

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PERSON SPECIFICATIONS

### The Job Description

1. Before writing a job description, or reviewing an existing one, it is useful to consider the following points:
  - (a) What is the key purpose of the job? Am I clear what I wish this post to do or am I writing a JD to reflect the skill of a current member of staff? Has the job changed? Is it in line with the Service Plan of the team/group? Are different skills now required?
  - (b) Have changes occurred, such as work patterns, restructuring of duties, changes in the service provided or in the profile of the customer?
  - (c) Have reporting/supervision arrangements changed?
  - (d) How does the job fit in with others? Can duties be allocated elsewhere? Does the job need to be done in a different way, or at a different level?
  - (e) Are you likely to recruit to this post, given your knowledge of the job market for similar positions? If the answer is "probably not" what will you do instead?
2. Turning to the job description itself, it is important to remember that this should list in broad terms the overall purpose and main duties of the post. The guidance below follows the main headings of the corporate job description format.
  - (a) **Purpose of Job** - set out here the main reasons why the post exists, its overall role and function.
  - (b) **Directly responsible to** - identify the post responsible for directly supervising/ managing the job.
  - (c) **Directly responsible for** - set out the post(s) that the job has formal supervisory/managerial responsibility for. If the post supervises volunteers, this should be included.
  - (d) **Service responsibilities** - set out the main duties the job has within the service where it is located. The majority of posts will confine their activities to the service in which they are based. However, more senior or managerial posts will often have a corporate responsibility, working across services. **(See 2e).**
  - (e) **Corporate responsibilities** - these are duties which directly affect the work of other services. They may include advising other services about issues for which the postholder is a specialist (for example, legal or accountancy staff), or writing plans/policies which will impact on the work of other services.
  - (f) **Management responsibilities** - include here responsibility for the supervision of staff, including staff at different locations. If the post has a training responsibility or carries out PDR's, include this. State whether the post monitors the work of contractors on a regular basis.

- (g) **Responsibilities for health and safety** - all staff have a general responsibility to ensure that they work in a healthy and safe way. This should not be included here. Rather, duties such as responsibility for carrying out risk assessments should be identified.
- (h) **Responsibilities for finance** - set out the job's specific responsibility for financial matters here. This would include whether the post is defined as a Spending Control Officer, or has a responsibility for raising invoices/signing purchase orders, or for setting and monitoring budgets.
- (i) **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act** - If the post has substantial unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults it may be an 'excluded occupation' under the above Act. This would entitle the Authority to carry out a police check on the successful applicant. If this is the case, this section needs to state 'Exempt' to enable the check to take place.
- (j) **Politically Restricted Posts – under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, certain posts are designated as being politically restricted. This means that the postholder is debarred from political activities. The definition for politically restricted posts is either Specified or Sensitive and applies to:**

***A Specified post is one of the following:-***

- ***Head of Paid Service (HoPS) (s4 LGHA)***
- ***Statutory Chief Officers, (including the Director of Children's services and director of adult social services in England, and the Chief Education Officer and Director of Social Services in Wales, the Chief Officer of a fire brigade, the Chief Finance Officer (s.151 LGA 1972)***
- ***Non-statutory Chief Officers (officers report to the HoPS excluding secretarial/clerical support staff).***
- ***Deputy Chief Officers (officers report to a Chief Officer excluding secretarial/clerical support staff).***
- ***The Monitoring Officer (s5 LGHA)***
- ***Officers exercising delegated powers, i.e. persons whose posts are for the time being specified by the authority in a list maintained in accordance with s100G(2) of the LGA 1972***
- ***Assistants to Political Groups***

***A Sensitive post is one which meets one or both of the following duties-related criteria:-***

- ***Giving advice on a regular basis to the authority itself, to any committee or sub-committee of the authority or to any joint committee on which the authority are represented; or where the authority are operating executive arrangements, to the executive of the authority; to any committee of that executive; or to any member of that executive who is also a member of the authority.***
- ***Speaking on behalf of the authority on a regular basis to journalists or broadcasters.***

If the post has no responsibilities under a particular heading then please state 'not applicable'.

For further advice about this please contact the Human Resources Unit or see the ~~Recruitment and Selection Guidelines on the HR Intranet.~~

## The Person Specification

1. Whilst the job description describes the overall purpose and main tasks of the post, the person specification describes the key attributes of the person required for it on appointment.
  - (a) **The use of Essential and Desirable Criteria** - essential criteria are those attributes which the successful candidate must have on appointment in order to carry out the job. Essential criteria must be appropriate to the scope and level of the post. Desirable criteria are those attributes which might be offered by an 'ideal' candidate, and are useful for short-listing purposes if you have a large response to a job advertisement.
  - (b) In drawing up essential criteria you must have regard to the basic requirements of the job. You should not consider the personal qualities of the current or previous postholders, which whilst useful might be additional to the basic requirement of the post. For example most administrative office based posts require some ability to word process documents. In some cases postholders have formal WP qualifications, but these would not be essential requirements of a post unless it had a formal secretarial or professional WP role. To include a formal WP qualification or defined typing speed would unnecessarily restrict the pool of applicants for the post and could leave the Council open to charges of indirect discrimination.
2. Turning to the elements of the person specification itself, specific guidance is now given on each heading.

