



Guidance on writing a Job Description and Person Specification for professional services roles

What is a Job Description?

- A Job Description is a written document designed to give candidates, employees and line managers a good understanding of what is involved in a job, including the relevant duties and responsibilities.
- Job Descriptions have a number of uses. They are crucial to the recruitment process for both candidates and employees who are involved in selecting the preferred candidate. A well written Job Description will allow candidates to determine whether they are interested in the vacancy and whether they have the relevant skills and experience to apply; and the criteria outlined in the Job Description will be used by the selection panel to assess all candidates against throughout the selection process.
- In addition, they are used by employees and their line managers to ensure there is a clear understanding of the job requirements and to ensure that the job is graded appropriately.
- When putting together a Job Description for professional services roles, please use the correct template which can be found on the [Job Descriptions page](#) on the HR website. You can also see some examples of completed Job Descriptions on this page. However please use the below guidance notes to ensure that your Job Description clearly, concisely and accurately defines the full job details.
- Before you commence recruitment for a role which has an existing Job Description, please ensure you fully review the Job Description and Person Specification to ensure that the information conveyed is still relevant, accurate and up-to-date. If the role has changed substantially, for example with the additional responsibility of line management, the Job Description should be updated and sent to your relevant HR Business Partner for evaluation.
- Or if the vacancy is for a new professional services role, a new Job Description must be completed along with a Job Evaluation Annex (which can be found on the [Job Descriptions page](#)), and sent to the HR Business Partner for evaluation. The HRBP will determine the grade and for new roles a HERA number will be issued.
- If you need any support or guidance with writing or reviewing your Job Descriptions, please speak to your HR Business Partner.

What information should a Job Description contain?

Using the Job Description template, please complete the following standard information, ensuring all these details do not exceed one page:

- **Job information**
 - **Job title** – this should be clear, unambiguous, and give a good overview of what the job is. Ensure that the job title will not confuse potential candidates and only make sense within the UCL community. Note that research posts should be given the appropriate title in accordance with the [Research Staff Appointment Guidance](#).
 - **Department** – confirm the name of the department/division that the job is located in
 - **Grade** – state the relevant grade for the job
 - **Location** – do not give the full address, just the high level location

- **Reports to**

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.

- **Context**

Provide one or two sentences to explain the team/department's objectives, and how the job fits into the team structure and strategy.

- **Main purpose of the job**

In one or two short paragraphs or around four bullet points, capture the overall purpose and scope of the role. These can be expressed as the primary duties to be performed, results to be achieved, or key contributions to be made, and the relationships and interactions with other colleagues or departments.

- **Duties and responsibilities**

This section consists of a list of up to twelve bullet points which identify the core tasks and responsibilities of the job. Try to be as specific as possible when defining these to avoid misunderstanding. Related duties or key deliverables can be grouped together if you wish. Write one clear outcome-based statement for each main duty/responsibility, e.g. 'Compile monthly reports to allow monitoring of the department's budget'.

If applicable, outline any specific conditions of employment and/or working conditions (e.g. unsocial or shift working patterns, overseas or business travel).

You may also wish to include a flexibility clause in this section, so that the Job Description can be amended from time-to-time as business needs change. An example of this would be: 'To deliver services effectively, a degree of flexibility is needed, and the post holder may be required to perform work not specifically referred to above'.

For part-time roles, you should ensure that the duties and responsibilities clearly and realistically reflect the part-time nature of the job. Speak to your HR Business Partner if you need some guidance as they will be able to help review the Job Description to determine whether it is feasible that the post and its associated responsibilities can be fulfilled on a part-time basis.

What is the Person Specification?

- The Person Specification is a dedicated section within the Job Description which details the criteria against which all candidates will be assessed throughout the selection process. It forms the basis of the shortlisting process and assists the interview panel to ensure objectivity in its selection decision.
- It also enables candidates to determine whether they are capable of meeting the requirements of the job, and to focus on how their skills and experience match the job requirements when completing their application.
- Make sure that the requirements stated are not too basic or you will receive an excessive number of applications. Similarly, the requirements should not be excessive in relation to the level of work in the Job Description.
- The Person Specification should be no more than one page.

What information should the Person Specification contain?

When writing the Person Specification, carefully consider the requirements to do the job in line with the following criteria, which must be directly related to the duties and responsibilities stated in the Job Description.

- **Qualifications experience and knowledge:**
 - **Qualifications** – state the necessary qualifications, certifications or education required, which should be appropriate to the level of expertise required by the role.
 - **Experience** – give details on the specific experience required in either similar organisations or equivalent roles for the key aspects of the role, as described in the Job Description. E.g. line managing employees, using specific applications/ tools, relevant work environment, training others etc. Be aware that whilst the type of experience candidates require should be specified, avoid stipulating the length of experience.

The Equality Act makes this unlawful unless objectively justified and, in most circumstances, the quality of the experience is more important than the quantity of experience. Note that experience can be transferable from one area of work to another, in which case requiring evidence of a skill or ability is likely to be more effective than simply asking about a narrow definition of experience.

- **Knowledge** – this should reflect the level of knowledge required to carry out the tasks listed in the Job Description. The successful candidate should have knowledge of key aspects of the role, e.g. relevant legislation, relevant issues for the workplace, appropriate tools/software, standard procedures mentioned in the Job Description etc.

- These requirements can be written in the form of (e.g.) 'Proven experience of ...', 'Working knowledge of ...', or 'A strong understanding of ...'.

