

Job Description Writing Guidance

This guidance aims to support managers to write effective job descriptions. It provides the wider considerations, an overview of a job description structure and a user friendly template that can be utilised when writing to ensure that the required information is captured.

Quality job descriptions are not only key to ensuring an efficient job evaluation process, but also in maximising candidate engagement during the recruitment campaign, and for a successful induction, performance management and appraisal process.

The Purpose of a Job Description

To effectively support job evaluation, recruitment and performance management processes, it is crucial that a job description provides a clear overview of the purpose of a role and its expected duties or responsibilities. It should therefore:

- Provide an engaging, overall summary of the post, which briefly explains the purpose of the role, as well as its contribution to the team, and wider organisation for example in a strategic or operational capacity.
- Concisely state the core responsibilities of the role including its key achievements, tasks, as well as relationships.
- Use active verbs that indicate the seniority of the role for example “to lead” “to support” or “to develop.” This will clearly signpost to both candidates and a job evaluator, the level of responsibility or accountability of the post.
- Statements about responsibilities should not be overly specific and writing exhaustive lists, for example of key contacts or providing overly detailed explanation of duties should therefore be avoided. This will ensure that the description is flexible and can follow the development of a role, for example by covering multiple circumstances or minor changes/additions to its responsibilities.

The Purpose of a Person Specification

The person specification should provide an accurate list of the competencies required to successfully fulfil the duties of the post, for example skills, experience and qualifications. These criteria not only encourage qualified candidates to apply for the role, but will also form the basis of the shortlisting and interview process.

The required competencies for a role should therefore be carefully considered, as the criteria will need to be accessible to candidates and also accurately reflect what is required to work successfully within the post.

Carefully considered and accurate person specification criteria also ensures a transparent and effective decision making process, as candidates can access clear information on how they will be measured. This will also support the provision of useful and justifiable feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

A successful person specification should contain the following:

- Explicit criteria that relate directly to the role detailed in the job description.
- The minimum requirements to complete the post. Overstating requirements will reduce the talent pool.
- Essential criteria that is critical to the successful performance of the role.
- Desirable criteria that will enhance a candidate’s ability to perform the role. These criteria can however be acquired or learnt once in post.

Equality and Diversity Considerations

The language used within a job description plays a crucial role in whether or not a candidate chooses to apply for a vacancy. Consideration therefore should be given to the inadvertent use of “subtly gender coded” language, which may deter a specific gender from applying. If a description contains a large quantity of masculine words, this could lead to a reduction of female applicants. Masculine words include ‘ambitious’ ‘confident’ or ‘capable.’

The use of a gender decoder is therefore recommended to ensure that a job description appeals to everyone and this can be accessed by clicking [here](#). The decoder will scan a description, provide a summary of the language used and highlight if it is, for example, too masculine.

Using a time period to quantify experience can also be discriminatory to certain age groups, for example requesting “ten years marketing experience” may discriminate against younger individuals. It is also important to note that the length of experience does not guarantee a good skill set or behaviours.

Following these guidelines will enable a job description to effectively promote our equality and diversity values, as well as encourage a wider, more diverse talent pool of candidates to apply for roles at the University.

It is also important to note that as a disability confident employer, we are committed to interviewing all candidates who have declared a disability.

Things to Consider Before Writing:

- The wider context of the role within the team, for example are there shared responsibilities or similarities with other roles? Could another job description therefore be used to form the basis of/be amended for this post?
- Are there roles within the wider business that are similar and could also inform writing a description?
- Could a generic job description be utilised in this instance? A description for an administrator for example, will contain core responsibilities that are the same, no matter the team or type of administration being completed. Please refer HR for templates.
- Could this description be used for other roles within the team (similar or the same) or form the basis of a more senior post? If so, please consider creating a generic template.

The following job description template has been provided to support the creation of job descriptions in an easy and user friendly manner. The text in blue offers guidance on information that could be included and can then be deleted on completion of the description.

THE POST

College/Service:

Post:

Reference No: **HR to complete**

Grade: Predicted grade, to be confirmed by the job evaluation process.

Reporting To:

Responsible For:

The above full-time/part-time/permanent post is available from DATE to DATE immediately in the College or Service.

Job Description

The University of Exeter is a Russell Group university that combines world-class research and teaching, with high levels of student satisfaction. Our vision is to become one of the most successful universities in the world, one that makes the exceptional happen by challenging traditional thinking and defying conventional boundaries.

A typical job description will provide approximately three sentences that provide an overview of college or department that the post will be working in.

Main purpose of the job:

Why does this role exist?

This section focuses on what the job is intended to achieve. The main purpose of the role should be summarised in a concise manner. A typical job description would provide the relevant information for this section in approximately 4 to 6 sentences.

