1. **Introduction**

This document has been created to support hiring managers with creating a job description and person specification. It provides an overview of what good practice recommends and what our legal obligations are. Read the University’s recruitment policy.

2. **Job description and person specification**

For a successful outcome to the recruitment process, it is essential to clarify the role’s key duties and responsibilities, and then the key characteristics of the person who could most effectively perform it.

Both the job description and person specification should be clearly articulated and the job evaluated and graded before the recruitment process begins. HR will support you through this process. The evaluation helps ensure that roles are appropriate graded, and that we offer equal pay for work of equal value across the University.

More information about [job evaluation](/#).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job description</strong></td>
<td>• Sets out the main purpose, duties and responsibilities of the role.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is an accurate description of the job to be done, neither under- or over-stating the inherent requirements of the post.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Person specification</strong></td>
<td>• Details the knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences and aptitudes required to do the job – both essential and desirable.</td>
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<td>• Forms the basis of the selection decision, enabling the selection panel to ensure they’ve chosen objectively by being specific, measurable and evidence-based.</td>
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3. **Career Pathways**

The activities and skills of staff at all job levels throughout the University are currently recognised by their alignment to one of our [Career Pathways](/#).

Each Career Pathway has a number of levels, each with representative work activities and skills and capability standards which together define the contributions expected of staff at each level and within each pathway. This framework offers clarity around standards of excellence, helps us maintain equal pay and equal value, and enables us to grade our posts fairly and consistently.

As such, the [Career Pathways](/#) are a crucial source of information for developing appropriate job descriptions and person specifications.

4. **Writing a job description & person specification**

Visit the online [job description library](/#) to review a selection of University standard graded role examples – both academic and non-academic.
In addition, a blank University template job description is available for download.

How to write a job description:

- Clarify the key duties and responsibilities of the job.
- Define the key characteristics of the person who could most effectively fulfil the job role.
- Agree which of these are essential and which are merely desirable.
- Avoid being too vague – it will not assist the recruitment process.
- Avoid being too prescriptive – it will be impossible to find anyone who lives up to the exhaustive expectations.
- Be objective and focus on the type and level of experience, types of skills and (where appropriate) qualifications that are necessary (or desirable) for the effective performance of the job.
- Avoid personal factors such as "outgoing personality" unless they are clearly relevant to the performance of the job.
- Don’t overstate the level of qualifications or extent of experience that candidates should have in order to be considered for the job – the person with the highest level of qualification and/or the longest experience may not be the "best" candidate for the job.
- Avoid asking for a particular number of years’ experience. As well as potentially being age-discriminatory, time served is often not a reliable indicator of present ability. Think instead about the specific tasks, processes or environments it would be useful for the person to have experienced.
- Use language that is:
  - Understandable and chosen with the reader in mind.
  - Clear and concise with an average sentence length of 15–20 words.
  - Jargon-free and without unexplained acronyms and abbreviations.
  - Non-discriminatory, including any unjustifiable requirement or condition.

Completing the University template:

