

Person Specifications

1. A person specification is a list of criteria which define in behavioural terms the minimum requirements to carry out the duties of the post satisfactorily in terms of the skills, knowledge, abilities, experience and qualifications necessary.
2. When prepared and used accurately, person specifications improve the reliability, consistency and justifiability of decisions made in recruitment. Managers, in consultation with the Personnel Unit, should draw up the person specification that will be sent to potential applicants as part of the recruitment pack.
3. All advertised jobs must have a person specification. Although it is principally a recruitment document it is also useful for job evaluation purposes.
4. Candidates applying for posts with the Council are supplied with a copy of the relevant person specification and guidance notes explaining how to use it to complete the application form.

Why do we use them?

5. Discrimination in selection is most likely to occur where there are no clear criteria being applied and where there is informality in the selection procedures.
6. One way of overcoming both of these problems is to draw up and use accurate person specifications. The person specification will:
 - help form the basis of any advertisements which are drawn up
 - help applicants to see if they will be able to meet the demands of the job
 - provide short listers with the criteria to assess applications
 - enable interviewers to structure their interviews
 - help interviewers to decide who to select.
7. Where organisations do not use person specifications, the probability of discrimination occurring increases because the selection of candidates will depend purely on the likes and dislikes of individual interviewers.
8. On the other hand, a badly drawn up person specification which has ambiguous criteria can be just as bad as having no person specification at all. Person specifications, therefore, have to be drawn up with care and attention so that they are both accurate and fair.

Drawing up a person specification

9. The criteria set out in the person specification are split between essential and desirable.
10. Essential criteria are the minimum requirements without which an applicant will not be able to perform the job satisfactorily.

11. Desirable criteria are additional criteria which would be beneficial to the post if an applicant met them, but which, for example, are not necessary to perform the basic functions of the post; could be met with the normal training and induction for the post; or are so specific to this Council or to local authorities that it is accepted that specific training will always be necessary for any applicant.
12. The criteria should always be the minimum requirements for the job, and additional weight should not be given to applicants who exceed them.
13. For example, if 2 A levels is specified as essential, an applicant with 3 A levels will not be given preference over someone with 2.
14. For this reason, desirable criteria must not be just an extension of an already specified essential one. For example, it is not appropriate to specify 2 A Levels as essential and 3 as desirable.
15. Desirable criteria should be separate, additional skills, knowledge etc. that are not being considered as part of the essential criteria. For example, if a vacancy occurred where on very rare occasions, there might be some contact with French speakers, it might be worth specifying French speaking as a desirable criterion. It would not be appropriate to include it as essential.
16. Generally it is unrealistic to expect all criteria on a person specification to be of equal value. Clearly though, the essential criteria are more important than the desirable. However, there will be occasions when some degree of weighting will be necessary to help distinguish between groups of applicants and this is discussed in the general Recruitment Procedure.

Criteria Content

17. The criteria are likely to be based on knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and qualifications
18. Not all jobs will contain examples from each e.g. education and experience may be irrelevant criteria when looking at some jobs.
19. When setting criteria it is important to remember that a major consideration in the Council's Job Evaluation Scheme is the experience or education requirements of the post holder. It is therefore vital that the minimum requirements are specified, and not the minimum experience etc. that could be obtained from the recruitment market for the salary on offer.
20. For example, if an Accounting Technician post was vacant, the advertisement and person specification should not ask for a fully qualified Accountant, even when it is known that it is possible to recruit such a person. To do so would leave the Council open to a later job evaluation claim that is required a higher level of qualification than the salary suggested.
21. It should be possible for the person who drew up the person specification to be able to say "I have included ability "x" to level of

competency "y" because it is clearly required in order to carry out tasks "w" and "z" in the job description".

22. Criteria must be capable of being assessed through a normal recruitment process i.e. by study of an application form and at interview, perhaps supplemented by some form of testing or presentation.
23. Therefore they should be clear. For example using a phrase "Experience of" immediately raises the question "How much experience?" Recruitment panels should make sure they each understand what is needed and at what level for each criterion.
24. The ability to adhere to the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy must be included in the essential criteria for all person specifications. This should read - Ability to actively support, work and deliver services within the framework of the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy and associated procedures.
25. Criteria must also not fall foul of discrimination legislation. Probably the most problems are likely to come from the Age Discrimination regulations. Personnel will advise if they think there is a potential problem.

Assessing Criteria

26. As part of the specification, it is only fair to let candidates know how these criteria are going to be assessed. In order to do that each specification sets out whether assessment will be as part of the application form, through qualifications, interview, test or presentation.
27. The example person specification shows this.

Person Specification

	Criteria	Assessment Method				
		A	Q	I	T	P
	Essential					
1	CIPD qualified	✓	✓			
2	Good oral and written communication skills	✓		✓		
3	Ability to produce and accurately analyse statistics using spreadsheets and databases.	✓			✓	
	Desirable					
4	Experience of administering a job evaluation scheme.	✓		✓		
5	Ability and confidence to deliver training courses	✓		✓		✓
6	Experience of monitoring budgets.	✓		✓		
7	Experience of or knowledge of local government personnel practices.	✓		✓		

Note:

Assessment Methods:

A = Application Form Q = Qualifications I = Interview
 T = Test P = Presentation