

6. Employing and managing people

6.3 Drawing up a Job Specification

A vacancy presents an opportunity to consider restructuring, or to reassess the requirements of the job. This assessment is valid whether it is to fill an existing job or a new one.

Ask questions such as:

- Has the function changed?
- Have work patterns, new technology or new products, services or projects altered the job?
- Are there any changes anticipated which will require different, more flexible skills from the jobholder?

Answers to these questions should help to clarify the actual requirements of the job and how it fits into the rest of the organisation or department. Exit interviews, or consultation with the current job-holder and colleagues may well produce good ideas about useful changes.

Writing a good job description or job specification helps in the process of analysing the needs of the job.

Job description/job specification

This should detail the purpose, tasks and responsibilities of the job. A good job description should include:

- Main purpose of the job - try to describe this in one sentence.
- Main tasks of the job - use active verbs, like 'writing', 'repairing', 'machining', 'calculating', instead of vaguer terms like 'dealing with', 'in charge of'.
- Scope of the job - expanding on the main tasks and the importance of the job. Job importance can be indicated by giving information such as the number of people to be supervised, the degree of precision required and the value of any materials and equipment used.

A good job description is useful for all jobs. It can help with induction and training. It provides the basis for drawing up a person specification - a profile of the skills and aptitudes considered essential and desirable in the job-holder. It enables prospective applicants to assess themselves for the job and provides a benchmark for judging achievements.

Person specification

Drawing up the person specification allows the organisation to profile the ideal person to fill the job. It is very important that the skills, aptitudes and knowledge included in the specification are related precisely to the needs of the job; if they are inflated beyond those necessary for effective job performance, the risk is that someone will be employed on the basis of false hopes and aspirations, and both the employer and employee will end up disappointed in each other.

Another good reason not to set unnecessary requirements is to avoid any possibility of discrimination against particular groups of potential applicants. The very process of writing a job and person specification should help the employer to develop and implement a policy of equal opportunity in the recruitment and selection of employees.

Factors to consider when drawing up the specification include:

- Skills, knowledge, aptitudes directly related to the job.
- The type of experience necessary.
- The competencies 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 (eg graduate trainees), when a higher level of education may be specified.
- Any criteria relating to personal qualities or circumstances which must be essential and directly related to the job, and must be applied equally to all applicants. To do otherwise is potentially discriminatory.

For instance, a clause requiring the successful candidate to move their place of work should be included only when absolutely necessary, as it is likely to discourage applicants with family care commitments.

The person specification helps the selection and subsequent interview to operate in a systematic way, as bias-free as possible.

ACAS provides free downloadable templates for generic job descriptions and person specifications.

Pay

After setting the job and the person specifications, consideration should be given to pay rates. Factors such as scales, grades and negotiated agreements, as well as market rates and skills shortages, may affect the wage or salary, and organisations should be aware of the requirements of equal pay and discrimination legislation.

Unless there is a formal system for increments or length of service, paying the new employee a different rate from that paid to the preceding postholder may contravene the relevant legislation. Employers must also comply with the provisions of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. Research other organisations (in your geographical area) that are advertising 'similar' vacancies to ascertain whether they are paying the 'going rate' for the vacancy in question. Remember to compare skills required and job descriptions accordingly.

Further information

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The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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