<table>
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<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Job purpose**                      | A short statement that summaries why the post exists. For example:  
- To provide day-to-day clerical support for the team including data input, diary management, filing and photocopying. (Secretary)  
- To undertake student teaching and supervision, to carry out research and take responsibility for health and safety. (Laboratory Manager)  
To teach at an undergraduate and postgraduate level, to undertake research in line with the department’s research strategy and to participate in departmental management activities. (Lecturer) |
| **Primary responsibilities / activities** | Between 8 and 12 statements which together represent all the main responsibilities and outputs of the role. (Not a detailed list of every task undertaken.) Listed in order, starting with the responsibility/output that will take up the greatest percentage (%) of the post-holder’s time. |
| **Percentage of time**               | An estimation of the percentage of the post-holder’s time that will be spent on this activity, to the nearest 5%. This allows prospective applicants to understand the major demands of the role, and is also important to job evaluation. |
| **Special requirements**             | Details of any special features that may impact upon the job. For example: Non-standard working hours, regular travel, seasonal and/or cyclical features of the job, environmental factors, forthcoming large-scale reorganisation, etc. |
| **Qualifications, knowledge and experience** | A list of the qualifications, knowledge and experience essential or highly desirable for the post-holder to have in order to perform successfully in the role. The University’s standard qualification, knowledge and experience requirements for each grade and career pathway are set out in the Career Pathways guidance and the generic job descriptions contained within the job description library.  
  - Except where a specific named qualification is a statutory/essential |
| Requirement for a post, state that a qualification (or equivalent qualification or experience) is required. Stating 'equivalent qualification or experience' is important; it recognises that prospective applicants may have achieved particular levels of knowledge or experience by non-standard routes – it will be for the assessment panel to determine whether an applicant's qualification levels are sufficient.  
• Indicate if there is a job requirement to obtain or maintain professional accreditation through appropriate updating of knowledge.  
• For most posts it is the ability to demonstrate certain skills/activities that is required, rather than simply a period of time in a role. List specifics rather than a generic reference to 'experience'.
• Do not refer to a number of years of experience – see “avoiding discrimination” below.  
Other areas of knowledge to consider:  
• Theoretical knowledge.  
• Project management qualification (or equivalent experience).  
• Procedural knowledge.  
• Practical knowledge (use of tools or specialised equipment).  
• Organisational knowledge. |  
| Planning and organising | The requirements for planning and organising in the job.  
Consider:  
• The requirement to plan and organise own–workload or the workload of others.  
• The complexity of planning/prioritising required by the post.  
• The time scale over which planning is required (e.g. days, weeks, months, years).  
• The extent to which the job is proactive or reactive. |  
| Problem solving and Initiative | The requirements for initiative and problem solving in the job.  
Consider:  
• The type of problems the post–holder has to solve, how they solve them, and what support is available to them.  
• Do they provide advice to committees or make independent decisions, and what policies/procedures/guidelines are available to help them?  
• The ability to follow clearly defined instructions/procedures.  
• The extent to which the post impacts the direction of the team/Academic Unit/University?  
• Innovation/unconstrained thinking. |  
| Management and teamwork | The requirements for management skills in the job.  
Consider:  
• Operational management (managing a service or a project).  
• Financial management (managing budgets or research grants/contracts).  
• People management (leading a team or department).  
• The size of the project or budget the post–holder manages.  
• The number of people managed. |  
| Communicating and influencing | The requirement for communication and interpersonal skills in the job.  
Consider:  
• To whom the post–holder communicates, how frequently they communicate and why they communicate.  
• Are they exchanging information, persuading someone to share their point of view, motivating their team or negotiating a new contract?  
• The use of tact and diplomacy  
• The ability to develop and change the motivation and behaviour of others  
• Communication with the immediate team, the wider University or external individuals/bodies. |
| How to be assessed | How each criteria will be assessed as part of the selection process, e.g.:  
| - At interview  
| - Skill–based test  
| - Presentation  
| - Application form  

More information about interviewing and selection. |

| Job hazards | Details of any potential health and safety hazards that are additional to those found in an office. |

5. **Avoiding discrimination**

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of any protected characteristics. Discrimination is unlawful whether or not it is intentional. Steps should therefore be taken to ensure job descriptions and person specifications are not discriminatory.

**Examples of potential discrimination:**

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<th>Protected Characteristic</th>
<th>Advice</th>
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| Gender                   | Unless necessary for the effective performance of the job, a requirement that the post-holder works overtime or is available to work at weekends or work shifts, would discriminate indirectly against women who are more likely than men to be unable to meet the requirement due to child-care responsibilities.  
A requirement that the post-holder travels extensively away from home on company business could indirectly discriminate against women, especially those with young children who may be unable to comply with such a requirement. |
| Race                     | A requirement that job applicants speak fluent English would have a discriminatory impact on people whose first language was not English. Unless there was a clear need from a business perspective for the post-holder to be fluent in the English language (rather than reasonably conversant) this would be indirectly discriminatory on racial grounds. |
| Religion                 | A policy that required staff to work on Sundays could discriminate indirectly against Christians, some of whom may feel strongly that Sunday must be respected as a day of rest.  
A rigid rule that all employees must work a Saturday rota could discriminate indirectly against Jews and people of other faiths who celebrate Saturday as their Sabbath. |
| Disability               | A statement that job applicants must be "energetic" could place people with a condition that causes them to tire easily at a disadvantage. If the job was largely sedentary in nature, it would not be justifiable. Any criterion of physical fitness would have to be shown to be necessary for the effective performance of the job in question.  
Requiring job applicants to hold a driving licence would exclude people with certain medical conditions who may be unable to hold one on account of their condition. It may be reasonable for the employer to waive this requirement if the post-holder could, without too much expense or disruption, travel on business in some other way. |
| Age                      | A requirement for job applicants to have a defined minimum number of years' experience would indirectly discriminate against younger candidates; younger people will be less likely than older people to have the requisite length of service. Unless necessary for the effective performance of the job, a requirement of this nature would be unlawful.  
Similarly, insisting that the successful applicant has a degree would be indirectly discriminatory against older people as they are statistically less likely than younger people to have been to university. |