THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

2
DEFINING YOUR ROLE

A Guide to Writing Job Descriptions and Person Specifications

Welcome

Welcome to the LSE's **Guide to Writing Job Descriptions and Person Specifications**.

This document builds on the School's *Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure (Professional Services Salaried Staff)* and provides further practical guidance to help hiring managers across the School.

Contents

1 Job Descriptions

1.1 What is a job description?

A job description is a written document which is designed to give candidates, employees and managers an understanding of what is involved in a job and the broad duties and responsibilities of the post.

Job descriptions have multiple uses. Job descriptions are used in recruitment to give candidates an idea of what the role involves. A well written job description can help candidates decide whether they are interested in the job and if they have relevant skills and experience to do it.

In addition, job descriptions are used by staff and their line managers to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the job requirements and to ensure that it is graded appropriately in accordance with the responsibilities and duties it involves and in comparison, to other comparator roles in the School.

1.2 What information should a job description contain?

All LSE job descriptions should contain the following standard information.

Job title
The job title should be clear and give a good overview of what the job is.

Department
The job description should confirm the name of the department, centre, institute or division that the job is located in.

Accountable to
The job description should confirm the name of the role that the job reports into. It is not necessary to state the specific name of the line manager, just their job title, as this helps to keep documents up-to-date when role-holders change.

Job summary
The job summary should be a short paragraph of two or three sentences that capture the overall purpose and scope of the role. This is the main section of the job description and should include a broad list of tasks that are normally undertaken in this role.

Main duties and responsibilities
This is a list of the key tasks and responsibilities that the role-holder will have when they undertake the job. These can be grouped under the competency headings if you wish, or if it is easier to list them individually or group them in another way, then you are free to do so.

Additional Information

Team management responsibility

It is helpful to include one or two sentences to confirm whether the role has any specific line management responsibility in this post, and to give a bit of context for both job holders and for evaluation purposes.

For example: This post has responsibility for managing a small team and has formal line management responsibility for a team of 4 people, 2 at band 5 and 2 at band 4.

Budget responsibility

It is also helpful to include one or two sentences to confirm whether the role has any specific responsibility for managing budgets and to clarify what this responsibility is, as well as the size and significance of the budget.

For example: This post has responsibility for managing the departmental budget of <x> per annum, including making decisions on spend and allocation, requesting carry-forwards, forecasting future needs and making funding bids for budget increases.

1.3 Standard Clauses

Standard clauses are included in all professional services staff job descriptions, as follows:

Flexibility clause

This allows for flexibility within job descriptions so that they can be amended from time-to-time as business needs change.

LSE has a flexibility clause in its standard job description templates, as follows:

To deliver services effectively, a degree of flexibility is needed, and the post holder may be required to perform work not specifically referred to here.

Environmental Sustainability

The post holder is required to minimise environmental impact in the performance of the role, and actively contribute to the delivery of the LSE Environmental Policy.

Clarification of the School's pay structure

The following clause is added to all job descriptions so that applicants can get a better picture of how the School's pay structure works.

The LSE has a progressive pay structure that rewards you with annual pay increases up to a certain level as you develop in your role. We also provide for further reward past this point in the form of further pay increases based on exceptional performance.

Equality & Diversity

The following clause is added to all job descriptions so that applicants are aware of the School's commitment to employing a diverse workforce.

LSE believes that equality for all is a basic human right. We actively encourage diversity and inclusion, while opposing all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex

and sexual orientation. The job description should also contain other information, which is important but may vary depending on the job.

Working Pattern

If the job is required to undertake any specific working patterns such as shift work, weekend work or alternative working hours, this should be included on the job description.

As a recruiting manager, you must use the LSE's standard job description template when writing your job description. You can also look at some examples role profiles at Band 1 – 9 in section 2 – Defining Your Role, of the Recruitment Toolkit.

2 Writing Job descriptions

2.1 How do I write a job description?

It is not always easy to write a job description, particularly from scratch. The first step is to think about the role and what you want the role holder to do. Take the opportunity to talk to other people, such as the role holder themselves, other people in the team, the job holder's line manager, the job holder's customers and your line manager to get feedback about what work is normally undertaken in the role and what needs to be done in the longer-term.

You may also find it helpful to look at some examples of role profiles at Band 1 – 9 here.

When writing a job description, particularly in cases where one already exists, it is useful to think about how the job has changed or evolved since the job description was originally written; for example have service requirements changed, has technology developed to change the way a job is done, or has the nature of the work changed in that it is done in other ways or by other people in the team.

Once you have established what you want the role-holder to do, start brainstorming the list of tasks or duties that you would like them to undertake. It might help to use a mind map diagram or a chart to help think about the role holistically and ensure that all significant areas are covered.

Think about grouping similar tasks or work together, and the HERA competencies may help here. You are not obliged to use the competency headings if you find it easier to write the job description without them, or you can use different headings if you wish. It may also help to think about the flow of the document, for example if a job does different work across a yearly cycle, consider putting the tasks that are done at the start of the year first.

