**May 2022**

**Guidance on writing a Job Description and Person Specification**

1. **What is a Job Description (JD) and Person Specification (PS)?**

* It is designed to give candidates, employees and line managers a good understanding of what is involved in a job, including the relevant duties and responsibilities.
* It allows candidates to determine whether they are interested in the vacancy and whether they have the relevant skills and experience to meet the criteria in the Person Specification.
* It gives the recruitment panel objective criteria against which to score each candidate.

1. **How do I write a JD and PS?**

* On the [Job Descriptions](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/working-ucl/job-descriptions) page you will find a [job description template](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/working-ucl/job-descriptions) to write the JD and PS. You can also see examples of two completed Job Descriptions on this page.
* Any new Job Description must be submitted with a [Job Evaluation form](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/sites/human_resources/files/job_evaluation_form_for_professional_services_roles_april_2019.docx), and sent to the HR Business Partner for evaluation. The HRBP will determine the grade and a HERA number will be issued.
* Before recruiting to an existing Job Description, fully review the Job Description and Person Specification to ensure it is still up-to-date and complies with the [job description template](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/sites/human_resources/files/ucl_job_description_template_updated_13_feb.docx). If the role has changed, the Job Description should be updated with tracked changes and sent to your relevant [HR Business Partner](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/about-hr/contacting-hr/people-hr/hr-business-partnering-contact-details) for evaluation.
* If you need any support or guidance with writing or reviewing your Job Descriptions, please speak to your [HR Business Partner](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/about-hr/contacting-hr/people-hr/hr-business-partnering-contact-details).

1. **What information should each section of the Job Description template contain?**

The Job Description template will guide you on how to complete each section.

* **Job title**

This should be clear, informative and give a good overview of what the job is and should be picked up by search engines and filters.   
 For example, “Policy Officer” doesn’t tell an applicant what field it is in. Be specific, is it a Financial Policy Officer, or a Research Policy Officer, or an HR Policy Officer?  
  
 What job title or area of work would a potential applicant search for?  
  
 Note that research posts should be given the appropriate title in accordance with the [Research Staff Appointment Guidance](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/research-staff-appointment-guidance).

* **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.

1. **What information should the Person Specification contain?**

* The Person Specification details the criteria against which all candidates will be scored 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 can meet 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, do not make the criteria too complicated or wordy.
* The Person Specification should list no more than **10 – 12 criteria** to be assessed on the application form. Remember, the candidate has to address each criteria and if there are too many they may give up applying. The panel also has to score each criteria, and if there are too many it will make shortlisting a lengthy process. Some criteria can be assessed at interview instead.
* **Qualifications, experience and knowledge**:
* **Qualifications** – only state necessary qualifications, certifications or education required, if they are **essential** to do the role. Ask yourself, why do they need A levels? Why do they need a degree? If a potential candidate could perform the role without a particular qualification, but with relevant experience then don’t list that qualification.   
    
  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.
* **Experience** – give details on the specific experience required, as described in the Job Description. E.g. line managing employees, using specific applications/ tools, relevant work environment, training others etc. Whilst the type of experience should be specified, avoid stipulating the length of experience, as this may constitute age discrimination.

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** – The successful candidate should have knowledge of key aspects of the role, e.g. relevant legislation, relevant issues, best practice, standard procedures mentioned in the Job Description etc.

These requirements can be written in the form of (e.g.) ‘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 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**

Choose one or two [UCL Ways of Working](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ways-of-working) from the appropriate grade, which are appropriate to the role.

* **Essential vs desirable criteria**
* **Essential criteria** are minimum standards relevant to the job that are absolutely expected from candidates to adequately perform the job. A candidate who meets the essential criteria is said to be “appointable”. UCL Ways of Working should be essential criteria. There should only be 10-12 essential criteria.
* **Desirable criteria** are additional requirements that would be advantageous to possess but not essential. There should only be one or two desirable criteria and they should only be scored where there is a tie-break for an interview slot.
* **Assessment method (Application/Interview)**

In the final column of the Person Specification, specify whether the criteria will be assessed through their application form and/or their interview. This will enable the candidate to be more focused in their supporting statement (and subsequent interview if shortlisted), as well as aiding the shortlisting process for the selection panel.

UCL Ways of Working (as stated on the Person Specification) should be assessed in the interview rather than the application form.

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

* 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 subjective should be avoided**

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

* **List one criteria for each bullet point. Do not combine criteria especially ones which are unrelated.**For example, many people put written communication and verbal communication into one bullet point. These are two separate skills and someone may be good at one but not the other.
* **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](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas-and-support-staff-and-managers/disability-equality-1) for more information.

* **Particular attention should be given to the language used:**

Avoid jargon, technical terms, and unexplained acronyms or abbreviations. 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.

**HR Employment Policy Team**