CASE STUDY

SMMT DRIVING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

A BRUSSELS GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS LEAD APPOINTED AMID A CHANGING EU LANDSCAPE.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) is the voice of the UK motor industry.

One of the UK's largest and most influential trade associations, SMMT represents more than 800 automotive companies, from vehicle and component manufacturers to motor retailers, and promotes the industry's interests to government at home and abroad. Murray McIntosh has made nine placements for SMMT since 2016, across its policy, economics, communications, and technology and innovation teams.

This case study focuses on one of those appointments: the European Government Affairs Manager, SMMT's first government affairs role based in Brussels, competed in 2019. With the UK preparing to leave the EU, the position had to be recruited from candidates already living and working in Brussels. Murray McIntosh mapped the Brussels market, assessed candidates against EU automotive policy priorities and managed the search across two countries.

The appointment extended an established UK partnership into a new market, giving SMMT direct representation among the EU institutions while the UK's future regulatory relationship with the EU was still being determined.

> *"We started working with Murray McIntosh in 2016, they've shown a real understanding of the market and our organisational needs. The team always make the effort to understand requirements thoroughly and beyond that, appreciate the importance of culture fit too."*
>
> *Katie Milbourn, Director of Group HR, SMMT*

Results

4	1:1	2	4:1
Candidates shortlisted	**CV to interview ratio**	**Candidates at final stage**	**CV to placement ratio**

The Role

European Government Affairs Manager
Public Policy & Vehicle Legislation Team
Based in Brussels · Permanent

Other SMMT Roles Recruited Since 2016

International Trade Policy Manager
Senior Policy Manager (FTC)
Government Affairs Manager
Press Officer
Economist
Environmental Policy Manager
Technology & Innovation Manager
Senior Communications Manager

THE CHALLENGE.

Representing UK automotive in Brussels during Brexit.

SMMT required an individual capable of representing the UK automotive industry in Brussels independently, at a time when the regulatory framework was being redefined. The search had to address several challenges simultaneously:

- **A shifting political environment.** A new European Commission was taking office alongside a newly elected European Parliament in which green and liberal groups had made significant gains, while the UK faced continued uncertainty over Brexit. Professionals able to guide industry through that uncertainty were in high demand.
- **Breadth of policy expertise.** Candidates required expertise across automotive, transport and environmental policy, with emissions regulation common to all three.
- **Language capability.** In addition to English; French, Dutch and German were desirable to support engagement with EU institutions, member states and European associations.
- **A standalone position.** This was a newly created role based alone in Brussels, reporting into a policy team in the UK. The successful candidate would need to build SMMT's network, represent the organisation in political discussions and manage their own priorities without colleagues on site.
- **A Brussels-based talent pool.** The role had to be recruited from candidates living and working in Brussels, requiring the search to reach a specialist local policy community in which the strongest candidates were already established.

OUR PARTNERSHIP APPROACH.

A single search process, managed across two countries.

- **An established partner in a new market.** SMMT appointed Murray McIntosh under the arrangement already in place for its UK recruitment, extending a proven process into Brussels.
- **Led by a policy and public affairs specialist.** The search was led by Lauren Maddocks, Associate Director – Policy, Public Affairs, Communications & Economics. Having worked with SMMT for three years by 2019, she already understood its policy team, its culture and the profile of people who succeed there.
- **Direct engagement with senior leadership.** Murray McIntosh worked closely with SMMT's Head of Policy and its Director of Policy and Government Affairs, with the Chief Executive joining at the final stage interviews.

SOURCING CANDIDATES.

Drawing on a European network to reach the Brussels policy community.

- **Mapping the Brussels market.** Murray McIntosh identified organisations across the automotive and policy landscape, including trade associations, manufacturers' public affairs teams, consultancies and the EU institutions. Tools such as Sourcebreaker, ZoomInfo and an enhanced LinkedIn Recruiter licence were used to pinpoint candidates within them.
- **Leveraging our European network.** Murray McIntosh's network across Europe, together with its contacts in Brussels, provided direct access to candidates already established within the city's policy community. Adverts were distributed through Bullhorn CRM and Broadbean, with targeted advertising reaching policy professionals already based in Brussels and wider reach through social media and Murray McIntosh's organically grown LinkedIn following.
- **A focused shortlist.** Four CVs were presented to SMMT, all of which progressed to first-stage interview: a 1:1 CV to interview ratio.

ASSESSING CANDIDATES.

Tested on the issues they would own from day one.

