A GUIDE TO WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WRITING A GOOD JOB DESCRIPTION?

A good job description offers a concise overview of the key duties and responsibilities of a role.

It provides candidates, employers and managers with a clear understanding of role expectations, as well as a strong foundation for learning and development.

If developed correctly, a job description can offer numerous benefits throughout the employee lifecycle:

RECRUITING NEW STAFF

- Clarifies role requirements.
- Engages applicants in opportunity.
- Provides accurate expectations of the role.
- Encourages quality applications.

ONBOARDING NEW STAFF

- Encourages engagement in the post and duties.
- Supports business objectives and team relationships.
- Supports training and the successful completion of probation.

RETENTION

- Ensures fair **remuneration** based on role responsibilities.
- Supports managers to identify **staff development**.
- Facilitates **succession planning** and **career Progression**.

BUSINESS CHANGE

A well considered job description can support managers to develop **flexible roles** that are able to **adapt** to **changing needs** and **challenges**.

This document provides a step by step guide to writing and amending job descriptions to ensure that managers are able to maximise these benefits.

To ensure consistency, please can all managers use the Job Description Template. There is also an amended template for roles with line management responsibility.

STEP 1:   DEFINING THE PURPOSE OF A ROLE

The opening paragraph of a job description should address the purpose of the role.

This statement should be concise and provide an overview, rather than detailed information within approximately 4 to 6 sentences.

The following questions could be considered to help with developing this section:

- What are the **main goals** and objectives of the role?

- **Why** is the role required?

- What would you like the role to **achieve**?

- Are there any **knowledge or resourcing gaps** within the team?

- What **contribution** will the role make to a team or project?

STEP 2:   IDENTIFYING KEY DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The duties and responsibilities section within the description contains a concise overview of what is required of the role.

It offers clear expectations, and flexibility to utilise the role effectively, for example, in response to change.

Exhaustive lists of duties and **overly specific** or **detailed statements** should therefore be avoided. The section should contain approximately **10 key duties**.

To ensure a clear and concise list, managers could consider:

- Using the HERA Competencies Guidance, identify and write a list of the tasks that the role will be required to complete.

- Identify any duplicate tasks and where these can be grouped together under a general statement.

- Order this list in terms of importance. Writing duties on post it notes can make ordering the list much easier.

- Select the most important tasks or groups of tasks.

This list of tasks can then be translated into duties, and added to the job description.

STEP 3:   TURNING TASKS INTO DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To ensure that the description supports effective recruitment, onboarding, retention and business change, content and language should be carefully considered.

Duties should consist of:

- Broad or generic statements that cover grouped tasks or key responsibilities.

- Statements that detail the required action, the impact of the action e.g on a person or project, and the desired outcome.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- To produce database reports that offer accurate and timely management information to inform planning.

- Overseeing the delivery of a new digital strategy by ensuring that teams have the resource, knowledge, as well as tools in place to successfully deliver new provision to both students and staff.

- Clear action verbs that highlight accountability e.g advising, creating.

- Language that clearly denotes levels of responsibility, accountability, and what is required.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Will the role gather or analyse data?

Data analysis involves identifying trends, forming conclusions and using the information to make decisions.

Will the role manage or supervise staff?

Management of staff refers to formal line management and the completion of PDRs. Supervision refers to the day to day allocation of tasks.

We advise reading the HERA terminology guidance to ensure that duties effectively detail responsibility.

- References to role relationships, which may include team members or customers.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Will the post be a **point of escalation** or a **first point** of contact?

Is it responsible for **achieving KPIs** or for a **budget?**

Will it **refer complex** situations to another member of the team?

STEP 4: WRITING A PERSON SPECIFICATION

Aside from detailing the knowledge, skills and experienced required to complete the role, the person specification also influences candidate quality.

It is important to carefully consider this section of the description, as the criteria detailed will be used to sift and interview applicants.

Criteria can not be amended during the recruitment process.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA	DESIRABLE CRITERIA
• Required to successfully perform within the role. • To be appointed, candidates will generally meet all of these criteria. • To ensure a successful recruitment process, we advise that managers aim to provide approximately 10 criteria.	• Enhance a person's ability to complete the role. • These criteria can however be developed or learnt, once in post. • This may be used if a higher volume of applications are received to identify which candidates should progress to interview.

MANAGERS SHOULD CONSIDER:

- Is a degree absolutely necessary for satisfactory performance in the role? For most roles, equivalent experience or a professional qualification would also be sufficient.

- Which knowledge and aptitudes are key in enabling the role to achieve objectives?

- Are there any criteria that have been duplicated within the different categories that can be omitted?

- Do the criteria enable equality and a diverse talent pool? Please refer to our EDI guidance for further information.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Asking for the ability to **work as part of a team** as well as for **experience of working within a team** environment.

Skills, Abilities and Behaviours

Managers may wish to copy these criteria from the following resources:

The essential skills framework: this provides the required skills and abilities for each grade.

General behaviours: these are aligned to our guiding principles and our cultural values.

If the role holds line management responsibility, we recommend instead including the leadership and management behaviours.

STEP 5: REVIEWING THE DESCRIPTION

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Duties should be concise and offer a more generic overview of activity to provide flexibility.

- Use action verbs and be clear about the level of responsibility held by the role.

- Use existing JD's to develop or amend roles where possible.

- External comparators could also be utilised e.g similar roles on jobs.ac.uk.

- Carefully consider essential experience and skills – does this person exist?

- Consider longer term requirements, including role relationships.

- Consider the job title; does this translate outside of Brookes?

- View our EDI guidance to ensure that the role and description represent our values, as well encourages a diverse talent pool to apply.

THINGS TO AVOID :

- Writing an operational task list.

- Including non-specific verbs such as assisting with or contributing to, as they are often too vague to be of value.

- Over or under stating expectations or required duties to achieve a desired grade.

- Overstating responsibilities and the opportunity available. Candidates should be provided with realistic expectations of the role.

- Shaping roles to achieve a desired grade or to promote a particular member of staff.

- Using internal references or acronyms.

Useful Resources

- Job Description Template

- HERA Competencies Guidance.

- HERA Terminology.

- Job Title Guidance

- EDI Guidance.

- Job evaluation webpages.

- Job evaluation process guidance.

- Recruitment webpages.