

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND & JOB DESIGN

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Job Design to Encourage Diversity and Inclusion

Whether it's a new post or a replacement vacancy, in order to create a truly diverse workforce, the first place to start is with the job documentation.

Whether you use a traditional job description and personnel specification or a more contemporary alternative like a role/performance description, the content of these will either open the post to a wide range of diverse candidates or continue to attract the type of candidates that you have always attracted, but not necessarily wanted.

A number of areas are explored below to help you to reconsider the content of your job documentation in order to enhance your ability to create a greater pool of candidate and create a more diverse workforce. This is neatly summarised in a checklist at the end.

Job Title

This tends to be the starting point of most documentation but is no less important. Consider the following:

- Does the job title accurately reflect the role?
- Do you use gender pronouns – it's best to steer clear of gender pronouns in titles to avoid any gender bias perceptions. Use them/they rather than her/him where possible.
- Is the title too abstract – something clear and concise will enable potential candidates to opt in much quicker.

Role Summary

The role summary is a useful way to highlight early on exactly what you are looking for. Rather than focus on the specific duties of the job you might get a better response if you describe the kind of abilities you are seeking, along with an indication of how those abilities fit into the job in practice.

Take for example the role of a GP receptionist. There is no doubt that this tends to be a very busy role, quite administrative in nature, but what is likely to be more important is the ability for candidates to demonstrate an ability to multitask and to demonstrate empathy and cordiality towards (often) anxious patients.

Consider the following:

- What abilities must the successful candidate have in order to successfully perform in the role – more on this later.
- What are the key tasks of the role?
- Is there anything within the role summary that might put off potential candidates, e.g. need to work a lot of overtime/highly pressured environment, etc.

Hours of Work

It was reported in 2019 that the Westminster Government will bring in a new law to compel employers in GB to make all jobs flexible by default and this is one of the most important considerations in job design. Just because the post has always been carried out on a full-time basis during traditional office hours does not mean that it should continue as such.

Flexible working is important to all - not just parents of young children but also candidates with disabilities and the new generation of workers who are demanding more flexible and agile working.

Consider the following:

- If the role is full time, then consider job share options – which will open the post to a wider pool and offer more flexibility to the organisation.
- Can the tasks be divided into different roles which can be completed on a part-time basis?
- Consider agile working hours for employees where the role is task orientated and which allows candidates to work at the times of the day that they are most productive. This will also have the benefit of enabling employees to achieve a greater work-life balance and they are more likely to stay with the organisation.
- Consider start and finish times – must it be 9-5 or can you permit more flexibility? A slavish fixation on a 9am start can rule out working parents who may need to do school drop-offs or a disabled candidate with a condition, such as agoraphobia, who suffers severe stress travelling during rush hour times and for whom an earlier or later start time would facilitate.
- In a manufacturing environment, for example, where production lines run along set hours – can you be creative around shift lengths – rather than 12-hour shifts which do not suit all, could you have 2 shorter shifts of varying hours which would attract a wider pool of candidates?
- If cover is required on a particular service, e.g. a telephone line or reception desk then can this be covered on a rotational basis around a team of staff, rather than a requirement for one person to cover those hours, thereby affording the organisation more flexibility and job rotation for employees?
- Is overtime a requirement? If so, how often and under which circumstances? Is it voluntary? Be mindful of general statements about candidates being required to work all the hours necessary as this is likely to put off a large pool of potential candidates. If overtime is necessary, describe the circumstances under which it might arise and how often it has arisen.
- Are hours required to be worked outside “normal” working hours, e.g. evening meetings or breakfast meetings. If so, then specify how often this is likely to arise and why and what flexibility is offered to employees to facilitate this, e.g. a later start on other days or an early finish to compensate.

Job Location

As remote working becomes more common and offers benefits for potential candidates, as well as employers, consider *where* the role can be carried out.

- How much time is the individual really required to be in the office/HQ? The increasing volumes of traffic at rush hour times means that some employees can spend hours travelling back and forth from work, which can be off-putting for a large number of candidates.
- Consider if the work be carried out remotely, e.g. at home or an alternative company site or business hub. In today’s technological times, out of sight is not out of mind and

employers can monitor employee performance without them needing to be in the office all the time. A work pattern that allows some remote working and office working can work better for a lot of candidates, providing them with a greater work-life balance, as well as better health and well-being as a result of less travel time. There are also potential cost-savings for employers in providing remote working, due to reduced accommodation requirements.

- What if any travel is required in the role? Candidates with certain physical disabilities or parents of young children may be put off roles if a general statement around travelling is included without any context of how often this might arise or why it is a requirement.
- Relating to travel – specifying that candidates must have a driving licence may put off in particular some physically disabled candidates for whom driving is not an option. Could the travel in fact be carried out utilising public transport or removed by using technology to host meetings, rather than having to travel in person?

Duties of Role

There is a tendency of traditional job documentation to list all and every task that might be required in a role, which can be off-putting and inaccurate if in fact the need for some of the duties has not ever arisen.

Employers often feel more secure in taking this approach as they may feel they can argue that 'it's in the job description'. In order to attract a wider pool of candidates focus instead on highlighting the key tasks of the role.

Some examples to consider are:

- If administrative tasks are a key aspect of the role then state this and give a couple of examples without listing each and every task that might be required. Indicate perhaps what percentage of the role might be attributed to such tasks.
- Problem solving – are tricky situations the norm in the role? If so, specify the types of problems that may need to be solved.
- Data analysis – if this is a key aspect of the role then it's worth highlighting this over other tasks. Neurodiverse candidates may have skills that are well suited to this and may therefore be attracted to roles where this is clearly identified.
- Autonomous working – where roles are largely unsupervised it is worth highlighting this as the need for candidates to work on their own initiative will be an important ability to test for during the selection process.