The role demanded two qualities in combination: depth of knowledge across live EU automotive legislation, and the confidence to represent SMMT independently. Many Brussels professionals offered one without the other, so the assessment process was designed to test both.

Our process

- **Screening.** Each candidate was screened against SMMT's brief before their CV was submitted, covering policy experience, knowledge of automotive and environmental legislation, existing Brussels network and Right to Work.
- **Three interview stages.** Candidates progressed through three stages involving SMMT's Head of Policy, its Director of Policy and Government Affairs and, at the final stage, its Chief Executive. One stage required candidates to travel to the UK.
- **A second-round technical task.** Candidates were asked to prepare for SMMT's first meeting with the incoming European Commission on vehicle emissions legislation, setting out how that legislation should account for Brexit. As the task reflected the role's immediate priorities, each finalist had already been tested on the issues they would own from day one.
- **Assessing suitability for a standalone role.** Interviews explored how each candidate builds new relationships, their perspective on the industry and the UK's position, and their approach to working independently of colleagues.

Running the assessment across two countries

While candidates were based in Brussels, SMMT's interview panel and the policy team the appointee would report into were in the UK. Murray McIntosh managed a single process across both locations:

- **Brussels-based candidates, UK-based panel.** All candidates were already living in Brussels, and one interview stage required them to travel to the UK to meet SMMT in person.
- **Maintaining momentum.** Murray McIntosh coordinated interview scheduling across both countries, aligning each stage with the panel's availability and candidates' existing commitments in Brussels, and kept every candidate informed between rounds to maintain engagement throughout.
- **Timeline.** The search followed an agreed timetable from brief to appointment, with each stage planned in advance so that SMMT had its Brussels lead in place as it prepared for the UK's departure from the EU.

Our standards

The standards that govern Murray McIntosh's UK searches applied equally in Brussels:

- As a Disability Confident committed employer, we adapt testing and interviews so that every candidate is assessed fairly on their ability to do the job.
- Our consultants are trained in responsible recruitment and modern slavery awareness.
- We are an APSCo Trusted Partner, FCSA accredited and BIoR members, and all consultants complete BIoR training, including the Essential Law and Legislation module.
- We hold Cyber Essentials certification, ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. Our GDPR and Privacy Policy is audited annually.

THE OUTCOME.

SMMT secured a dedicated voice in Brussels.

The appointment established a Brussels-based lead, ready to carry SMMT's EU engagement through the UK's departure. It gave SMMT a single point of ownership for its relationships with the EU institutions, the UK's representation in Brussels, member states and sister associations, and connected EU positions directly to the policy team's work through briefings on EU issues and process for colleagues and members.

The right candidate for a standalone role

The successful candidate was a multilingual, Brussels-based professional who joined from a comparable trade association, where she held the role of Environmental Policy Advisor. She brought:

- **Trade association experience,** giving her a clear understanding of how a membership body develops and represents an industry position.
- **Automotive and environmental policy knowledge,** covering the emissions issues central to the role.
- **An established Brussels network** on which to build SMMT's relationships from her first week.
- **The gravitas to represent SMMT independently,** together with the ambition to make the role her next step into European political affairs.

Murray McIntosh's retained policy and public affairs search extends well beyond Westminster. Organisations with influencing priorities in Europe and internationally benefit from the same rigour that underpins our UK work: in-depth market mapping, assessment against live policy agendas and a candidate network that reaches across borders. Whether a client is establishing a presence in Brussels, strengthening its voice in another capital or building a team to engage multiple jurisdictions, Murray McIntosh identifies, assesses and secures the people able to represent it with authority.

MORE ABOUT MURRAY MCINTOSH.

Founded in 2015, Murray McIntosh is a specialist recruitment consultancy for Policy, Public Affairs, Strategic Communications and Economics, working with government departments, regulators, trade bodies, think tanks, charities and NGOs. In a fast-moving policy and regulatory landscape, we find candidates who meet the brief and can adapt and lead within pressured environments.

Our policy and public affairs specialists work as an extension of clients' own teams, combining sector insight with rigorous, confidential search practice to identify leaders who can shape policy positions and influence decision-makers across government, regulators and industry. That approach helps organisations build the influencing capability today's regulatory landscape demands.

We also offer strategic, complementary advice across recruitment process design, employer branding and workforce planning. Our services cover both permanent and contract recruitment, tailored to the specific needs of each client.

THE PEOPLE YOU NEED DO EXIST.

Let us know how we can help.

If you are planning a policy or public affairs appointment beyond Westminster, whether in Brussels or elsewhere, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss how this approach could work for your organisation.



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