

Guidelines for the writing of Job Descriptions

The aim of a Job Description is to set out as clearly and concisely as possible what is expected of the post holder. It should be unambiguous and written in a way that the post holder can understand.

Job Descriptions are not only used at the point of advertising to fill a post, other uses of the Job Description are:

- Induction / Probation - to clearly outline what is expected and to evaluate the performance of new appointees;
- Development and Training - to act as the reference point for training needs analysis;
- Appraisal - to identify strengths and weaknesses in performance and to refocus efforts. It is normal to start an appraisal interview by reviewing the contents of a Job Description with the post holder and make necessary changes;
- Job Evaluation – to provide an objective description of the duties and responsibilities of the post;
- Reorganisation of duties within the school or unit;
- Restructuring exercises;

Upon review it may be necessary to submit the Job Description for re-grading, this should be carried out in accordance with the University procedures for review and appraisal to be found on the Human Resources website, and should so far as is possible adhere to the cycle of the relevant procedure.

When writing a Job Description please be wary of describing the current or last post holder's preferred duties rather than the actual requirements of the post. Always consider how the post can be altered to make it more flexible and therefore open to a wider section of the community, e.g. by offering the post on a part time or job share basis.

Creating a Job Description

The University has a standard format for all Job Descriptions that should be used in all instances. If your requirements cannot be met by the use of this format please discuss this with your Personnel Officer. Some groups of posts have a generic Job Description so it will be unnecessary for another to be created – check with your Personnel Officer.

When completing the Job Description you should be as concise and as factual as possible.

Key Responsibilities

This section gives a detailed description of the day-to-day activities of the post.

Identify and produce an initial list of the main activities or tasks carried out by the job holder. Define each activity as a statement of what the post holder is expected to achieve i.e. an output. This should be done in one sentence that should:

- Start with a verb in the active voice e.g. plans, prepares, produces, provides, maintains. It is worth considering the use of verbs as these may have an effect on grading decisions e.g. manage or supervise, be responsible for or progress in agreement with.
- Describe the object of the verb (what is done) as succinctly as possible e.g. tests new systems, posts cash to the nominal ledger.
- State briefly the purpose of the activity in terms of outputs or standards to be achieved e.g. tests new systems to ensure that they meet the agreed systems specifications, posts cash to the nominal ledger in order to provide up to date and accurate financial information.

Statements that emphasize outputs in terms of results expected provide essential data for use in agreeing objective performance measures.

Examples:

“Monitoring budget codes and ensure recharges are correctly processed.”

“Maintaining up to date accurate records of VAT certificates which may be audited by HMRC.”

“Ensure that safe working practises are adhered to in line with relevant local and legal requirements.”

These are the 14 H.E.R.A. elements with points to consider when writing the Job Description. Please include the frequency of each requirement of the role and the level of complexity.

1. **Communication:** Oral and written communication required? With whom? How often?
2. **Teamwork and Motivation:** Details of the team in which they work? Size of it? Do they have management responsibilities? If so, for how many people? Do they cover others?
3. **Liaison and Networking:** With whom – internal or external to the University? What is the purpose?
4. **Service Delivery:** Is the main focus of the role reactive or proactive?
5. **Decision Making processes and outcomes:** Are independent, collaborative and/or advisory decisions required of the role?

6. **Planning and Organising Resources:** Do they plan their own work, the work of others, or project work?
7. **Initiative and Problem-Solving:** What parts of the role would require problem solving / initiative and creativity to be undertaken?
8. **Analysis and Research (not just academic research):** Analysis and interpretation of data? Do they decide how to conduct the research or is it done to a standard procedure? Who analyses and interprets the resulting information?
9. **Sensory and Physical demands:** Is it standard office work, or lab experiments, is heavy or awkward lifting required, or is there a need to use highly specialised equipment?
10. **Work Environment:** Is it a stable environment, or a lab? Or working with distressed students? Are there any Health and safety responsibilities?
11. **Pastoral care and Welfare:** Any responsibility for the welfare or performance issues of those they deal with or manage?
12. **Team Development:** Inducting new starters? Providing training or guidance to other members of the team? Identifying training needs of other team members? i.e. through the appraisal system.
13. **Teaching and Learning Support:** Is the role required to give simple explanations or demonstrations, or deliver short one-off training sessions to those outside their work team?
14. **Knowledge and Experience:** What level of knowledge and experience is required for the role? Are specialist, technical, academic or professional qualifications required?

Review

On each Job Description there appears the following statement:

“This Job Description sets out current duties of the post that may vary from time to time without changing the general character of the post or the level of responsibility entailed”.