Consider using bullet points to get your points across clearly and concisely. Avoid using internal references or acronyms; it is better to spell these out so that anyone outside of LSE can understand what they mean.

"Try to be as specific as possible when defining tasks to avoid any potential misunderstanding."

2.2 Examples

Manage the paper filing system

- This could mean maintaining that paper filing system by filing paper correctly on a weekly basis.

- Or, it could mean ensuring that the filing system works overall and meets the needs of the department/service.

Servicing committees

- This could mean circulating paperwork for a committee meeting.

- Or, it could mean organising and coordinating diaries of committee members, booking rooms and catering arrangements, collating and distributing committee papers, taking minutes at the committee etc.

Analysing data

- This could mean, producing standard statistics from a database and sending them to another person.

- Or, it could mean reviewing the data, spotting patterns and trends in the data, using them to make recommendations on policy or service changes, presenting the results in papers etc.

Above all, try to avoid dressing the job up to sound better or more interesting than it is. This could back-fire once the new starter is in the role as they may feel that they have been misled about the role.

2.3 Reviewing the job description

Roles may evolve over time depending on

operational need, technology developments, service changes etc. and so it is important to regularly review the document in one-to-one meetings to ensure that it is kept up-to-date. This ensures that the person doing the role is aware of what the needs are as well as allowing managers and employees to review performance as well as help suggest areas for personal development.

2.4 Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA)

As explored in the 'Planning Your Recruitment' section of this toolkit, all new or changed job descriptions must be formally HERA evaluated in order to determine the correct salary band for the post.

You must allow sufficient time in your recruitment plan, for the HR Division to evaluate the job description.

You should consult with your HR Adviser for further guidance on HERA evaluation, and associated timelines.

Details of your HR Adviser can be found [here.](#)

2.5 What next?

Several role profiles have been created to assist recruiting managers in writing job descriptions; these can be found in the **Defining Your Role** section of the toolkit.

Once your job description is complete, you must submit this for HERA evaluation, in order to determine what band the role is.

Further information on HERA can be sought from your [HR Adviser,](#) or through the HERA section of the [HR webpages.](#)

3 Person Specifications

3.1 What is a Person Specification?

A person specification is a profile of the personal skills, qualifications, abilities and experiences you will look for during the recruitment and selection process.

A person specification has several uses:

- It informs candidates about the level and complexity of the job and helps them to decide whether to apply for the job
- It establishes the essential criteria against which all candidates will be judged objectively
- It sets desirable criteria which can be used to establish the most suitable candidate
- It provides a template for transparent decision making during the selection process

TOP TIP

Consider putting **Knowledge and Experience** as your first competency heading on the person specification and include a justifiable and measurable criterion as your first on the list. This will help you when shortlisting because if a candidate does not demonstrate they meet this criterion you do not need to consider them against the other criteria and you can eliminate them from the shortlist quickly.

The criteria set out in the person specification must be capable of being **objectively justified** as the minimum requirements to carry out the post effectively.

3.2 Creating a person specification

When creating your person specification consider the following:

- Be careful about overstating the level of knowledge, experience and qualifications required for the job.

- **Avoid duplication**, for example by putting 'ability to work as part of a team' under Skills & Abilities of and 'experience of working in a team environment' under Relevant Experience.

- Aim to have no more than **10 criteria assessed at the application stage**. Too many, and this will make application and shortlisting arduous for both candidates and the panel.

- Using the person specification throughout the recruitment and selection process will enable you to ensure that the best candidate is selected and that the legal obligations and best practice objectives of the School are complied with.

- The person specification must not be changed or amended mid-way through the recruitment and selection process, as this may unfairly disadvantage some of your candidates.

- All assessments throughout the recruitment and selection process are subject to reasonable adjustments and candidates with impairments must be allowed to undertake an assessment in a suitable alternative manner.

3.3 Essential vs. Desirable criteria

The person specification should be divided into essential and desirable criteria. This should be used in the short-listing process to distinguish between candidates.

- **Essential criteria** are those that are critical for the satisfactory performance of the job. It is expected that applicants will meet

all the essential criteria to be considered eligible for appointment.

- **Desirable criteria** are those that enhance a person's capacity to do the job. These are usually not listed as essential because it is expected that they can be acquired once in employment. For example, while specific knowledge of the University and its environment could be of benefit, it can also be learnt.

Factors to consider when drawing up the person specification include:

- Skills, knowledge and aptitudes directly related to the job.

- Level and type of experience necessary.

- Education and training: but only so far as is necessary for satisfactory job performance, unless the person is being recruited on the basis of future potential (for example, if you are recruiting someone to do an apprenticeship).

3.4 Discrimination

It is unlawful to discriminate on grounds of any protected characteristic.

Selection criteria and questions in applications and interviews should not discriminate directly (e.g. deliberately excluding persons of either sex, persons from an ethnic minority) or indirectly.

Criteria should not be included if they unfairly discriminate on the grounds of:

- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Gender re-assignment
- Gender
- Disability
- Age
- Marriage / civil partnership
- Pregnancy / maternity

If you need any more guidance on creating and using

job descriptions or person specifications, please speak to your HR Adviser.