

Principals Kit – Developing Effective Job Descriptions for Support Staff

The settlement of the teacher aide pay equity claim in 2020 highlighted the need for all support staff roles to be covered by accurate and current job descriptions that clearly set out the expectations and focus of each role within the school. In many cases, support staff roles have evolved beyond what may have originally been expected. This resulted in significant issues for schools in differentiating between what a role may have been originally and the reality of how the role had evolved over time.

Components of job description development

Job analysis

Job analysis is the process of developing a thorough understanding of the various attributes of the position.

You can use the *Job Analysis Sheet* (see below), to help guide the job analysis process and organise your results. A complete job analysis should provide you with information on the:

1. **Duties or responsibilities of the job:** those tasks that are performed, the types of decisions the person in the position will make, and responsibility for record-keeping.

2. **Where appropriate, the qualifications and/or experience needed to carry out the work:** the abilities, general skills, previous experience and special training, knowledge, or qualifications required.

3. **Work environment:** the location and work conditions under which the job is performed and supervision and contacts with other school personnel, students, and the school's community.

Discussing the position with current employees, if there are any, can often be a useful way to gather job analysis information. In doing a job analysis, be sure to think in terms of what work needs to be done, not just the work that is currently being done.

Job design

As you develop a job description, you also need to consider how the position will relate to other positions in the school. This is part of the job design. In addition to considering how the position relates to other positions in the school, job design also addresses the organisation of the work flow, how the position will help meet your school's requirements, and the personal needs of the job holder.

As you think about job design, ask yourself questions such as:

1. Can you find ways to make the role more efficient?
2. Have you taken into account the board's responsibilities to provide all employees with a healthy and safe work environment?
3. Can you find a way to make jobs more rewarding or give employees a greater sense of accomplishment?
4. Is there a way to organise work so that employees can vary activities according to personal needs, work habits and the circumstances in the workplace?
5. Do you have a robust induction and training programme in place that will help employees understand what they need to know in order to satisfactorily perform their duties?

6. Are there changes that can be made to address any negative elements generally associated with the position?

Answering these questions may result in tasks being eliminated or moved from one position to another.

Components of a Job Description

Using information from your job analysis and job design, you will be in a better position to develop a short (usually one to two page) job description containing the following components:

1. Title
2. Job Summary
3. Job Tasks, Responsibilities, and Authorities
4. Tenure (is the position permanent or fixed term)
5. Supervision
6. Working Conditions
7. Grading and Starting Salary
8. Collective Agreement Coverage

[Job description template](#)

Job Title

The job title is the first thing a prospective employee sees. Keep it to the point and ensure that it is consistent with the Support Staff in Schools Collective Agreement. Whatever title you select must accurately reflect the duties of the job. It should also indicate where the employee will fit into the school's staffing structure, e.g. whether it is a senior or assistant position. Be aware of the words you select. For instance, there is a difference in connotation between the titles "school secretary" and "office manager", even though the jobs might be identical.

Job Summary

The job summary is a brief narrative (four to five sentences) containing information on essential duties, specific skills or attributes needed and abilities necessary to perform the job. This may also include information about interactions with other school employees as well as the students or school community with whom the employee may deal directly. The job summary is often used when advertising for new employees, so it should be concise and clear. Summaries are often easier to write after completing other sections of the job description.

Job Tasks, Responsibilities, and Authorities

What will the person do? In the job responsibilities section, state the major tasks and, if necessary, the sub-tasks that are essential for the position.

The list of tasks usually starts with the most important task or the one to which the employee will devote the largest share of time. A task is what the person in the job will actually do. Tasks are observable actions. For example, if the position requires maintaining financial records for the school, you would expect to observe at some time the person entering receipt and expense data into a

computerised accounting program. Providing estimates of the percentage of time to be spent on important tasks can give employees a sense of the job components.

From your job analysis, you may have developed a long list of tasks and responsibilities. Group tasks associated with each responsibility together. Once grouped, there should be no more than eight main responsibilities. Any more than this number can result in an overly complicated document, one that will only confuse prospective and current employees. Each major responsibility can have sub-duties, but keep these to a minimum.

Describe each task in a short statement. Begin each statement with an action verb describing the activity. Using verbs makes the responsibilities seem more real to potential candidates. Examples of action verbs include: performs, supports, coaches, monitors, plans, inputs, supervises, recommends, analyses. Using specific language will help you and the employee define the job.

In areas of authority, list the areas in which your job analysis indicates that the person will have decision-making power. For example, a person may have the authority to make purchases for repairs totalling \$500 or less.

