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## 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 position's various attributes.

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 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 workflow, 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 considered 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 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. Job Qualifications
6. Supervision
7. Working Conditions
8. Grading and Starting Salary
9. Collective Agreement Coverage

The NZSTA online resource center has more information on creating appropriate job descriptions or call their helpline for support.

### **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 current 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 and 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 subtasks 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 do. Tasks are observable actions. For example, if the position requires maintaining financial records for the school, you will 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 8 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**

Determine if the role you seek to fill is permanent or if there are genuine reasons based on reasonable grounds for the position to be fixed term. Refer to the "Fixed Term Appointments" document in the Principals' 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:** factual or procedural information necessary for successfully performing a task.
- **Skill:** individual's level of proficiency at performing a particular task.
- **Ability:** a more general enduring capability that an individual possesses.
- **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 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 off-site work 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. 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 Support Staff Collective Agreement 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 currently not centrally funded, it 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 provide detailed 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, given your school's current needs and long-term objectives.

Also, when combining tasks into a job description, make sure you have not created a job 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 following consultation with that employee.

## **SAMPLE JOB ANALYSIS SHEET**

1. **SUMMARY OF DUTIES:** Briefly state the main duties.
2. **SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS:** List any qualifications or attributes required to perform the position's duties.
3. **EQUIPMENT:** List any equipment (e.g. computer software) normally operated in the role.

4. **REGULAR DUTIES:** In general terms describe the duties regularly performed. List these duties in descending order of importance and percentage of time spent on them per month. List as many duties as possible.
5. **CONTACTS:** Describe how the position interacts with other school staff, students, the school community, and outside agencies.
6. **SUPERVISION:** List any supervisory responsibilities the position has. If there is responsibility for other's work but no direct supervision, explain how this works.
7. **DECISION MAKING:** Explain decisions the person in this role will need to make.
8. **RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECORDS:** List the reports and files the person will be required to prepare or maintain. State for whom each report is intended.
9. **FREQUENCY OF SUPERVISION:** Explain when and how frequently (i.e. frequently, occasionally, seldom, or never) the person in the role must confer with a supervisor or other personnel to determine the proper course of action to be taken.
10. **WORKING CONDITIONS:** Describe the conditions under which the person in the role works. List any disagreeable or unusual working conditions, for example:
  - a. School is spread over two sites.
  - b. Stair only access to upstairs staffroom
  - c. Working from temporary office accommodation during property upgrade.
11. **JOB REQUIREMENTS:** Please indicate the minimum requirements necessary to perform satisfactorily in the role.
  - a. Specific attributes required.
  - b. Experience (i.e. Number of years)
  - c. Specialist skills required.
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, list the appropriate grading of the position.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Provide additional information that would be important in a description of the position that is not yet included in any of the previous items.