Experience Required

The tendency to set out a specific number of years' previous experience can be very limiting and reduce a candidate pool considerably. It may also lead to difficulties in terms of age discrimination legislation. Consider, for example, younger candidates who have not gained the specified years of experience but who, when tested during selection, may demonstrate the abilities and aptitudes that are required; or a parent of young children returning from a career break who has been out of the workplace for a few years.

In addition, specifying in an IT role that candidates must have experience in the use of specific software etc, may limit the candidate pool if what you are actually seeking is a pool of candidates who have the ability to work with developing software/equipment and understand it.

Think creatively about how skills and abilities gained in completely different roles, fields or countries, are transferrable and devise selection methods that test for the ability sought, rather than relying on the idea that a specific number of years' experience will automatically mean that the skills and abilities sought are present in a candidate.

Does the organisation train all new candidates – if so, then having a set number of years' experience in previous roles may be completely irrelevant.

Qualifications

Other than to meet legal or regulatory requirements, consider if it is necessary to specify a long list of qualifications that candidates must have. Having a pool of candidates with A Levels or Degrees may provide some comfort to employers but what does this add if what an employer really needs are candidates who can adapt quickly to changing circumstances or can demonstrate a high level of empathy or an ability to work on routine tasks continuously? What value does an A Level from 30 years ago really have to your business? Examples of continuous professional development might be much more valuable.

In specifying qualifications consider the following:

- Older candidates will have completed qualifications under a different educational system, which may not include the fuller range of subjects that are available today, so specifying for example that candidates have a GCSE in Media Studies may limit the pool to a younger workforce.
- Candidates who were educated overseas may not have the exact qualifications sought, so consider equivalents if you need specific qualifications for a role.
- How far back in terms of qualifications do you need to go? For example, if seeking a 3rd level qualification is it really necessary to state GCSE's required?
- What alternatives to qualifications are acceptable for candidates who may not have gone down an academic route but who have taken a more practical vocational route?

Attributes Required

This tends to be the section of the job documentation that sets out things such as 'being a good team worker' or 'have excellent communication skills'. These are often written in a general and almost aspirational way.

To ensure as wide a range of candidate pool as possible, it is important to be more specific about the attributes required and ensure that they can be justified. For example, is it really necessary for an individual who perhaps has an Autism Spectrum disorder and for whom social interaction may be challenging to have a high level of ability to work in a team, especially if the role requires them to work independently? Or do you really need candidates

to be able to speak English fluently if their role requires them to work with computer languages and isn't customer-facing?

Consider the following:

- When you require someone to have the 'ability to work as part of a team', what does this mean in practice? Be more specific about the fact that, for example, they might need to attend meetings and be prepared to contribute ideas and suggestions, or they may need to share the workload of work colleagues.
- Excellent Communication Skills – does this mean written or oral, or both, and why is this a requirement? Can you justify a requirement for candidates to speak English fluently if they are not required to do so as part of the role?
- Physical attributes – some roles may require certain physical attributes and this may be tested for as part of the selection process but is it always necessary for candidates to be 'physically fit', a term that often appears in job documentation and which could rule out a large pool of candidates who may have disabilities. It is essential to be able to justify these requirements but also consider what technological aids could facilitate performance.

Job Design Checklist

Aspect of Job	Considerations – Have you thought about the following?	
Job Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid abstract titles • Avoid use of gender pronouns • Use clear, concise language 	
Role Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid lengthy summary of duties • Focus on abilities required • Identify one or two key tasks of the role • Avoid language that could suggest bias, e.g. energetic candidates or dynamic candidates. 	
Hour of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what flexibility can be offered, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time hours or job share - Agile working hours - Flexible start/finish times - Alternative shift patterns • What if any overtime is required and for what reason? • Are any hours required to be worked outside 'normal' working time and what compensation is provided? 	
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider where job can be carried out, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At main office/site or alternative office/site - Remote working from home or business hub • What if any travel is required – be specific to avoid excluding parents of young children or disabled candidates for whom travelling may be a challenge • Avoid requiring candidates to have a driving licence unless this can be justified. Could candidates use public/alternative transport to travel between sites if this is a requirement 	
Duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid lengthy lists of duties that try to cover all eventualities • Focus on the key tasks that link to the role summary • Use descriptive language to outline performance indicators • When drafting duties consider what aids can be used to facilitate candidates with a disability 	
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider breadth of experience rather than setting a number of years. If specifying a set number of years can this be justified as it may rule out candidates 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider transferrable skills gained through experience in alternative roles • Focus on the types of abilities that the role requires and that you are seeking candidates to have gained through work experience • Use relevant selection methods to test for relevant experience • Is training provided by the organisation? If so, then is relevant experience necessary? Looking for abilities may be more relevant than previous experience. 	
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any legal/regulatory requirements that justify need for specific qualifications? • Avoid seeking candidates with 'contemporary' qualifications that could exclude older workers • Consider candidates educated outside NI and specify equivalents if you can justify need for qualifications • Consider alternatives to qualifications to include candidates who have opted for a vocational rather than academic route 	
Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid general terms such as 'be a good team player' or 'have excellent communication skills' • Give specific examples of attributes required as they relate to the role, e.g. if report writing is a requirement of the role then specify this rather than 'good written communication skills' • Do not specify 'must speak English fluently' unless this can be justified • If specifying physical attributes, ensure these can be justified as they could exclude a large pool of candidates • Avoid using the term, 'physically fit' as again this is too general and could rule out a large pool of candidates • Focus on abilities that can be tested through selection methods. 	