WRITING POSITION DESCRIPTIONS AT ECU

Why Have a Position Description?

A position description (PD) is an essential document that underpins a number of key management processes, including:

- Job Design & Establishment Structure
- Job Analysis and Classification Determination;
- Recruitment, Selection and Induction; and
- Probation and Performance Management (coaching/discipline/reward).

A PD defines a job or group of like jobs, specifying the overall role, major accountabilities and the capabilities, traits and skills required for achieving the desired outcomes, all of which need to fit within the team and business context.

Underlying Principles of an ECU Position Description.

Position Descriptions focus on business outcomes (deliverables) for the position and those requirements critical to enabling achievement, rather than over-specifying detailed activities/tasks. Activities and Tasks may be more appropriately recorded as part of the occupant’s MPS. Generally, defining a PD should be guided by the following:

- A PD is the formal description of a specific job and relates directly to the organisation’s structure, its Establishment. As such, it becomes a reference point for any clarification or issue about the specific nature or requirements of a job. It needs to provide a broad framework for defining the type of occupation, the classification, the work outcomes and key capabilities needed to achieve the outcomes. It needs to remain accurate.
- A PD describes the work to be undertaken as defined by the university’s business requirements and is not to reflect an individual person's performance.
- The various components of the PD should be defined and written in a concise but informative manner. Particularly important is the limiting of the role statement to a sentence or two and the accountabilities to 4 or 5 short outcome statements, rather than activities/duties lists. Constructing statements in this manner will offer longevity to the PD document, enable it to remain contemporary and allow for increased flexibility in the job scope. Outcomes focussed statements will also assist in the MPS process for setting key objectives, standards and performance indicators.
- The job/person specification (eg. knowledge/experience, skills, abilities etc) will be those capabilities (criterion) key to delivering optimum performance in the job. There will be a maximum number of 8 criterion for a PD. These criterion will be drawn from:
  - The job specific knowledge and skills (suggest 1 - 4); and
  - the ECU Capability Framework).
- Criterion will not be defined as essential or desirable.

The PD will be no more than 2 pages.
Drafting a Position Description

The following describes the various sections of the PD document and what it is intended to include.

ESTABLISHMENT DETAILS

This first section includes all of the specific establishment information (eg. position title, position number, classification, organisation units etc.) and authorisations.

CONTEXT

The Context information provides detail about the environment that the position will be working in and in particular the business operations/outcomes that the position will contribute to. Typically it will briefly describe the role of the work unit or School/Branch or Faculty/Centre.

Ideally the information will reflect the operational plans and be sourced from the Service Centre/Faculty/Office Operational Plan.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART

This includes the establishment/organisational structure information for the work area. It should display the key reporting relationships, positions details etc for the work unit or School/Branch etc.

ROLE STATEMENT

This is a brief, specific statement of 1-2 sentences that summarises the overall objective(s) of the position. It should articulate:

- “Why the position exists?” and,
- “What major work outcomes are expected?”

The purpose of this statement enables the understanding of the position’s overall importance to the organisation.

A good structure for the this statement is

- Action Verb
- Object (What)
- Result (Why)

For Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Verb</th>
<th>Object (What)</th>
<th>Result (Why)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To plan, lead and control...</td>
<td>...selling operations throughout Australia...</td>
<td>...to increase market share and achieve sales turnover with expense budget limits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Designing & Describing Work – HayGroup, 2004)
**ACCOUNTABILITIES**

This section details the major outcomes expected for the position and critical responsibilities that will enable the successful achievement of the objective(s). Accountabilities are not detailed tasks and activities statements (these can be recorded elsewhere); rather they should focus on the results that are to be achieved. It is anticipated that a position will have between 5-8 major accountabilities (including the mandatory ECU accountability). However many positions might need only 3-4 to cover the position.

These Accountabilities would be defined as concise statements, each no more than 1-2 sentences. To assist in defining these statements, consider:

- Who are the customer(s) of this position and what are the agreed products/services?
- What standards have been agreed for the products/services?
- What are the measurable outputs of the position?
- What are the implications of not delivering the desired outputs?
- What are the essential processes or ways of undertaking the work that will produce the requisite outputs (eg. relationship management, leading/enabling teams...)?

**Ideally,** Accountabilities should be “**M.E.C.E**”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M – Mutually</th>
<th>E – Exclusive</th>
<th>C – Collectively</th>
<th>E - Exhaustive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A good structure for Accountability is:
- Start with an action word *(Verb)*;
- Apply it to an object ;
- Define the end result; and
- How is this done *(by, through)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION WORD</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
<th>END RESULT</th>
<th>HOW DONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectively lead and manage...</td>
<td>...various building projects...</td>
<td>... to satisfactory completion, inspection and registration ...</td>
<td>... through project monitoring, negotiation, leadership, customer focus and the use of available technologies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Well written accountabilities should suggest the performance measure.

**Mandatory Accountability**

Each ECU position description should include the following mandatory accountability.

- Employees are required to participate in all ECU, team, and individual planning activities; comply with ECU policies and practices in all aspects of their work and conduct; and ensure the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others by complying with OSH and EO requirements.
CAPABILITIES

This information defines the key job/person specifications for optimum performance in the job. These criterion are regarded as the ‘top 8’ requirements associated with successful performance in the position and are not delineated into essential or desirable.

These are identified from two primary sources:
1. the Job Specific Requirements (qualifications, relevant experience, etc); and
2. the ECU Capability Framework.

Job specific requirements are the knowledge/experience, skills etc associated with a type of occupation or job. Generally, it is anticipated that there would be 3 or 4 of these criterion. Knowledge/experience statements can group related topics together in one statement.

Statements about qualifications will be specific as to the discipline required and the statement must end with the following, to ensure equity access in meeting this requirement:

Tertiary qualification in..........OR equivalent level of expertise gained from a combination of experience, training or professional accreditation.

The ECU Capability Framework defines a wide range of capabilities required for working at ECU. The framework classifies and defines various capabilities and can be used as a ‘menu’ to identify critical dimensions relevant to the job. Generally, it is anticipated that there would be 4 or 5 of these criterion.

The ECU Capability Framework is available via the HR web site or at:


For further assistance, please contact your HR Account Manager.