



Guidance for Writing Job Descriptions

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Introduction

It is important that the information listed on your JD is provided in the right level of detail so that it meaningfully outlines what the role is designed to achieve. Please read the guidance as you complete each section of the JD.

To begin, you will need the following documents on hand:

- A Job Description template found on the [HR A-Z Forms](#) page.
- The [Grade Profiles document](#) - a reference guide for the skills and experience expected for each grade and job category (academic, technical, administrative).

Overview and Purpose

The Job Description is a multi- functional document and should accurately reflect the key accountabilities and deliverables of the role. It is used for:



- Perspective staff, providing a clear description of the role, expectations and context. It also forms a basis for your employment contract
- Current staff, helping staff and managers evaluate job performance. It acts as a benchmark for future training and development
- Creating consistency across the organisation, role matching and 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.

5 Principles for writing Job Descriptions

1. It's about the role, not the person

Describe the attributes, skills and qualifications required for the role, not those of the current role-holder.

The manager defines the role in relation to the tasks, duties and responsibilities that the University of Edinburgh requires completed. It is not defined by the competency or capability of the current role-holder.

2. It's an analysis, not a list

Responses should describe the role as it is now and for the near future, not as it should or might be. Summarise the functions/responsibilities of the role; do not write a list of the tasks that are carried out by the role-holder.

Consider including a description of a typical day at work for your role in the Additional Information section.

3. Use facts, not judgements

Try to describe the JD as objectively and accurately as possible. It should be a clear, factual record of what the role-holder is required to do. Avoid under-stating or over-stating the requirements of the role.



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

Diversity of thought, perspectives, experience and skills brings demonstrable benefits to our work and to our decision making, as well as to our ability to build a truly inclusive institution. the words we use in job descriptions and job adverts can encourage some applicants and discourage others.

Unconscious bias in recruitment practices can cause us to make decisions that are not objective, miss opportunities and limit potential. There are a number of online courses in your People and Money Learn App that are necessary to complete before starting to recruit and will help to understand your responsibility in this process and equality, diversity and inclusion issues for recruitment:

- Recruitment and Selection Essentials
- Challenging Unconscious Bias
- Equality and Diversity Essentials: Equality and Diversity Essentials

Bias Decoders: 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	Exceptional
Competitive	Motivated
Assertive	Go-getter
Leader	Chairperson
Self-reliant	Professional
Chairman	Courteous
Sensitive	Customer-oriented
Honest	Responsible
Dependable	Quality

The Job Description

JDs should usually be no more than two pages long and should describe the core of the role in broad terms; fine details are not necessary. Take care not to repeat the same information in different sections. Please note that 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.
- **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) not 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 in 2-3 sentences. It should not be a detailed description, but rather a highlight that attracts the reader so they continue down to the more detailed sections. It should outline what the role is intended to achieve, providing 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 will find the [Grade Profiles document](#) particularly useful here and in following sections.

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 describes the role-holder's responsibility for the activity, so 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 (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. If the role has traditionally needed a degree, please consider whether this is still required or if you would also accept candidates with experience.

This information can be categorised into 'Essential and Desirable':

- Education/Qualifications & Training
- Knowledge and Experience

The following is an example of a Grade UE06/7 Administrative post

Attribute	Essential	Desirable
Education, Qualifications & Training	Broad experience acquired through a combination of job-related training and considerable on-the-job experience, demonstrating development through involvement in progressively more demanding relevant work/roles.	Qualification in X Membership of X
Knowledge & Experience	• Demonstrated skills working in... • Knowledge and experience of practical application of • Tact and ability to deal with difficult and sensitive situations; a high level of emotional intelligence, and personal resilience. • Excellent communication, facilitation and presentation skills with staff at all levels including senior management.	British Sign Language



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

Pre-Employment Checks

If applicable, select any pre-employment checks required such as a Disclosure or Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check. If there are none, please delete this section or write N/A. Further information regarding Disclosure and PVG checks is available on the [Disclosure and PVG checks](#) webpage.

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 delete this section or write 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>