

A Unite representatives update on the NHS Job Evaluation Scheme/Agenda for Change (How to write a job description)

Tuesday 22 June 2026



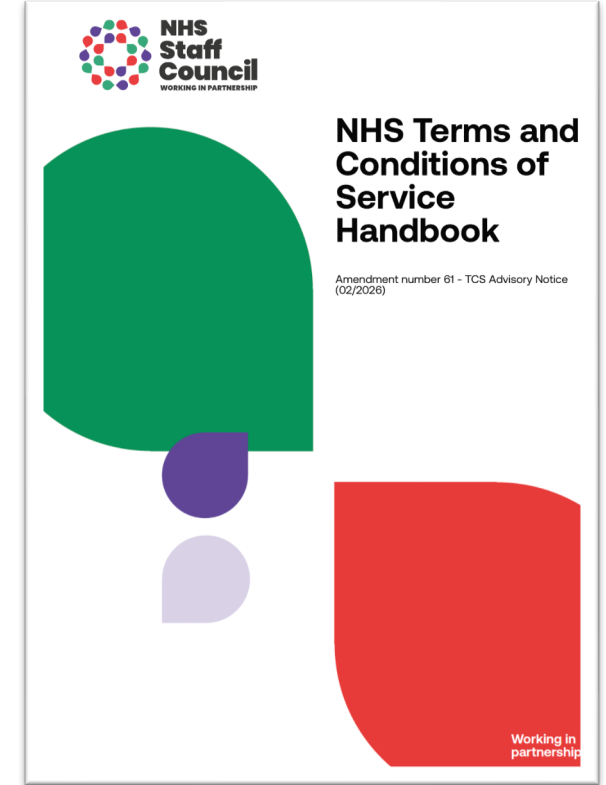
Introduction

This is the second webinar that we've done aimed at Unite reps in the NHS (in England).

The first session was on Annex 31, a new annex that has been added to the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook in England. If you missed that session, you can still catch up by watching the recording and reviewing the resources on the Unite website: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/annex31>

Following feedback after the first session, we decided that today's second session would be focused on how best to write a job description (JD) with a focus on what is needed for (NHS Job Evaluation Scheme) job evaluation purposes.

This session is based on NHS Employers 'Writing successful job descriptions': <https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/writing-successful-job-descriptions>



What is a job description

A JD is an essential document for every position in the NHS. It is needed to fulfil several purposes:

- for recruitment
- for job evaluation
- for performance management

Today we'll be focusing on the second of these, for job evaluation in the NHS Job Evaluation Scheme (JES). The JES measures the skills, responsibilities and effort required for a job in order to allocate it to a pay band. It uses consistent criteria across the wide range of NHS jobs in order to ensure pay parity and avoid equal pay challenges.

Trained job evaluation (JE) panellists use agreed job information when undertaking job evaluation (or matching to national profiles). Part of this information is an agreed job description that gives sufficient information for the panel to understand the responsibilities of the job and the skills required to do it.



What is a job description (2)

Therefore, the JD considered by a JE panel needs to:

- describe the skills and responsibilities needed to perform the role
- define where the job fits within the overall company hierarchy
- outline the types of activities a post-holder is expected to do and decisions they may need to make
- outline the autonomy a post-holder has in undertaking the duties required by the role.

Whilst the JD is a key document for job evaluation, it does not need to be written to follow and give information on each the 16 factors of the NHS JES.

National job profiles **are not** job descriptions.

Job descriptions **do not** need to look like a national job profile.



The key to writing successful job descriptions

Do not use words and phrases taken straight from the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook or national job evaluation profiles. Many of the phrases that are used in profiles and the factor plan are defined within the NHS JE handbook and may not make sense by themselves in a job description.

A JD describes a role while the JE profile is used for analysing the information on the JD and therefore should not be the same. Where the language is the same as the JE profile, the JD is likely to be rejected by the panel. However, you can look at profiles to get an idea about the expectations and differentiation between profiles at different bands.

There are some factors that would not be expected to be covered in a JD, such as effort factors. There is provision for collecting that information in the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook either by using partnership job analysts or by agreeing a pro forma for the jobholder and their line manager to complete.



The key to writing successful job descriptions (2)

Line managers writing or reviewing job descriptions are encouraged to work with their organisation's job evaluation leads. They will be able to ensure that the contents of the JD are clear for job matching purposes.

Job evaluation and matching panels also consider the person specification drawn up for recruitment purposes. However, panellists need to be aware that the main purpose of the person specification is recruitment, to assess the skills and experience necessary to recruit someone into the role and to assist with shortlisting. Job evaluation measures the role, not the person in the role – so panels need to take care when assessing skills and knowledge where this needs to be learnt on the job and is not stated as an “essential criteria”. In some roles, qualifications are necessary in order to register to practice, but for many roles there will be alternative ways of showing competence.



