

## **Analysing and communicating job requirements**

Job descriptions serve several purposes. Two of these – job evaluation and performance management – are administrative purposes that require the job description to be quite detailed. A job description which aims to attract applicants, however, needs only to communicate to the applicant, simply and clearly, what you want them to do and the knowledge and skills that they will need to bring to the job. This type of job description serves its purpose when it attracts the right applicants and assists people who are not a good fit for the role to assess for themselves that it's not the job for them.

While the job description can be used for administrative and recruitment purposes, try to avoid making it lengthy and bureaucratic, which could deter many applicants.

## ***Applicant-friendly ways of describing the job***

### **The job description**

The job advertisement will stimulate applicant interest in your vacancy, but the job description will be the decider on whether they apply. So, it's important to keep the job description brief, interesting and applicant-friendly. Think about the following:

- **Keep it short**  
Consider using a shortened version when advertising a vacancy – it isn't a legal contract in which every detail of the job has to be spelled out at the point of recruitment. How do your most successful competitors describe their jobs and what can you learn from them?
- **Keep it simple**  
There should be enough information in the job description for the applicant to get a good idea of what the job is about. But not so much that applicants are overwhelmed.
- **Keep it clear**  
Language! Your job description needs to speak to its target audience in the most applicant-friendly way possible. Don't scare off people with bureaucratic language – use plain English. Find out what is good and bad about your job descriptions – ask for feedback from appointees and applicants.

Remember that not all the applicant information needs to be in the job description. It should mainly provide information on what the job does and what you're looking for in an applicant.

### **Does the applicant know what you are looking for?**

You might call your basis for assessing applicants selection criteria, capabilities, competencies, candidate profile or something else. What matters is that the applicant understands what it is you're looking for.

Again, it's good to keep the statements simple, without duplication or overlap. The following might assist:

- Define brief, non-overlapping elements, such as
  - Comprehensive understanding of [specified subject area].
  - Excellent research, analysis and report-writing skills.
  - Proven ability to meet challenging project deadlines.
  - High-level interpersonal and negotiation skills.

Each of these elements is a clearly defined package of related knowledge and skills. Applicants who are required to address these elements in writing will not be overwhelmed by having to address too many things at once.

- Some tips for writing simple, applicant-friendly elements of the assessment are:
  - If it's important that applicants can demonstrate an ability to operate successfully in a particular kind of environment (*For example:* where flexibility is required to respond to changing work priorities) specify this once, upfront, as an element of its own and don't then repeat it in the other elements.
  - Focus on the underlying, transferable skills needed for the job, rather than all the various applications of the skills within the particular work environment. This makes the elements easier for applicants to address. (*For example:* 'Excellent communication, interpersonal and negotiation skills' is much simpler than; 'Excellent communication, interpersonal and negotiation skills in resolving complex issues of competing inter- and intra-organisational stakeholder interests'. The latter just overcomplicates the issue. Good negotiation skills always underlie an ability to resolve competing interests.)
  - Combine 'like with like' in a way that makes sense for the particular job. *For example:* Is teamwork another application of interpersonal skills or an ability to help a team meet its deadlines and goals? You need to analyse what the job is about before you can help the applicant to make sense of it.
  - Avoid asking for applicants to have what you know will be provided through induction or on-the-job training (for example, an understanding of company procedures, workplace health and safety procedures or code of conduct).

*Source: Office of the Public Service Commissioner "Recruitment and Selection Resources"*