Tenure

You will need to determine whether the role you are seeking to fill is a permanent role or whether there are *genuine reasons based on reasonable grounds* for the position to be fixed term (It's important to refer to the Fixed Term Appointments chapter in this kit).

Job Qualifications

In this area, indicate the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that an individual must have to perform the job duties.

Knowledge is factual or procedural information that is necessary for successfully performing a task.

A **skill** is an individual's level of proficiency at performing a particular task.

Ability refers to a more general enduring capability that an individual possesses.

Finally, **other characteristics** might be personality traits such as one's motivation, persistence, work ethic, or willingness to be a team player.

To help you write the job qualifications section, refer back to your job analysis, and ask yourself what knowledge, skills, abilities and experience are required. You do not need to include every possible qualification, but you do need to be clear about what is essential. If there are formal qualifications needed to perform the job, this would be the place to note them.

Supervision

In this section, indicate to whom the person in this position will report.

Working Conditions

Here, be specific about the hours and days of work, what happens in school term break, the degree of autonomy there is in the role, and the school's commitment to providing a safe and healthy work environment. In this section, include the working relationship expected with other employees. Is this

position part of a broader team, like a junior syndicate? Also, are there special circumstances that may require work off site such as school camps?

Grading and Starting Salary

All support staff positions are subject to the grading matrices in the Support Staff in Schools Collective Agreement (SSCA). It is strongly recommended that you take the time to ensure that the position you are looking to fill has been afforded the appropriate grading. Grading a position at a lower grade than is appropriate may unnecessarily limit the scope of the role and may also leave that grading subject to potential challenge in the future. Principals may take the opportunity to consult with and seek advice from NZEI Te Riu Roa through NZEIHHELP (0800693443) or the Principal Helpline (0508624774) before finalising a grading decision.

The SSCA is a minimum rates collective agreement. You must start a new employee at the correct step within the appropriate grade but there is nothing precluding you from deciding to start that position at a higher step. As support staff are not currently centrally funded, that comes down to striking a balance between affordability and paying rates to attract appropriate applicants for any vacant position within your school.

In this salary section you may also choose to detail information about other entitlements such as annual leave and sick leave.

Final Comment

When putting together a job description, focus on what the position needs to be in light of your school's current needs and long-term objectives.

Also, when combining tasks into a job description, make sure a job hasn't been created that very few people could fill.

A job description must not be discriminatory on the basis of religious preference, sex, race, age, nationality, or physical or mental disability.

It is important to keep your school's job descriptions up to date. However, any amendments to an employee's current job description should only be made through prior consultation with that employee.

SAMPLE JOB ANALYSIS SHEET

1.SUMMARY OF DUTIES: State in your own words briefly the main duties.

2.SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS: List any qualifications, attributes, etc. required to perform duties assigned to the position.

3.EQUIPMENT: List any equipment (e.g., computer systems, software programmes etc.) normally operated as a part of the position's duties.

4.REGULAR DUTIES: In general terms, describe duties regularly performed. List these duties in descending order of importance and percent of time spent on them per month. List as many duties as possible and attach additional sheets, if necessary.

5. CONTACTS: Describe how the position interacts with other school staff, students, the school's community, outside agencies?

6.SUPERVISION: Does position have supervisory responsibilities?

Yes

No

If there is responsibility for the work of others but no direct supervision, please explain.

7. DECISION MAKING: Please explain the decisions the person in this position will make while performing the regular duties of the job.

8.RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECORDS: List the reports and files the person would be required to prepare or maintain. State, in general, for whom each report is intended.

9.FREQUENCY OF SUPERVISION: How frequently must the person confer with a supervisor or other personnel in making decisions or in determining the proper course of action to be taken?

Frequently

Occasionally

Seldom

Never

10.WORKING CONDITIONS: Please describe the conditions under which the person in this position works. Be sure to list any disagreeable or unusual working conditions.

11. JOB REQUIREMENTS: Please indicate the minimum requirements necessary to perform satisfactorily in the position.

a. Specific attributes required:

Type _____

Type _____

Type _____

b. Experience:

Type _____

Number of years _____

Type _____

Number of years _____

c. Specialist skills required:

Type _____

Type _____

Type _____

12. GRADING

All support staff positions must be graded appropriately in accordance with the matrices in the Support Staff in Schools Collective Agreement. Based on this job analysis, the appropriate grading for the position is: _____

13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Please provide additional information, not included in any of the previous items, which would be important in a description of the position.
