



# Why Employees Deserve Proper Job Descriptions

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## Introduction

Most employees are legally entitled to receive a written statement that covers their main employment particulars within two months of starting a job. Part of that written statement is known as the principal statement and must include:

- The legal name of the employer company;
- The legal name of the employee;
- The date the current employment began;
- Any earlier date upon which employment with a previous employer began which is treated as "continuous" with the current employment;
- The employee's pay, or how it is calculated, and the intervals at which it will be paid – e.g. weekly or monthly;
- The employee's hours of work;
- Entitlement to holidays - including public holidays - and holiday pay. The information must be accurate enough to allow precise calculation of accrued entitlement;
- The address of the employee's place of work. If they will be working in more than one place then you should indicate this along with the employer's address: and
- Job title or a brief description of the work.

That means that an employer can choose to just list the job title OR a brief description of the role in the written statement. Neither option properly communicates what is expected of the employee.

Preparing a job description is not a legal requirement but it is an important part of employee documentation. If expectations and requirements are not properly set at the start of employment, then problems can occur further down the line if there is a mismatch between the employee's performance and the employer's expectations. This is not fair on either party and can just lead to unnecessary conflict.

In fact without a clear and realistic job description in place at the recruitment stage there's a much greater risk of filling a vacancy with an unsuitable candidate.

Employees deserve job descriptions that clearly identify their responsibilities, the knowledge and skills they require and their position within the company's organisation.

### Why your employee needs a job description

A well written clear job description:

- helps an employer differentiate between job applicants to recruit the right person for the job on offer
- helps an employer address any questions from unsuccessful applicants
- communicates a business's company direction and values
- sets clear expectations of what is expected from the employee
- tells an employee (and co-workers) where they fit within an organisation
- identifies any qualifications and experience necessary for the job
- is flexible enough to allow the job to grow and change to suit the employee's skills and the business' needs
- provides a reference against which an employee's performance can be measured. (This is particularly important if an employee is underperforming)
- indicates any necessary adherence to any relevant employment legislation (e.g. health and safety legislation)

## Writing a Job Description

A job description should include:

- The job title.
- A summary of the general nature and objectives of the job.
- The position in the company, including the job titles of:
  - the person to whom the employee will report,
  - any subordinates
  - any other relevant working relationships.
- A list of the main duties or tasks of the employee. This list should contain all of the duties and tasks that are necessary for the successful performance of the job. It should make clear where the employee has overall responsibility and accountability for both their own tasks and tasks performed by their subordinates.
- A list of the qualifications or experience required to fulfil the job's functions split into those that are essential and those that are desirable.
- The location of the job.
- Equipment to be used in performing the functions of the job (include any health and safety guidance if appropriate).
- Salary range/grade for the job.

### Tips on Employee Job Descriptions

Effectively developed, employee job descriptions are communication tools that are significant in your organization's success. Poorly written employee job descriptions, on the other hand, add to workplace confusion, impede good communication and make people feel as if they don't know what is expected from them. Employee job descriptions are written statements that describe the duties, responsibilities, required qualifications, and reporting relationships of a particular job. Employee job descriptions are based on objective information obtained through job analysis, an understanding of the competencies and skills required to accomplish needed tasks, and the needs of the organisation to produce work.

**Source: Five Tips About Employee Job Descriptions, By Susan M. Heathfield,**  
<http://humanresources.about.com/od/glossaryj/a/jobdescriptions.htm>,

## Using HERA

HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) is an analytical job evaluation scheme which was designed specifically to cover the full range of jobs (“roles”) in higher education. It was developed, tested, and refined over several years by a consortium of 110 universities and colleges. The development process included input from over 2000 staff in higher education, and specialist advice from organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission to ensure the scheme complies with equal opportunities legislation and best practice.

The University of Aberdeen sets out the 14 HERA elements required in a comprehensive job description. Although designed for the academic sector, it is a useful guide for all employers:

### (1) COMMUNICATION

Covers communication through written, electronic or visual means and oral communication, in both informal and formal situations. This may include the need to convey basic factual information clearly and accurately; conveying information in the most appropriate format; and explaining complex or detailed specialist information.

