

Guidance: Writing Job Descriptions

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A) INTRODUCTION

These notes provide guidance for producing Job Descriptions (JDs) using the standard job description template.

A job description describes a job at the time of writing. It describes what the job holder is required to do to carry out the job effectively and can be used for a variety of purposes:

- (i) The 2005/6 Pay and Reward Modernisation process:
 - JDs are required for job matching, which is the process that will be used for assimilating most jobs to the new pay scales as part of the Pay and Reward Modernisation project. Job matching involves matching jobs against pre-determined profiles to determine the grade. This will be carried out at a local level by a process yet to be agreed. An organisation chart is not required within the JD. Instead a standard chart (or charts) will be produced to cover the whole School/ Professional Services Department.
 - JDs will also be used for job evaluation purposes, which will apply to only a minority of jobs which are either part of the benchmark sample for the development of grade structures or which cannot be matched. In some cases, further job information may be sought to enable job evaluation.
- (ii) Recruitment, to provide a clear description of the job for candidates along with further information, as appropriate.
- (iii) Job grading, to describe the job sufficiently to assess the grade
- (iv) To clarify roles and responsibilities for existing job holders
- (v) To inform training and development needs.

Examples are provided within this guidance for illustrative purposes. These should not be taken as definitive duties for particular jobs.

B) WRITING A JOB DESCRIPTION: OVERVIEW

There are four principles to follow when writing a job description:

JOB – NOT THE PERSON: Describe the requirements of the job not the person in it. Describe the skills and qualifications required for the job, not those of the current job holder.

ANALYSIS – **NOT** LISTS: Summarise the functions of the job; don't write a list of the tasks that are carried out by the job holder (see guidance on Main Responsibilities below).

FACTS – **NOT** JUDGEMENTS: The job description should be a clear, factual record of what the jobholder is required to do¹. Do not under-state or over-state the requirements of the job – try to describe it objectively and accurately.

TIMING – Describe the job being done, or required to be done, now and in the foreseeable future.

In addition, to help ensure equality of opportunity, please only include the job title and the job-holder's name once, in the Job Details and Verification sections respectively. Do not include any indication of the job-holder's sex. Within the body of the JD, use 'job-holder' rather than the job title, name or 'he' or 'she'.

JDs should usually be no more than 2 pages long. The JD should describe the core of the job in broad terms; fine details are not necessary. Also, take care not to repeat the same information in different sections.

C) NOTES ON EACH SECTION OF THE FORM

- 1) Job Details
- 2) Job Purpose
- 3) Main Responsibilities
- 4) Planning and Organising
- 5) Problem Solving
- 6) Decision Making
- 7) Key Contacts/Relationships (JDs only)
- 8) Knowledge, Skills and Experience needed
- 9) Dimensions
- 10) Job Context and any other relevant information

Please read through the notes thoroughly before completing each section of the form.

Where possible, try to make the answers short but to the point. Depending on the nature of the job, it may not be necessary to complete some sections of the form. Please indicate '*not applicable*' where appropriate. It is important that the necessary information is provided within the form. Additional information or supporting letters will not be accepted unless specifically requested by a grading or job evaluation panel.

Answers should describe the job **as it is now** and for the foreseeable future, not as it should or might be (other than where the job has been adjusted for disability – see footnote 1).

SECTION 1 Job Details

Please enter the 'job title' and the name of the School/ Professional Services Department. If the job is in a defined 'unit' within a School/ Professional Services Department, such as a Division, Institute or Centre, please also enter its name.

¹ Adjustments for disability: in a small number of cases a job may have been adjusted due to the job-holder's disability. In such cases the job should be described as it would be without those adjustments and advice should be sought from an HR adviser.

Enter the title of the post to which the job reports (e.g. Head of School, Housekeeping Supervisor, Chief Technician, Director of Finance) rather than the name of an individual. If the job is answerable to more than one post for different areas of responsibilities, please give a brief indication of this division of reporting line. Please also highlight if the line manager is in a different location to the job-holder.

SECTION 2 Job Purpose

This is an accurate and concise statement summarising the overall purpose of the job from the University's point of view. This statement should be brief and should not normally be more than 2 or 3 sentences in length.

The purpose does not include a detailed list of how the job is done, nor is it a list of problems, tasks and activities.

It may be easiest to complete this section last after giving thorough consideration to all aspects of the job, and considering the following questions:

- What is the job intended to achieve?
- What would not get done if the job did not exist?

Some examples of job purpose are listed below:

Catering Assistant:

'Assist in the preparation and serving of food and general cleaning duties within the Catering Department'

Clerical Assistant:

'Provide day-to-day support for the team including data input, filing and photocopying'.

