

# **A GUIDE TO WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PERSON SPECIFICATIONS**

## **THE JOB DESCRIPTION**

The job description is an important part of the selection process. It informs applicants of the work they would be required to perform and together with the person specification, provides vital tools to ensure that good and fair selection decisions are made. The job description also serves other purposes:

- It provides a guide for the Manager when reviewing the performance of the post holder.
- It can assist with establishing the training needs of the post holder.
- It provides the basis for establishing the correct grade for the job.

The job description provides the basis for drawing up a person specification – a profile of the skills, experience, knowledge and aptitudes considered essential for the job holder to effectively do their work. It enables prospective applicants to assess themselves for the job and provides a benchmark for judging achievements.

The job description explains *why* the job exists, lists the duties specifying *what* is done and *how* the job is done. It should not be complicated or lengthy and it should not attempt to set down every activity that can conceivably occur in the job. That information (if required) would be contained in a procedures manual. For clarity it helps to begin sentences with 'action' verbs e.g. planning, compiling, designing, writing.

The job description reflects the present requirements of the post. As duties and responsibilities change and develop, the job description will be reviewed and therefore subject to amendment with the post holder. It also plays a key part in the annual performance and development review.

The language in the job description should:

- Avoid jargon and unexplained acronyms and abbreviations
- Be matched to the type of job so that it can be readily understood by the likely pool of applicants and relevant employees
- Avoid ambiguity about responsibility and be clear about the post-holders accountability for results and resources

The job description should also state whether the appointment of the successful applicant is subject to a DBS check.

## **THE PERSON SPECIFICATION**

The person specification is the basis for the whole recruitment process. It provides a profile of the ideal candidate for the post, by listing the knowledge, skills, qualifications and personal attributes needed to fill the post successfully based on the duties listed in the job description.

It is worth front-loading your effort in the recruitment process, focusing on defining your key criteria accurately and considering how wide or narrow to pitch it bearing in mind the current market and likely pool of applicants. For example if you are recruiting for a generic administrative role, you would be making a lot of work for yourself potentially holding too many interviews or making difficult decisions at short listing stage if you did not carefully consider in advance what pre-defined criteria will give one applicant an edge over another. If you are looking for a specialist role, you may need to be more flexible. If the person specification contains fair and objectively relevant criteria, pitched at an appropriate level, and carefully worded to accurately describe the person being sought for the post, the whole process should follow smoothly.

The person specification is used in a number of ways:

- It helps the applicant decide if they would be a suitable candidate.
- It sets the standard required to appoint to the post and is essential when shortlisting and assessing applicants at the interview
- It provides a reference point for all those involved in the recruitment process
- It provides a written record to help focus and structure the selection panel's thinking of the aptitudes required by the successful candidate.
- It provides evidence to show that you have conducted a fair and objective recruitment process in the event of challenge or requests for feedback by an unsuccessful candidate. If a complaint is taken to an Employment Tribunal alleging unlawful discrimination, the person specification will be central to the Council's documentary evidence. You will need to show that the selection decision was made fairly on the basis of lawful, fair and job relevant criteria for selection.

The person specification should cover all aspects of the post holder's work and should include terms which are objective and capable of being assessed either from an application or at interview or from a job-related test or job-based exercise.

The person specification should be derived from (and therefore drawn up after) the job description, but before the advertisement. **The criteria set out in the person specification are the only criteria against which applicants should be assessed at short listing, test and interview.** This therefore indicates how important it is that you set this appropriately in advance or you will open yourself up to too many or too few interviews. The criteria must:

- Be specific
- Be justifiable in relation to the job needs
- Not be unnecessarily restrictive for example in relation to the qualifications required.

#### **How to write the person specification:**

- From the job description pick out the duties, grouping together those which are similar.
- Translate these duties into the abilities and skills need to do the job. Take each main element from the job description and ask the questions, what specific knowledge or skill is needed and to what standard to perform the job?
- Identify any specific knowledge requirements for the job.
- Where relevant indicate qualifications and level of education required to do the job, being as precise as possible.
- Identify the skills and knowledge needed to do the job.
- Avoid terms that could indirectly discriminate for example avoid specifying number of year's experience.