**When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

#### *Oral Communication*

- Who do you talk to as part of the job?
- What type of information is exchanged?
- How do you decide what to say and when to say it?

#### *Written Communication*

- Who do you write to?
- What do you write about?
- How do you decide what to write and when to write it?
- How do you structure the information?

### (2) TEAMWORK AND MOTIVATION

Covers team work and team leadership when working in both internal and external teams. This may include the need to contribute as an active member of the team; motivating others in the team; and providing leadership and direction for the team.

**When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- In which teams are you mainly involved?
- What is the function of these teams?
- What are they working to achieve?
- Who is in the team and what is your main function in it?

- Who identified the need for the team and set it up?
- Who is responsible for setting the direction of the work of the team?
- How are team members encouraged and motivated?

### (3) LIAISON AND NETWORKING

Covers liaising with others both within and outside the institution and creating networks of useful contacts. This may include passing on information promptly to colleagues; ensuring mutual exchange of information; influencing developments through one’s contacts; and building an external reputation.

**When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- Who do you liaise with and why?
- Why is it important and how often does it happen?
- What information do you typically pass on or receive?
- What networks (if any) do you belong to and why?
- What is the purpose of the network and what is your part in it?
- What would happen if you were not part of this network?

### (4) SERVICE DELIVERY

Covers the provision of help and assistance to a high standard of service to students, visitors, members of staff and other users of the institution. This may include reacting to requests for information or advice; actively offering or promoting the services of the institution to others; and setting the overall standards of service offered.

**When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- What service do you provide and to whom?
- Do you actively offer the service or does the customer come to you?
- Is there a standard service, which is the same for all customers?
- How do you find out what the customer wants?
- Who sets the overall standards for service and decides which services will be offered?

### (5) DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

Covers the impact of decisions within the institution and externally. This may include decisions which impact on one’s own work or team; decisions which impact across the institution; and decisions which could have significant impact in the longer term within or outside the institution.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- How are decisions made and who makes them?
- What authority do you have to make decision without the agreement of others?
- How do you take typical decisions and what are the results of making them?
- Who else is involved in making your decisions and how do you contribute?
- How regularly do you make these types of decisions?
- Who or what do they impact and over what timescale?

### **(6) PLANNING AND ORGANISING RESOURCES**

Covers organising, prioritising and planning time and resources, be they human, physical or financial. This may include planning and organising one's own work; planning work for others on day to day tasks or on projects; carrying out operational planning; and planning for coming years.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- What do you plan and organise?
- What resources are involved (e.g. people, equipment, money, etc)?
- Who else is involved in creating or working on the plan?
- What is the time scale?
- How do you prioritise?
- What may impact on the plan and what else do you have to take into account?
- How is progress monitored?

### **(7) INITIATIVE AND PROBLEM SOLVING**

Covers identifying or developing options and selecting solutions to problems which occur in the job. This may include using initiative to select from available options; resolving problems where an immediate solution may not be apparent; dealing with complex problems; and anticipating problems which could have major repercussions.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- What are examples of typical problems?
- How often does this type of problem occur?
- What do you do about them?
- What options do you consider and how do you select the best course of action?
- Do you have to generate new or creative approaches?

### **(8) ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH**

Covers investigating issues, analysing information and carrying out research. This may include following standard procedures to gather and analyse data; identifying and designing appropriate methods of research; collating and analysing a range of data from different sources; and establishing new methods or models for research, setting the context for research.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- Who else is involved in the analysis and research?
- What data do you have available or need to obtain?
- How do you obtain this data?
- How do you chose which method or approach to use?
- Who decides that the investigation or research is needed or would be beneficial?

### **(9) SENSORY AND PHYSICAL DEMANDS**

Covers the sensory and physical aspects of the job required to complete tasks. This may include physical effort, co-ordination and dexterity, using aural evidence to assess next actions; applying skilled techniques and co-ordinating sensory information; and high levels of dexterity where precision or accuracy is essential.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- Do you use any tools or equipment?
- Are you required to lift, carry or handle large or heavy objects?
- Is any assistance given by others or in the form of special equipment?
- Do you work in cramped, confined or difficult spaces or awkward positions?
- How long did it take to learn or develop the skills and how were they acquired?

