# **Guidance: Writing Job Descriptions**

## **Introduction**

These notes provide guidance for producing Job Descriptions (JDs) using the standard job description template found here <https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/a-to-z-of-forms>.

The Job Description is a multi- functional document and should accurately reflect the key accountabilities and deliverables of the role.  Essential and Desirable criteria form the basis for, shortlisting, interview and job advert content.  If this is a newly created role, the Job Description elements contribute to the Grading process.

Within the University of Edinburgh, job descriptions are used for:

* Recruitment, to provide a clear description of the role for candidates along with further information, as appropriate
* Clarifying roles and responsibilities for existing role-holders
* Informing training and development needs
* Role matching/grading, and role evaluation
  + Role matching involves matching roles against pre-determined grade profiles to determine the grade of new roles or the re-grading of existing roles, undertaken by HR.
  + Role evaluation, which will apply to only a minority of roles, involves a more in-depth assessment of the grade of the role, performed by trained evaluators.

## **Writing a Job Description: Overview**

There are five principles to follow when writing a job description (JD):

1. **Role – not the person**

* Describe the requirements of the role not the person in it. Describe the attributes, skills and qualifications required for the role, not those of the current role-holder.
* The manager, in relation to the tasks, duties and responsibilities that the University of Edinburgh requires completed, defines the role. It is not defined by the competency or capability of the current role-holder.

2. **Analysis – not lists**

* Summarise the functions/responsibilities of the role; do not write a list of the tasks that are carried out by the role-holder

3. **Facts – not judgements**

* The JD should be a clear, factual record of what the role-holder is required to do. Do not under-state or over-state the requirements of the role – try to describe it objectively and accurately.

4. **Timing**

* Describe the role being done, or required to be done, now and in the near future, as opposed to immediate tasks.

5. **Use non-biased language**

* Unconscious bias can cause us to make decisions that are not objective, miss opportunities and limit potential. There are a number of online courses to complete before starting to recruit that are helpful in understanding equality, diversity and inclusion issues for recruitment;
  + [Recruitment and Selection Essentials](https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/learning-development/courses/other-courses/elearning/recruitment-selection-law)
  + [Challenging Unconscious Bias](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/training/modules)
  + [[Equality and Diversity Essentials](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/training/modules)](https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/training/modules)
* It is important to use words in your job description and advert text that help attract a diverse pool of candidates. Examples can be found in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Avoid | Instead, choose words like |
| Strong  Competitive  Assertive  Leader  Self-reliant  Chairman  Sensitive  Honest  Dependable | Exceptional  Motivated  Go-getter  Chairperson  Professional  Courteous  Customer-oriented  Responsible  Quality |

## **Notes on each section of the Job Description**

* Job Purpose
* Main Responsibilities
* Planning and Organising
* Problem Solving
* Decision Making
* Knowledge, Skills and Experience
* Dimensions
* Additional Information
* Health and Safety Requirements including Key Job Hazards

Please read the notes thoroughly before completing each section of the Job Description (JD). It is important that information be provided in the right level of detail in order that the JD meaningfully outlines what the role is designed to achieve. Responses should describe the role as it is now and for the near future, not as it should or might be.

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

Additional information may be requested as part of a grading or re-grading process, but should not form part of the JD.

* **Job title:** The role title should be meaningful, succinct and accurately reflect the role. Please refrain from using internal acronyms within the job title.
* **Department / School:** Note the title of the department or where the job will be based.
* **Unit:** If the job is in a defined ‘unit’ within a School/ Professional Services Department, such as a Division, Institute or Centre, please include the details.
* **Reports to:** Enter the title of the role to which this role reports (e.g. Head of School, Housekeeping Supervisor, Chief Technician, Director of Finance) rather than the name of an individual. If the role 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 role-holder.

**Job Purpose**

This should summarise the overall purpose of the role from the University’s point of view. The purpose does not include a detailed list of how the role is done, nor is it a list of problems, tasks and activities. Instead, it should outline what the role is intended to achieve. It should provide relevant factual, quantitative information that describes the scope of the role on an ongoing basis.

**Main Responsibilities**

This section should focus on and describe the key areas of responsibility and outputs for the job, most jobs should have between four and eight main responsibilities in total. If there are more than eight, they are probably a list of duties rather than the key areas of responsibility.

You should write **the responsibilities in order of importance** and estimate 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). Time spent should be captured as a percentage and should total at least 95% and no more than 100%.

It is 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.

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 role-holder’s responsibility for the activity, so describing: what is done and to what/whom
* The second half of the statement should describe why or the end result of the role

**Examples**

* Move and set up furniture and equipment in rooms throughout the University so that meetings and conferences can take place – % of time
* Maintain and update the student database within the School so that accurate and reliable information is available to Senior Management - % of time
* Provide technical assistance to academic staff, researchers and students so that experiments and research are completed in an efficient and timely manner - % of time
* Supervise and develop the support team so that staff have the motivation and skills to deliver required levels of performance - % of time
* Contribute to the delivery of teaching programmes for undergraduate students to meet the School’s teaching objectives - % of time
* Contribute to writing bids to win research grants - % of time

Once the statements are drafted, check that:

* Together they represent all of the key responsibilities of the role (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

**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?

**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.

* What types of problems or challenges are typically faced?
* What part does the role-holder play in solving these?
* Does the role-holder think independently or in collaboration with others?
* What kind of guidance is in place to support problem solving?

**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:

* How are decisions made?
* What accountability does the role-holder have for making decisions?
* What is the role-holder’s role in these decisions – are they taken independently or in collaboration with others, or escalated?
* What kind of guidance is in place to support decision-making? (E.g. policies, processes or legislation)?

**Knowledge Skills and Experience**

Describe the attributes needed to perform the role at the required level – see table below

This information can be categorised into ‘Essential and Desirable’:

* Education/Qualifications & Training
* Knowledge and Experience

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Attribute** | **Essential** | **Desirable** |
| **Education, Qualifications & Training** |  |  |
| **Knowledge & Experience** |  |  |

**Dimensions**

Relevant factual, quantitative information that describes the management/supervisory responsibilities and scope of the job on an ongoing basis.

**Additional Information (optional)**

Brief explanation of any aspects of the job not adequately covered in previous sections and which is important in understanding the job. This could include, but not limited to:

* Location of office
* Size and scope of the team
* Description of working hours (is there any flexibility?)
* Is there any travel requirements as part of the job?
* Political or environmental factors that impact on the job
* Nature and extent of commercial pressure

**Health and Safety Requirements and / or specific job hazard information**

If applicable, select any Health and Safety requirements and key job hazards associated with the job. If there are none please state N/A. Further information on these can be found on the Health and Safety webpages <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/safety-responsibilities/recruitment>