supporting year-end accounts or an annual audit.

- Able to interpret and translate financial information, identify emerging issues and explain their implications clearly to non-finance colleagues.
- Proficiency in accounting software (SAGE, Xero or QuickBooks). Please note that our current system is Sage.
- Governance, operations and people
 - Experience of supporting charity or company governance, including preparing board papers and coordinating meetings and actions.
 - Understanding of the annual reporting and compliance requirements of the Charity Commission and Companies House.
 - Experience of managing organisational systems, suppliers, and contracts.
 - Working knowledge of HR administration, including recruitment, onboarding, employee records and liaison with external HR support.
 - Able to handle sensitive financial, employee and organisational information with honesty, confidentiality and discretion.
 - Experience of line-managing and effectively delegating transactional finance and administrative tasks to a direct report.
- Skills and ways of working
 - Excellent organisational skills, attention to detail and the ability to manage competing priorities and deadlines.
 - Confident and competent user of Microsoft 365, with particularly strong Excel skills and the confidence to learn new digital systems.
 - Clear and confident written and verbal communication skills, including the ability to work effectively with trustees, colleagues, advisers and suppliers.
 - A practical, proactive and solutions-focused approach, with the willingness to undertake detailed work directly as well as contribute strategic insight.
 - A track record of building trusted and collaborative working relationships across a small, distributed team.
 - Commitment to CLES's mission of building fairer, greener and more democratic local economies.
- Personal qualities
 - Honest, dependable and committed to high professional standards.
 - Collaborative, approachable and motivated by enabling colleagues to do their best work.
 - Calm and constructive when responding to problems or changing priorities.

- Comfortable working independently and taking ownership, while knowing when to seek advice or involve others.
- Interested in how organisations work and always alert to practical opportunities to improve them

Our offer to you

- **Salary:** £50,000-£54,000 per annum (depending on skills and experience)
- **Four-day week:** Full pay for a 30-hour week worked over four days.
- **Prioritising your well-being and work-life balance:** Flexible and hybrid working from our office in Manchester (office attendance normally required two days per week) alongside full access to an Employee Assistance Programme.
- **Generous holiday:** 20 days annual leave (equivalent to five full working weeks) rising to 24 days with service (equivalent to six full working weeks).
- **Extra time off:** An additional day off for your birthday and a further day at Christmas.
- **Generous pension scheme:** A 6% employer contribution from day one, rising to 13% with long service.
- **Learning, development and culture:** A supportive working environment, a dedicated learning and development budget, regular team days and an annual residential.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

CLES is committed to equality of opportunity and welcomes applications from all sections of the community and from applicants with a wide range of professional and lived experiences.

We are a disability confident employer and guarantee an interview to applicants who self-certify as disabled and meet all the essential criteria. Please indicate in your cover letter if this applies to you.

How to apply

Please apply by submitting a cover letter of no more than two pages and a CV of no more than two pages to jobs@cles.org.uk. Your letter should explain what attracts you to the role and demonstrate, with evidence, how you meet the essential criteria set out in the person specification.

Please also complete our equal opportunities monitoring form before submitting your application.

Recruitment process and key dates

We are operating a rolling recruitment process and encourage early applications.

- **Initial application cutoff:** Monday 24 August 2026 at 9:00am
- **Interview date:** Wednesday 2 September 2026

We intend to appoint from this first round if a suitable candidate is identified. If the role is not filled, the advert will remain open and subsequent applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

If you would like to discuss the role before applying, please contact: emmahall@cles.org.uk.