- When writing this section, please consider:
- What are the main goals of the post?
- What is its core function?
- What contribution will this role make to a team or project?

Main duties and accountabilities:

What will this role achieve and how does it fulfil its purpose?

This section details what the role will achieve and the duties it will complete to fulfil the above purpose. It should therefore:

- Contain only core responsibilities of the role, which are distinct from each other.
- Use active verbs to indicate the level of responsibility for example to support, manage, lead or create, as well as describe if the role is operational, strategic or a mixture of both.
- Avoid overly specific statements and exhaustive lists.

- Avoid the use of University specific terminology and acronyms if possible to ensure the description is accessible to candidates. If used, please expand and explain.
- Not contain any reference to experience or abilities – this would be covered in the person specification.

A typical job description would contain approximately 12 statements to ensure a concise and accessible description.

Use of the following headings will ensure an efficient HERA/or HAY evaluation and effective structure. Please therefore utilise the below headings where appropriate.

Communication and Liaison

Consider here the communications required to fulfil the purpose of the role and the importance of building relationships:

- Audiences and individuals communicated with e.g senior managers, outside of own team, students or external businesses?
- Is this role customer focussed?
- Will it require negotiation or influencing skills?
- How complex is the information being communicated e.g is this strategic, operational, or academic data?
- Will the role be required to write formal papers for others or provide reports? If so, at what level?
- Will this post be partaking in or leading any groups or networks?

Service Delivery

- What service will this post be delivering?
- Will the role be responsible for service improvement?
- Is it customer focused and who will it predominantly work with, for example external or internal stakeholders?
- Will it be setting targets or working to/measuring achievement against KPIs?

Decision Making

- What types of decisions will be made and are they strategic, operational or related to own work?
- Will this post make any independent decisions?
- What collaborative decisions will be made?
- Will this post provide specialist advice?

Planning and Organising Resources

- Will this post be responsible for planning and organising its own work?
- Are they managing projects, resources and on what scale e.g a section of a college?
- Are they planning team resources including workload?
- Budgetary responsibility?

Problem Solving

- Reactive or proactive problem solving?
- How predictable are the problems and how easy are they to resolve?
- Is this post a point of escalation for complex problems?

Analysis and Reporting

- Is this a core responsibility of the post?
- How routine is the data being analysed and how can this be accessed?
- Will the post be required to conduct investigations or interpret results?

People Management

- Is this role supervising others on a regular basis?
- Is this role allocating work and directing the delivery of their team?
- How many individuals, teams or sections does this post formally line manage?
- Are they responsible for the PDR process or completion of inductions?
- Is this post managing the input or work allocation of others through a matrix management arrangement?
- Will they deputise for a senior role?
- Are they part of SMT?
- How far is this role involved in pastoral care and wellbeing?
- Will this role be required to offer train, for example provide regular training sessions, monitor/feedback on learner progress?

This job description summarises the main duties and accountabilities of the post and is not comprehensive. The post-holder may be required to undertake other duties of similar level and responsibility.

Person Specification

The criteria detailed here will not only determine the quality and type of applicants who apply for the role, but will also be used benchmark candidates during the interview process. It is important therefore to carefully consider the skills, experience and knowledge required to complete a post.

As a disability confident employer, all applicants who declare a disability will automatically be shortlisted for interview.

Careful consideration should therefore be given as to if a criteria can be fulfilled via transferrable skills and experience, as well as the importance of the right behavioural characteristics. This will prevent suitable applicants being discounted and also ensure a diverse talent pool.

Essential criteria

This should provide only what is absolutely necessary and crucial to complete the role, for example if the post holder does not have this skill/experience/characteristic, they could not successfully fulfil the role.

Desirable

This section details criteria that will enhance the ability of the individual to complete the role, however are not necessary for success. These skills and experience can also be learnt or developed once in post.

Elements of the headings detailed in the main body of the description could be utilised to create successful criteria.

Competency	Essential	Desirable
Attainments/Qualifications	<p>Consider here the qualifications that are strictly necessary to the post.</p> <p>Is a degree necessary to successfully complete the role?</p> <p>Will this role require certain professional qualifications?</p>	
Skills and Understanding	<p>The following headings provided above could be explored here in terms of skills and understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving • Service delivery 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making 	
Prior Experience	<p>The following headings provided above could be explored here:</p> <p>Service delivery Problem solving</p> <p>If the role will be line managing individuals, is prior experience beneficial?</p>	
Behavioural Characteristics		
Circumstances		

Informal Enquiries

Before submitting an application you may wish to discuss the post further by contacting insert contact name, job title, telephone (01392/01326 insert number) or email email address@exeter.ac.uk.