### Section 1 – Education, Training *and Knowledge*

- (a) **Formal Qualifications/Educational Attainment** - List here those qualifications that the postholder must have on appointment. Remember that all pupils are required to remain at school until age 16, so phrases such as 'educated to GCSE level' are meaningless. Instead, identify the specific GCSE's required to carry out the post. Be sure that you are able to justify why the post requires the type/level of qualification identified in this section. Remember that if you set the essential requirement at a level higher than the post requires, the Authority may be liable to claims of indirect discrimination on the basis that this may adversely affect one section of the community, or you could restrict the pool of applications for the post.

For your information, students take GCSE's at age 16. A pass is A\* to C. A/S levels are taken at age 17, followed by A levels (A2 examinations) at age 18. References to O levels and CSE's should be removed from person specifications instead, state 'GCSE or equivalent'.

An NVQ at level 2 is broadly equivalent to attaining 5 GCSEs. A level 3 NVQ is equivalent to 2 A levels, whilst level 4 broadly equates to a non-honours degree qualification. Level 5 equates to post graduate study. However, before making direct comparisons please seek advice from the HR Unit as this is a complex area.

The Human Resources Unit will monitor the essential educational requirements set out on person specifications and will advise managers accordingly. For job evaluation purpose checks may be made on the level/equivalence of qualifications with appropriate educational/professional bodies.

It could be that qualifications are not essential and an equivalent number of years relevant work experience is required (see conventions).

- (b) **Specialist Training Requirements** - List here the training required of the successful candidate before they take up appointment. An example might be formal or on the job training in the use of a piece of equipment such as a chainsaw or printing machine, or regarding a piece of legislation i.e. PACE interviewing.
- (c) **Specialist Knowledge Requirements** - Set out here the knowledge which the successful candidate must have before they take up appointment. An example might be knowledge of homelessness legislation.
- (d) **Membership of Professional Bodies** - only list as essential criteria the memberships which are required, and without which the postholder cannot practice in the role. For most posts a formal membership is a desirable criteria only. Ensure that you distinguish between membership acquired through qualification/experience/assessment and membership acquired through payment of a fee only, where no attainments are required in order to be a member. Clearly, the former is likely to be more important in many cases.
- (e) **Specific IT Training** - most Council jobs require the use of a computer, however few will require formal IT training to carry out day to day IT functions such as the use of a word processing or other IT package. Furthermore postholders who operate specific databases will generally only require on the job training after appointment.

## Section 2 - Work Experience Required on Appointment

Set out the nature of the previous work experience required and the length of this. Ensure you are able to justify your requirements. For example, why would an applicant require ~~five years~~ managerial experience in a specific field rather than general supervisory experience ~~3 years~~? ~~What would the additional 2 years experience provide which would not have been gained in the first three years?~~

## Section 3 - Skills requirements on appointment

- (a) **Oral Communication** - think about the ways in which the postholder will be required to communicate orally, for example, influencing or persuading, and the circumstances in which oral communication will occur, for example, presenting the Council's case at a Hearing or Court. Please note that there is a difference between presenting evidence and being the Council's expert witness.
- (b) **Written Communication** - as with oral communication, consider the nature of the written communication, the circumstances in which it will take place and the nature of the audience. Is it routine or is specialist drafting involved?

- (c) **IT Skills** - as noted above, most posts will not require specific IT skills training on appointment, beyond the general IT awareness and experience which is now generally held.
- (d) **Physical Skills** - examples of physical skills include using power tools or driving machinery. The requirement for specialist word processing qualifications would be set out here.

#### **Section 4 - Physical Demands**

Examples of physical demands include being required to sit in a constrained position, for example telephonists or those taking formal minutes at Committee meetings, bending, lifting objects regularly, or carry out site visits.

#### **Section 5 - Other Requirements**

List here any matters not covered above, for example the requirement to regularly attend evening meetings.

### **3. Career Grades**

***With some posts it could be difficult to identify a particular qualification or training course that would be required on appointment as they do not exist, the subject area is new or there are a number of courses required before a postholder would be fully competent to carry out the role. This could also apply to experience.***

***In this instance managers should identify the substantive requirements of the post on the person specification for job evaluation purposes and discuss with HR using a career grade to assist with recruiting to the role.***