### **(10) WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Covers the impact the working environment has on the individual and their ability to respond to and control that environment safely. This may include such things as the temperature, noise or fumes, the work position and working in an outdoor environment.

### **When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:**

- Where do you work?
- What is the environment like?
- Do you take any special measures to reduce the risk or control the environment before or while working there?
- Do you make use of any safety equipment or special clothing?

- Who is responsible for controlling the environment and making sure that others working there are not at risk?
- Who is responsible for the health & safety of people working there and decides that it is safe to work?

### (11) PASTORAL CARE AND WELFARE

Covers the welfare and well being of [students and staff] within the institution, in both informal and formal situations. This may include the need to be aware of the support services available; giving supportive advice and guidance; and counselling others on specific issues.

#### When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:

- Are you approached by others for help?
- What are the typical issues or problems?
- What do you do and how do you decide to do it?
- Are you able to refer the other person to anyone else for help?
- Did you have any training in this aspect of the job?
- Is there any guidance material to help?

### (12) TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Covers the development of the skills and knowledge of others in the work team. This may include the induction of new colleagues; coaching and appraising any individuals who are supervised, mentored or managed by the post holder; and giving guidance or advice to one's peers or supervisor on specific aspects of work.

#### When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:

- What do you instruct, coach or guide others to do?
- How do you do this?
- Are there any materials to help?
- Have you been trained in this aspect of the job?
- Who identifies the learning needs of the team members and decides whether any one individual should receive training or development?
- How do you assess whether learning has occurred?

### (13) TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT

Covers the development of the skills and knowledge of students and others who are not part of the work team. This may include providing instruction to students or others when they are first using a particular service or working in a particular area; carrying out standard training; and the assessment and teaching of students.

#### When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:

- What is your subject area or specialism?
- Who do you teach, develop or provide with academic support?
- Who decides on the content of the activity?
- Is anyone else involved in providing teaching, development or learning support in this subject area?
- Who designs and develops the course content?
- Who else within the Institution is involved in teaching, training or learning support in the area?
- Who decides on how the content is to be delivered?
- How is the effectiveness of the teaching, training or support assessed?

### (14) KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Covers the relevant knowledge needed to carry out the job, however acquired, whether this is technical, professional or specialist. This may include the need for sufficient experience to carry out basic, day to day responsibilities; the need for a breadth or depth of experience to act as a point of reference for others; and the need to act as a leading authority in one's field or discipline.

#### When completing this section you may wish to consider the following:

- What knowledge and experience, however gained, do you need to carry out your basic day to day responsibilities?
- How do you apply the knowledge and experience?
- How long did it take to obtain the required knowledge and experience?
- How did you develop that knowledge and experience?
- How often do you need to update that knowledge and experience?
- Who routinely goes to you for advice or guidance?
- What level of knowledge and experience would be required of the replacement, were you to leave your job?

### Weightings

The University of Cambridge has taken the fourteen elements of HERA and weighted them as a percentage of the total (of 100%). Each element has a maximum score in direct proportion to that percentage to identify the relative importance of each of the elements. <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/reward/hera.html>

## What else does an Employee need to know?

A job description is just one of the documentary tools that helps an employee understand what is expected of them and where they stand in a company. But what about policies and procedures?

Providing your employees with an Office Manual that includes both company policies and company procedures helps both your business and your employees. It helps set employee expectations about the company's work environment and communicate corporate standards and procedures.

For more information on Work Manuals see our publication 488 – *Why Your Company Needs a Work Manual*.

## Further Information

You might like to visit [www.bizezia.com](http://www.bizezia.com) for details of the new Work Manual product – it now includes a comprehensive library of over 500 job descriptions.

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues. We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

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Aaron Wallis hopes that you have found this document useful. We are a specialist sales and marketing recruitment agency with offices in Milton Keynes, London (Victoria), Leeds and Bristol.

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