

How to....write a Job description

Job Description

If you are writing a job description for a new Professional post or making any substantial changes to an existing Professional role you will need to go through the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA), job grading and evaluation process. You can contact Human Resources for more information.

For Academic posts, you should use the standardised job pack templates which have been created for every level of post across the three academic career pathways (ASER, ASE, ASR) to ensure that they are reflective of the appropriate duties, expectations, remuneration and career pathway for later applications for permanency and promotion. These job packs can have discipline specific information added to them; however they cannot have pre-existing information removed from them. They can be accessed [online](#).

In brief, the job description describes the job duties and the person specification describes the sort of person you need to do the job.

You should be aware when you are writing these documents that they will be used as a tool to measure performance through the probationary period, for objective setting and any form of appraisal process. It does form part of the contract of employment, however it is not set in stone and can be adapted in consultation with the role-holder as time goes on.

It is important that the job description is accurate and provides details of the duties to be carried out as this will help the role holder to be clear about the expectations placed upon them and the remit of their responsibility.

The job pack includes the University template for a job description and person specification. For academic and research roles, the University has standardised templates in place to which you can add information.

Job title

The job title should be brief and accurately describe the job, whilst retaining consistency with University norms. It should not include the Department/Section name. For example state "School Administrator" and not "School of XYZ Administrator". Any new job title must be checked with your HR link contact.

Purpose of the job

This should be an accurate and concise statement of the contribution the job makes to the University. It should not exceed a paragraph in length, and is normally capable of being contained within one sentence. The purpose does not include a detailed list of how the job is done, or a list of problems, tasks and activities. Nor is it a summary of the duties and responsibilities or a description of the Department/Section name. You may find it easier to write the purpose statement by answering one of the following questions:

- What is it that the job is intended to achieve?
- What would not get done if the job did not exist?
- What is the contribution that the job makes to the University?

Examples: The purpose of a Director of Information Technology might read: “Develop and implement an Information Technology Strategy for the University that reflects and supports the current and future needs of the organisation. “

The purpose of a Finance Assistant might read: “To maintain all operational aspects of the school’s accounts to ensure school expenditure and income is accurately processed and reported upon.“

When preparing the job description it may be better to defer writing down the purpose of the job until the main duties and responsibilities have been analysed and described.

Main duties and responsibilities

The steps required to define the main duties and responsibilities of the job are as follows: please note that for new posts, the information you gain from the HERA process for professional jobs, will help you describe the main duties and responsibilities

- Firstly, identify, in general, the responsibilities that are to be carried out. There is no need to describe every single one and how they are carried out but some indication should be given as to the purpose. A list of 8-12 short duties is recommended.
- Analyse the initial list of responsibilities and, so far as possible, simplify the list by grouping related tasks together.
- Decide on the order in which the main responsibilities should be described. Perhaps the most effective order is to list the most important responsibilities first. An alternative is to adopt a more chronological order; this can be useful when jobs are based around a core process or calendar of events.
- A typical sentence describing a task/duty should start with an active verb and use verbs which express the actual responsibility, for example: to recommend; to ensure that; to collaborate; to prepare; to supervise. A list of active verbs is included below.
- Complete the sentence by stating why that action is carried out. This indicates the purpose of the task and can lead to setting targets or performance standards more easily. A useful format for constructing a job responsibility is: “What is done” ”To what” ”To achieve what result” for example:

| What is done | To what | To achieve what result |
|---------------------|---|--|
| To supervise | the team | so that staff have the motivation and training to deliver the required levels of performance. |
| To undertake | equipment maintenance | in order to ensure that equipment is kept in a safe working condition. |
| To design | degree courses for undergraduate students | to meet the school's teaching objectives. |
| To design | training courses | in order to produce quality training events that meet the University's development strategy. |
| To produce | the management accounts | in order to provide accurate and timely management information to assist managers to stay meet budget targets. |

Having written down the main duties and responsibilities, amplify each sentence appropriately using precise terminology and examples if necessary. An example of expanding the first of the above statements regarding supervision could include: recruits and selects team members, sets performance objectives, agrees training and development plans and manages any performance issues.

- You should not feel it necessary to amplify every sentence. However for certain elements further detail will provide a fuller picture of the main duties.
- Where acronyms are to be used please ensure the first instance is stated in full e.g. Performance Development Review (PDR).
- 8 - 12 short sentences are recommended for job description duties.