

Guidance for writing job descriptions, person specifications and adverts

Why are these documents important?

These documents are key to attracting candidates to your vacancy, as well as clarifying both the expectations of the successful candidate and how they will be assessed during the selection process. These documents will support probationary reviews, performance management and appraisals, so time and care should be taken when drafting them.

Where to start?

The job description. This should be a concise and logical description of the core duties of the role; not a step-by-step, exhaustive list. Potential candidates will review the job description to assess their own suitability and interest, and the document will also be used as part of the job evaluation process to establish the banding and salary that the post will attract.

Here are some useful tips on writing a job description:

- Try to limit the 'Main Duties' section to a maximum of 14 duties.
- Focus on the essential duties, and list them in order of their importance to the role, with the highest priority duties first.
- Do not include minor or occasional duties, unless they have a significant impact on the day-to-day work of the postholder.
- Articulate the duties in simple and easy to understand sentences, avoiding the use of jargon/acronyms where possible.

The template Job Description can be found [here for Academic](#) roles, and [here for Professional Service](#) roles.

Person specification

After establishing the main duties, you need to decide on a set of essential and desirable criteria. These are the criteria that candidates will be required to evidence throughout the selection process, and ultimately, how you will decide on who to appoint to the post.

You should be clear to make the distinction between 'Essential' and 'Desirable' criteria, and how these affect the selection process. Candidates who are unable to provide evidence that they meet the essential criteria will not ordinarily be shortlisted, so it is vital that these criteria are limited to skills, experience and qualifications that without which the main duties could not be fulfilled.

'Desirable' criteria can be useful in narrowing down a pool of applicants when the volume of applications is high and several candidates meet the essential criteria. They can also give candidates an indication of other qualifications, skills or experience that might be useful but not essential for the post.

Here are some useful tips on writing a person specification:

- Try to limit the 'Essential' criteria to 8 or less, and where necessary, include up to 3 'Desirable' criteria.
- Align the criteria to the main duties of the role – for example; if you're asking a candidate to have a minimum of 5 GCSEs, a degree or a PhD, there should be a rationale evident in the main duties.
- Be mindful of indirect discrimination. Avoid using words like “energetic” or “mature” and instead focus on the skill or capability you are looking to assess.
- Be clear that equivalent alternative qualifications will be considered, to ensure that applicants of different ages and nationalities are able to apply.
- Ensure that the criteria you select are specific, measurable and realistic, again referring back to the 'Main Duties' where necessary.

The template Person Specification can be found [here for Academic](#) roles, and [here for Professional Service](#) roles.

If you would like support in drafting either of the above documents, please contact your HR Business Partner or HR Manager - Recruitment to discuss further.

Job adverts

Once you have drafted these documents, you'll need to write the advert text. The advert will automatically populate with the job title and other details such as salary and location, so you'll just need to write one paragraph about the role itself.

This should be a concise overview of the role and its purpose in the wider team; a positive and attractive statement about the role, in the region of 100 words.

Following your text, the advert will include the pre-agreed paragraph about your School or Department. Lastly, we will include the contact information of the hiring manager, so candidates are able to ask questions about the role. This is a great opportunity to expand on the details provided in the advert and sell the vacancy to prospective candidates, as well as give candidates the opportunity to self-assess their suitability for the position. This conversation shouldn't be used to encourage a candidate to apply or not.

If you would like support in drafting your advert, please contact the HR Recruitment Team.

Recruitment & Selection Training

For further guidance and support, you may want to undertake Recruitment & Selection training (parts 1 and 2). These sessions can be booked through the Staff Development Workshops section of the [Staff Portal](#), and provide a practical workshop to develop an understanding of the principles and best-practice of recruitment and selection activities.

All staff participating in recruitment and selection activities should undertake this training before taking part.