

How to....Write a Person Specification

A person specification is a profile of the skills and aptitudes required of the role holder and are derived from the job description. It lists the criteria that will be used in shortlisting and selecting candidates. The essential and desirable requirements will be derived from the job description and the duties the role holder will be need to undertake.

It provides:

- A set of criteria against which all applicants can be measured objectively.
- A structured and systematic means for a comparative assessment of the applicants.
- A document to ensure that the basis of decision-making is transparent. The person specification is a live document to be reviewed and amended as appropriate in line with the job description.

If the essential and desirable criteria are not robust enough, it will make it difficult to objectively justify the reasons for non-selection of candidates.

The University has a standard format for all person specifications that should be used in all instances. You can find this in the [job pack template for Professional Services posts](#) and the [Academic job pack templates](#). If your requirements cannot be met by the use of this format please discuss this with your Resourcing Adviser.

Essential/Expected Criteria

This is the minimum you will accept when the person starts work. Do not include any criteria that are not essential from day one. Candidates must demonstrate in their application that they meet the essential criteria in order to be shortlisted.

One of the essential requirements included in the person specification for a manager must be based on diversity and inclusion. An example of this could be an approach that ensures principles of equality and diversity are embedded in the service.

Desirable / Exemplary Criteria

This is someone that could do the job without these skills and attributes but they would be useful, or they are necessary for the job but not from day one (it should be clear which of these apply). A person could acquire these after they have been appointed (e.g. through training). The desirable criteria can be used to reduce the shortlist if a large number of candidates satisfy the essential criteria so you may wish to list these in priority order.

Qualifications / Professional Qualifications

It is important to include qualifications/professional qualification in the person specification as this indicates the level of educational knowledge that is needed to be able to undertake the role.

For example, for an administrative role at Grade 4 level, GCSE level qualifications (or equivalent) in English and Mathematics may be required to demonstrate that the role holder has a good foundation of knowledge in these areas, which will be essential as the role involves a lot of writing and working with basic numbers.

When considering what types of qualifications the role holder will need to have, think about:

- Which qualifications are definitely essential requirements
- Which qualifications are just desirable
- Whether knowledge gained through equivalent experience would be sufficient to carry out the role

The grade of the post should also be considered and the qualifications appropriately aligned to that.

An example of a broad qualification criterion would be 'Educated to degree level/holds equivalent level qualification/holds equivalent level of relevant experience'.

Be specific about the grade/award you expect the person to have i.e. 5 GCSE's at Grade A-C, or a minimum 2.1 degree, to minimise any subjectivity.

A qualification that is not necessary, or is too high for the level of the post, should not be included as this could deter good applicants and reduce the pool available.

Experience/Knowledge and Skills/Abilities

When considering the type of experience/knowledge or skills/abilities the role holder will need to have, think about:

- What experience/knowledge is essential for them to be able to start this post on day one? For example do they need experience of working in an office environment or are you recruiting to an entry level job where that is not necessary? Is this a specialist role, do they need to have experience in a specific academic discipline or professional services area such as IT? Make this clear in the job description
- Consider what skills and abilities they will need, such as effective listening skills, attention to detail, influencing and negotiation skills.

We do not specify a number of years' experience required for roles as this could lead to claims of age discrimination, instead focus on the skills which are actually required for the job.

Top Tips

- Care should be taken in wording the criteria. If they are too narrow there is a danger that there could only be a few applicants. However, if they are too broad you could attract too many applicants who are not suitable, making the shortlisting process difficult and time consuming.
- Any job description/person specification should avoid words which imply that most of the people doing the job are predominantly of one gender.
- The words used should be clear and not open to misinterpretation. They should also be specific e.g. rather than stating 'good communication skills', it is better to specify exactly what is required in the post, such as 'be able to prepare and deliver presentations to small groups' or 'ability to communicate with staff and students effectively via phone, email and in person'.
- If the role is physical in nature, e.g. standing for long periods, climbing ladders/stairs; lifting heavy objects, working in confined spaces – explain this so that candidates can determine if they can meet these requirements (with reasonable adjustments if necessary).

Important to Know

- A person specification is essential if the recruitment and selection is to be undertaken lawfully and in accordance with the University's Equality Policy. Failure to use the person specification makes it very difficult to justify selection criteria in the event of a complaint or challenge. As such, criteria included in the person specification must be genuinely necessary for the performance of the job.
- The inclusion of unnecessary or marginal requirements should not be included in order to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities, e.g. a driving licence. Stating instead that 'applicants must be willing and able to travel' would still indicate that this is a requirement of the job. However, this does not specify how this should be done and therefore will not exclude people who cannot drive because of a disability.
- As part of our Stonewall accreditation, when a post that includes management and leadership responsibilities is to be advertised, one of the essential requirements in the person specification must be about diversity and inclusion, for example: "*A demonstrable approach that ensures principles of equality and diversity are embedded in the service.*"
- The University of Essex is proud to be part of the Disability Confident scheme and is committed to supporting diversity and equality, representative of our inclusive community. As part of our commitment to this scheme any candidate who has a disability and meets all the essential criteria for the role should be offered an interview. Please contact your Resourcing Adviser for any queries on this process.