

Employer's guide to recruitment

Part 2: Job description and advert



The job advert

Ensure you widen the appeal of your vacancies – and make them more inclusive – with this handy checklist.

State your diversity case

Provide a diversity statement in your ads that tells people your organisation welcomes applications from people of all backgrounds.

Some people might not think a role or company is for them because of their gender, disability or ethnicity – an encouraging word can stop them from moving on to the next vacancy that reads as more inclusive.

Here's an example:

“If you've got the right skills for the job we want to hear from you. We encourage applications from the right candidates regardless of age, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, belief or race.”

Offer additional support

Ask all candidates if they require any support at interview or in the role.

Provide contact details if they would like information in an alternative format – or they require other support such as wheelchair access or a BSL interpreter.

Include potential dates for interview in the job advert. This can help those with caring responsibilities make the necessary arrangements.

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Skills and qualifications

Are all those skills and qualifications you list in your job advert needed?

Some people won't apply if they think they don't have the specific abilities outlined in the vacancy – even if they are suited to the role. Women in particular are more likely to apply only if they meet all the essential criteria.

Eliminate any skills and qualifications that are not required for the role advertised. If they are crucial, could they be developed once the person is in the post?

Consider avoiding the phrase “recent experience” as this could exclude people who have taken time out of work to have children, to undertake caring responsibilities or to recover from illness.

Bear in mind young people may not have a lot of work experience – and they could avoid applying for a job that lists skills they are yet to utilise or acquire.

Take into account the value of skills gained outwith the workplace such as voluntary work in the community.

“ We really wanted our workforce to reflect the communities that we serve ”

An example

Could experience of specific softwares and systems used by your company be learned on the job rather than required by all applicants before they begin the role?

If you would prefer candidates to have knowledge of a certain skill, consider listing it as “desirable” rather than “essential”.

Some communities have particularly high academic and professional aspirations for their young people.

Point out that apprenticeships enable individuals to earn while they learn and progress into higher skilled and paid occupations.

Emphasise an apprenticeship can be the first step to a career, and if appropriate for your business, possibly lead to higher education.

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A case study MacTaggart Scott



The engineering firm adapted the entry requirements for their apprenticeships. By removing the need for physics at National 5 level, they encouraged more applications from young women who are less likely to study the subject.

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Use inclusive language

Minor tweaks to the language you use can make a big difference in attracting a wider range of potential candidates.

Try to focus on describing what the person will be doing rather than the type of people who apply to avoid stereotypes for that job.

You'll find a list of language dos and don'ts at the end of this section.

Avoid acronyms or abbreviations

Applicants are unlikely to be familiar with your acronyms. Unnecessary jargon can make the job seem less appealing and more inaccessible. Plain English is the gold standard.

If it is a technical role, provide an example of what your business does – or what a normal day would look like to give applicants some context.

Photos and images

How you illustrate a job advert is a good opportunity to show your diversity ethos.

A photograph of one particular type of person – eg a group shot of only men or women – can put off individuals who are not represented in that image.

Challenge stereotypes of your industry or sector by using diverse but realistic images.

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Keep on the right side of law

You can only specify you are looking for someone from a specific group, for example only men or only women, on rare occasions.

This is called an Occupational Requirement and employers have to show that only a man or a woman would be suitable for the role. For example, if the job involves providing personal care services to vulnerable older people.

Physical requirements

Have you mentioned an applicant “must be physically fit”? This may discriminate against disabled people.

If a role does have particular physical requirements then these must be clearly described.

This allows disabled candidates the opportunity to assess whether they can meet the criteria and whether any adjustments to the role could be made to allow them to do it.

Application forms or CVs?

Application forms can provide a fairer platform for all applicants compared to CVs where gender, background and education institutions are often laid bare.

Forms can also make it easier for you to check whether candidates meet the skills and experience for the job.

You could also opt to use anonymised CVs or application forms where personal information has been removed to avoid any preconceived ideas about certain groups influencing your decision.

Career aspirations

Highlight the career progression available to candidates in order to make the role as enticing as possible.



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A case study MacTaggart Scott



The housing and property management group changed its recruitment approach to better reach applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds. Here's why...

“We really wanted our workforce to reflect the communities that we serve and we wanted our employees to be as close to the people we look after every day. Our workforce was becoming older. When we entered into the modern apprenticeship programme it was about recruiting employees of the future.”

Steps taken

“We weren't getting candidates coming through from minority ethnic backgrounds. We spoke to a lot of groups who supported young people from these backgrounds. What we learned was sometimes a Modern Apprenticeship wasn't seen as a good career opportunity so we changed focus from the young person and went around communities and families to persuade them that this was a professional route into work.”

The impact

“Most of the people who have come through now have permanent jobs in our organisation or within our contractors and suppliers.”

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Check your language

- ✗ Don't use terms that imply only men or women can do the job – eg “handyman”. Try “maintenance worker” instead.
- ✗ Don't use terms that imply you are looking for a certain age – eg “mature”.
- ✗ Don't ask for a specific number of years of experience, instead use “proven experience in...”
- ✗ Don't list criteria that are not essential to do the job – eg asking for a driving licence when the person could do the job using public transport.
- ✗ Don't use terms like “physically” fit or “energetic” – instead describe the physical requirements of the role so people with disabilities can consider whether it is suitable for them. Remember that there might be support you could put in place for a disabled person to do the job.

Next steps and help available

- Consider becoming a **Disability Confident employer**. You can use the logo and visibly demonstrate your commitment to equality. If you have registered you should offer guaranteed interviews to disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria. Small business advisers from the Department for Work and Pensions can help you recruit and retain disabled individuals.
- **Equate Scotland**, which promotes the advancement of women in science, engineering, technology and the built environment, offers tailored advice to employers on job adverts.
- Skills Development Scotland's Modern Apprenticeship equality team can also provide support and advice at Equality.Apprenticeships@sds.co.uk