Technician:

Construct and maintain mechanical and electrical components and apparatus for teaching and research'.

Lecturer:

'Teach at an undergraduate level, undertake research in line with the School's research strategy and contribute to School academic administration'

SECTION 3 Main Responsibilities

Describe the key areas in which results must be achieved in order to fulfil the overall purpose of the job. These are the key outputs of the job. It is not necessary to write the responsibilities in order of importance, but try to follow a logical sequence. If there are more than eight, they are probably a list of duties rather than main responsibilities.

Each responsibility statement should be constructed in two halves:

- The first half of the statement should describe a main activity and include at least one “action verb” which gives the job holder’s responsibility for the activity, so describing: what is done and to what/whom: for example:
Maintain accounting records and analyse in accordance with established reporting systems in order to.....
- The second half of the statement should describe why or the end result of the job: for example:
.....ensure that the University’s reporting requirements are satisfied.

It might be useful to list the relevant key areas of the job as a first step. The next step is to consider what is done in relation to each of these key areas, and what the end results ought to be.

Some examples are shown below:

Type of job	What is done:	To what whom :	/with	With what end results:
Manual	Move and	set up furniture and equipment in rooms throughout the University	and	so that meetings and conferences can take place.
Clerical	Maintain and update	the student database within the School		so that accurate and reliable information is available to Senior Management
Technical	Provide technical assistance	to academic researchers and students	staff, and	so that experiments and research are completed in an efficient and timely manner.
Administrative	Supervise and develop	the support team		so that staff have the motivation and skills to deliver required levels of performance
Lecturer	Contribute to the delivery of teaching programmes	for undergraduate students		to meet the School’s teaching objectives
Research Fellow	Contribute	to writing bids		to win research grants

In the job description there should be a sentence for each responsibility statement and an estimate should be given of the approximate amount of time spent on each responsibility during the year (this will enable responsibilities that vary over the annual cycle to be described accurately).

When the statements have been drafted check that:

- Together they represent all of the key responsibilities of the job (although the relative importance of each of these may change from year to year)
- They focus on *results*, not tasks or activities
- Each one is distinct from the others, and describes a specific area in which results must be achieved
- They relate specifically to this job

Most jobs will have about 4 to 8 statements in total.

SECTION 4 Planning and Organising

This section describes the job's requirement for planning and organisation of the workload, other people, or resources. Consider:

- Where does the work come from?
- What planning is required and over what timescale?

Give up to three typical examples for the job. Some examples are listed below:

Cleaner:

- *Follow weekly work schedule set out by Cleaning Supervisor*
- *Some duties are urgent e.g. reacting to spillages and accidents.*

Senior Secretary:

- *Planning deadlines for production of grant applications and research papers up to a year ahead to ensure that deadlines are met*
- *Planning and organisation of School meetings and seminars three months in advance, including speakers' programme, room bookings, AV requirements and similar.*

Technician:

- *Planning required with Teaching staff at the start of semesters to organise labs and resources*
- *Plan set up of laboratories 1 or 2 days ahead – determined by Senior Technician/Teaching staff*
- *React daily to queries and problems within laboratory from students and academic staff*

Financial Accountant

- *Make a report to College senior management forecasting financial position of various units over the next 3-5 years*
- *Estimate income and expenditure of unit annually.*
- *Reconcile budgets on a monthly basis*

Senior Lecturer

- *Plan work of programme teaching team for 5 years in outline and 2 years in detail*
- *Plan for continuous replacement of research funding over a three years cycle*

- *Supervise PhD students through formal monthly meetings*

Careers Adviser

- *Self-generate departmental work; normally agree work for the next academic year with line manager. Work is also generated through involvement with the profession at national level.*
- *Devise departmental/central activities up to 6 months in advance. Must also be reactive to accommodate immediate customer needs*
- *Planning is influenced by the academic year and employer expectations, fluctuating demand, student expectations, available resources and commitments of other colleagues.*

SECTION 5 Problem Solving

This section indicates the type of problems or challenges typically faced by the job holder and how they are solved. Give up to three examples. The best examples for this section are not necessarily the most dramatic or unusual ones; think of the problems and challenges that occur most regularly in the job.

Examples should include:

- Examples of typical problems or challenges the job-holder deals with
- The nature of the job holder's role in solving these problems. Indicate whether the job holder thinks independently or in collaboration with others.
- What kind of guidance is in place to support the problem solving (e.g. policies/procedures/protocols/legislation)

SECTION 6 Decision Making

This section records how decisions are made and the accountability for making decisions. Give examples of typical decisions that would be made, including:

- Examples of typical decisions the job-holder makes or is involved in, or has a significant influence on, through advising or making recommendations. This would include examples where the job-holder is responsible for giving advice to a decision making body.
- The nature of the job holder's role in these decisions. Indicate whether these are taken independently or in collaboration with others.
- What kind of guidance is in place to support the decision making (e.g. policies/procedures/protocols/legislation)
- What decisions would be referred to the manager.