- **Skills and abilities**

This should list the technical, organisational, communicative, and creative skills needed for the job, and should therefore reflect the duties listed in the Job Description. Abilities should be expressed in terms of the standards required, not the task to be undertaken. E.g. avoid statements such as 'Ability to write reports'. Instead, indicate the expected standard, such as 'Ability to write detailed financial reports that encompass departmental budgeting, annual variances, and forecasting'.

- **Ways of Working / Personal Attributes**

The final section of the Person Specification should indicate the required behaviours and approach. These should primarily be assessed in an interview rather than from a candidate's application form.

For professional services roles – the UCL Ways of Working should be used. Please see the below for full details.

For all other roles – the required Personal Attributes should be stated, which describe the sort of person, behaviours and type of approach required for the job. It is recommended that that three attributes are included. Examples might include working style, approach to change, enthusiasm for certain aspects of the role, customer focus, proactivity or resilience. E.g. 'Meticulous attention to detail and a conscientious approach to checking the accuracy of information', or 'A proactive and practical approach to problem-solving and to the provision of advice, demonstrating the ability to use initiative'. UCL's [Core Behaviours Framework](#) can be used for guidance on the types of behaviours that would enhance a person's ability to undertake their role more effectively.

Ways of Working for professional services roles



[UCL Ways of Working](#) is a behavioural framework that clarifies mutual and shared 'how we work' expectations in UCL professional services roles.

As part of the Person Specification, the Ways of Working describe the required candidate behaviours and approach. For more information and to understand how to use UCL Ways indicators in a Person Specification, look at [Using Ways of Working in the recruitment process](#). These indicators should be assessed in an interview rather than from a candidate's application form. Ask your HRBP for a list of questions to use at interviews to assess Ways of Working.

The Ways of Working framework details supporting indicators for each grade that should be used in the Person Specification. Find these under the appropriate grade section on [this page](#).

One supporting indicator per central theme – 1. Personal Excellence, 2. Working Together and 3. Achieving our Missions – is recommended. For example for a Grade 6 Project Co-ordinator role, the following Ways of Working could be drawn from the grade 6 supporting indicators which are in the grade 6 section on [this page](#).

1. “Planning effectively so that work is delivered and others are not delayed”
2. “Understanding who your key stakeholders are and ensuring that they are being kept informed”
3. “Planning effectively and recognising and flagging any problems ahead of time.”

You can select up to three grade-appropriate key supporting indicators that you consider the most suitable according to the context and focus of the role.

- **Essential vs desirable criteria**

For **each** of the criteria stated, make a distinction between essential and desirable criteria:

- **Essential criteria** are minimum standards relevant to the job that are expected from candidates to adequately perform the job. A candidate who meets the essential criteria is said to be “appointable”. Please note that all UCL Ways of Working and Person Attributes stated on the Person Specification should be essential criteria.
- **Desirable criteria** are additional relevant requirements that should be advantageous for a candidate to possess, and may be used to distinguish between candidates where more than one candidate meets the essential criteria.
- Only specify criteria as essential if that really is that case, for example if having experience of using a specific system is not an absolute requirement to perform the job however would be advantageous, then state this as ‘Desirable’. This will assist the interview panel to ensure objectivity in its selection decision and avoid indirect discrimination. Careful consideration should particularly be given to the use of qualifications as essential or desirable criteria:
 - If a potential candidate could perform the role without a particular qualification, then that qualification is considered desirable.
 - Where the qualification is considered essential in broad terms, then phrases such as “or equivalent experience” will be used.
 - For professional services posts below Grade 7, degree-level qualifications would not normally be an essential requirement.

- For academic posts on Grades 7 and above, “a PhD in the relevant area or equivalent experience” is appropriate to specify as an essential requirement.
- **Assessment method (Application/Interview)**
In the final column of the Person Specification, specify whether the selection panel will primarily assess if the candidate meets each of the criteria through their application form and/or their interview. This will enable the candidate to be more focused in their application form (and subsequent interview if shortlisted) when providing evidence that they meet the criteria for the job, as well as aiding the shortlisting process for the selection panel.

Please note that all UCL Ways of Working for professional services roles and typically the Personal Attributes for all other roles (as stated on the Person Specification) should be assessed in the interview rather than the application form, so that the candidate’s behaviours and approach are fully explored.

What other considerations should be made when writing the Job Description and Person Specification?

- For many roles, particularly those with line management responsibility, it is recommended that the recruiting manager includes **an appropriate criterion relating to knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity principles**, and how this can be embedded in the role, which should then be tested within the interview. For example:
 - For senior staff posts (grades 9/10), an essential criterion would be ‘A demonstrable contribution to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion’ and
 - For mid-management posts (grades 7/8), an essential criterion could be ‘Commitment and knowledge to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion’.

- **Criteria that are overly subjective should be avoided, particularly criteria for which little evidence is likely to be obtained through the selection process.**

E.g. ‘an interest in university administration’ is too vague, whereas ‘experience in processing student admission applications’ is more tangible.

- **Extreme care should be taken if physical requirements are specified.**

The Equality Act requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to a workplace or the way a job is carried out to remove barriers faced by disabled people. Therefore any physical requirement must be stated in terms of the job that needs to be done. E.g. a job may require that the appointee ‘must be able to travel to a number of different locations on UCL business’. See UCL’s guidance on [reasonable adjustments](#) for more information.

- **Particular attention should be given to the language used:**
 - Avoid jargon, technical terms, and unexplained acronyms or abbreviations. If you must use the latter, use the full term the first time followed by the acronym or abbreviation in brackets.

- Use clear, concise language. Avoid ambiguous or elaborate wording.
- Use non-discriminatory and inclusive language.