Introduction

These guidance notes have been put together to help you when writing or updating a job description or person specification.

Purpose of a job description

Job descriptions are written statements of the primary tasks, functions, responsibilities and relationships of a role. Job descriptions are essential aids to recruitment, job evaluation, induction, performance management and staff development review processes.

Job descriptions should:

- Provide a clear and concise description of the whole job so its purpose is clearly understood.
- Describe major tasks clearly.
- Describe how much direction and supervision is required to conduct the functions of the position, and the interaction with other positions within the College to achieve a given result.
- Provide a context for understanding the objectives of the position by defining and clarifying its responsibilities, supervision and relationships.

Writing new job descriptions

A job description is an outline of the role that is to be performed. This should be a straightforward description of the key duties and responsibilities associated with the role. Ideally, it should state the reporting lines that the job will have reporting into it and who the role holder will report to.

The job description should be unambiguous and avoid jargon and abbreviations. Care should be taken to ensure that the role is not defined too tightly as an element of flexibility is required.

Drawing up an accurate job description is crucial to the success of the recruitment process as it will give applicants clear information about the role. It should neither overstate nor understate the responsibilities of the role as it will play an important part in an individual’s decision whether to apply or not. In addition, the job description indicates the expectation of performance of the post holder once they are appointed.

When writing a new job description:

- Please use gender-neutral language.
- When listing tasks, please state what the task is, rather than how you expect the post-holder to undertake the task.
Please remember that job descriptions are summaries of key duties and responsibilities and not exhaustive lists of every single task a post-holder may have to undertake. You should therefore, avoid including every minor task.

Ideally a job description should not be longer than two sides of A4 paper; although length will depend on the nature of the role.

Please try to avoid too much detail as this can be too restrictive and inflexible to change. Equally, job descriptions which are too short can be vague, unclear and can be misleading to candidates.

Please do not use any jargon or abbreviations which external candidates may not understand.

Please include a date at the end of your job description for future reference.

All job descriptions should include the following statement (or similar flexibility phrase) at the end of the description:

“Any other duties as required by the line manager or Head of Department, that are commensurate with the grade.

As the needs of the University change so the above job profile, duties and location of the role within the Department / Professional Service of the University will be adjusted accordingly.”

Reviewing/rewriting old job descriptions

If you are advertising a replacement position, you should begin by reviewing the old job description, if available, to see if it is still an accurate representation of the post. If there have been changes to the role then the job description should be updated to reflect this.

If you are unsure if any changes to the responsibilities of the post have an impact on the role’s grade, then you should contact the Deputy Head of HR Operations for advice on whether the job description needs to be re-evaluated.

When reviewing or re-writing an old job description:

- Ensure that the style of the job description is in keeping with the standard template job description, available below and includes the standard flexibility paragraph.
- Previous job descriptions may be available from the Recruitment Team but may need updating to ensure consistency with the current job description template in use.
- Please include the date that you reviewed the job description at the bottom of the document.

Purpose of a person specification

The person specification should identify the essential and in some cases the desirable, qualifications, knowledge, skills, experience and other attributes (selection criteria) that will be required by the post-holder to perform the duties of the role.
The person specification should be derived from the job description and forms the foundation of the recruitment process as it will be used as the basis for selection decisions at shortlisting, presentation, test and interview stages.

Interview questions and selection tests should also be derived from the person specification and be designed to elicit more evidence on the candidate against the requirements (criteria) of the post.

The person specification should also be used to write your vacancy advertisement for the position and be referred to in the third paragraph of the advert as per the template available below.

The identified requirements will be used as grounds for making an appointment and therefore if the requirement cannot be justified, it should not be used as selection criteria and should not be included in the person specification and advert.

## Essential vs. Desirable selection criteria

Person specification selection criteria should be classified as either “E” for Essential or “D” for Desirable.

Essential criteria are those requirements that are indispensable if the role is to be carried out to the required standard. These criteria specific the minimum standard required and should be used in the shortlisting process as a basis for the rejection of unsuitable applicants.

Desirable criteria are those requirements that would enhance the applicant’s ability to carry out the role, but a lack of these on the applicant’s part would not mean that they could not carry out the tasks of the job description.

## Selection criteria requirements

Person specification selection criteria should be:

- Specific
- Justifiable
- Measurable
- Non Discriminatory

### Specific

Selection criteria should be specific rather than general. This is to ensure that the person specification properly reflects job requirements. It also helps ensure that candidates understand the qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience you, as the Recruitment Manager are looking for. In addition, it helps ensure consistency of selection decisions by shortlisting or interview panel members and avoids confusion.
For example:

The criteria “verbal and written communication skills” covers a range of possibilities. It would be more effective to specify the nature and level of communication skills that the job requires. The use of the following criteria for example would still relate to communication skills.

- The ability to draft complex correspondence.
- Good report writing skills.
- Effective presentation skills.
- The ability to converse with a diverse range of people at all levels.

Justifiable

Selection criteria must be justifiable in relation to the job tasks and requirements. Non-justifiable criteria could be deemed discriminatory and prevent suitable applicants from applying for your position.

For example:

An essential requirement for a Faculty Administrator to be educated to degree level could be deemed unjustifiable as the role is an administrative one (in most cases) and an experienced administrator could perform all the functions of the role effectively without a degree.

In examples such as these, this requirement (criteria) would be best placed as desirable and it should be made clear to candidates that equivalent relevant experiences would be considered as sufficient.

Measurable

When writing selection criteria, you need to consider how you are going to assess how each candidate measures against the requirement.

The third column of the person specification template, available below, should be used to indicate at what stage of the process you will be assessing the candidate against the criteria:

- Application Form stage
- Interview Stage
- Presentation Stage
- Test Stage
- Or a combination of the above.

It is important to consider the wording of the criteria to ensure that what you are asking can in fact be measured.

For example:

How would you assess the criteria “A commitment to equal opportunities”?

You could question or test candidates on their knowledge of equalities legislation and best practice but arguably, this would not test commitment only understanding and therefore the
criteria should be rephrased as "An understanding of equal opportunities legislation and best practice".

Alternatively, at the interview stage, you could ask candidates to explain how they have demonstrated their commitment to equal opportunities through their work, however, if this was the evidence you were seeking, it may have been better to phase the criteria as "Demonstrable evidence of promoting equal opportunities through work experience”

*The University now undertakes online shortlisting and the criteria that you state is measurable at the application stage or application/interview stage will be added to the application form that all applicants are required to complete so that the applicant can respond to the criteria and demonstrate how they meet it.*

Non-Discriminatory

Selection criteria must be fair, objective and directly relevant to the job requirements.

Discriminatory language or statements concerning the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010 must not be used.

These protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race (which includes ethnic or national origins, colour and nationality)
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Recruitment Team will review job further particulars prior to any advertisement going live and we may therefore make changes or ask for further clarification on any content that could be deemed discriminatory.