Two or three examples of typical decisions will normally be sufficient. Some decision making examples are listed below:

Library Assistant:

- *What area of the Library to direct users to*
- *Make decisions, in accordance with the rules, about who should have access to the library's facilities.*

Clerical Assistant:

- *Which information to send in response to a general query and who to refer requests for more detailed information to*
- *Make decisions on the most appropriate rooms to book*
- *Prioritisation of own work*

Computing Officer:

- *What the best programming method to solve a problem is.*
- *Work alone on a problem, within existing specifications and standards*
- *Select the appropriate method and advise on the feasibility of implementing a system and the risks involved.*

Workshop Chief Technician:

- *Prioritise and allocate work to other technicians.*
- *Determine work method and materials.*
- *Exercise quality control of output.*

Assistant Director:

- *Decides on recruitment and staff allocation*
- *Decide how to control the budget and reach the section's performance targets*
- *In conjunction with the Director, decides on the content of policies and systems for the section.*

SECTION 7 Key Contacts/Relationships

Briefly describe the significant types of internal and external relationships that are important in getting the job done, taking care not to duplicate information provided earlier. For pay and reward modernisation purposes, this should only include any key aspects which would not be readily understood within the School/ Professional Services Department. Describe the overall purpose of these relationships and the type of communication required.

Some examples are listed below:

Security officer:

- *Contact with staff from across the University for the issuing and recording allocation of keys in order to ensuring security procedures are followed*

Technician:

- *Advising academic staff within the school on the most suitable equipment for experiments in order to support teaching and research*

Senior Lecturer

- *Represent the University in formal discipline-focused teaching and research networks involving peers elsewhere in Europe and further afield*

SECTION 8 Knowledge, Skills and Experience Needed

Describe the knowledge, skills and experience **needed** to perform the job at the required level. This should include only the knowledge, skills and experience required to carry out the job at a fully satisfactory level, and not necessarily those of the job holder. It may be helpful to think what would be essential if advertising to fill the post with a fully trained and competent replacement.

SECTION 9 Dimensions

This section should provide relevant factual, quantitative information that describes the management/supervisory responsibilities and scope of the job on an ongoing basis.

Examples of key indicators to include are:

- number of staff directly reporting to the job holder (headcount number and full-time equivalent (FTE));
- approximate number of indirect reports;
- approximate number of staff the job affects directly or indirectly;
- financial aspects (responsibility for budgets, grants, contracts etc with approximate figures);
- approximate number and type of students/customers the job affects directly or indirectly;

and any other dimensions relevant to the job.

Use the dimensions that best describe the scale and complexity of the job and indicate the responsibility held for these items. Only approximate figures are required, but where the dimensions vary significantly over time, the range should be given with an indication of what is typical.

Some examples of dimensions are listed below:

Clerical Officer within an academic department:

- *Provide secretarial support for 4 academic staff*
- *Customers – 200 students, producing course materials, dealing with course queries, taking messages etc*

Research Technician -

- *Supervise suite of 4 laboratories, 1 store room and 1 preparation area.*
- *Provide technical support to 3 Teaching staff, 3 Researchers and 5 PhD students.*
- *Responsible for operation and maintenance of equipment totalling £250k. Responsible for annual consumables budget of £15k.*

School Administrator

- *Line manager for 7 Clerical staff within School*
- *Monitor School budget - £2 million*
- *Service 6 School Committees*

Lecturer

- *Co-manage external research funding over period of grant, typically £30K salary and £20K non-salary funding pa*

- *Teach and assess on two undergraduate programmes and one postgraduate programme;*
- *Supervise 4 Masters dissertation students; co-supervise 2 PhD students*
- *Produce approximately 2 published articles pa in appropriate refereed journals in line with School RAE strategy*

SECTION 10 Job Context and any other relevant information

Briefly explain any aspect of the job not adequately covered in previous sections and which is important in understanding the job. For pay and reward modernisation purposes, this should only include any key aspects which would not be readily understood within the School/ Professional Services Department.

Think about the job in both an internal and external context:

Internally this might include:

- Operating in a wide ranging, rapidly changing, particularly complex or technical field
- Special environmental factors that impact on the job

Externally this might include:

- Politics/public relations issues
- Nature and extent of commercial pressure.