The key to writing successful job descriptions (3)

The job description considered by a job evaluation panel needs to:



describe the skills and responsibilities needed to perform the role



outline the types of activities a post-holder is expected to do and decisions they may need to make



outline the autonomy a post-holder has in undertaking the duties required by the role



not use words and phrases taken straight from the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook that require a definition



define where the job fits within the overall company hierarchy



not look like a national job profile.



Top tips – Ensure the job title is correct

The first important element of a JD is the job title, which should have the following qualities:

- It accurately reflects the nature of the job and the duties performed.
- It reflects its ranking order with other jobs.
- It is free of gender or age implications.
- It is self-explanatory for recruitment purposes (in most online job searches, the job title is the main key word searched).

Describe what the service needs, not what you want

Never write a job description with a person in mind. The most important aspect of a JD is that it reflects what the service needs.

Describe the main purpose of the job

This should be the essence of the role, for example to provide HR advice to managers. Just concentrate on the main reason for the job existing, you will be able to add specific tasks and responsibilities in the next section.



Top tips – Set out the main tasks and responsibilities clearly and factually

The job description should contain a list of duties and responsibilities associated with the role. You could indicate the amount of time expected to be dedicated to each task, which should be represented as a percentage, for example:

- filing 20 per cent
- data entry 40 per cent.

Descriptions of duties should be no more than two or three sentences in length and should be outcome-based, containing an action, an object and a purpose. For example: ‘Compiles monthly reports to allow monitoring of the department’s budget’.

- Use examples to illustrate where possible. Make sure responsibilities are relevant.
- The list of duties and responsibilities will vary in length, but as a rule, should be as short as possible, otherwise the document becomes an operational manual rather than a job description.
- Keep it factual and do not repeat tasks/responsibilities. Avoid gender specific or discriminatory language.



Top tips – Include an organisational structure chart and set out who the job holder reports to and who reports to the job holder

As well as being helpful for a job evaluation panel to understand how departments are structured and how roles are interfaced, it also confirms to prospective candidates where their job will sit in the service/department.

Do not ask for years of experience

Asking for many years of experience may fall foul of both age discrimination and gender discrimination law, as it could prevent younger people and women from applying for certain jobs.

Instead of specifying years of experience or service, which is time-based so potentially indirectly age discriminatory, employers should specify the type, breadth or level of experience needed for the particular job and the skills and competencies required.

Use plain English

Remember to use straightforward, phrases and sentences, avoid abbreviations and always explain what you mean by your terminology.



Advice from JEG for NHS employers recruiting jobs defined or described by other organisations

The following advice was produced by the NHS Job Evaluation Group (JEG), a sub-group of the NHS Staff Council, to support employers when using a JD that has been developed and banded by another organisation, for example:

- Using a job description written by a neighbouring NHS body (such as NHS Jobs)
- Using template job descriptions from a national career framework (for example Integrated Urgent Care).
- Using job descriptions written to support national programme delivery (for example Covid vaccination).

In all these situations the employer must ensure that:

- they are satisfied and can prove that the job matches to a national profile or evaluates at the stated band AND
- the outcome is consistent with other jobs within that employer AND
- they have an audit trail demonstrating that the pay band can be justified.



Advice from JEG for NHS employers recruiting jobs defined or described by other organisations (2)

They should do this by undertaking a match or evaluation using a partnership panel of trained job practitioners following the process outlined in the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook.

After recruitment, should employers adapt or alter the job description they should review the job evaluation outcome as soon as possible. Importantly, employers should ensure they have a robust job evaluation audit trail for the banding outcomes attributed to the job descriptions used locally.

Employers should not rely on banding outcomes determined by other organisations. Using job information from other sources does not mean that employers are absolved of legal responsibility for matching and consistency checking the posts.

Where a national NHS body has engaged with the JEG for advice and support, JEG might undertake a mapping exercise to suggest what an indicative banding for the job description might be. This mapping process is not a full job evaluation and as such a local employer will still need to undertake their own local job evaluation to ensure that they meet their legal responsibility for ensuring equal pay.



Why does this matter?

- Accurate JDs should, more likely, lead to safe and correct initial Agenda for Change outcomes
- The NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook demands it, including:
 - Annex 31 - **18. Line managers are expected to:** work with staff to keep the job descriptions for roles under their management up to date/relevant – ideally annually but at least every three years
 - Annex 31 - **19. Staff have the right to:** have an up-to-date job description that reflects the full requirements of their role and that is reviewed at least every three years.



Why does this matter? (2)

- The NHS Job Evaluation Handbook demands it, including:
 - Chapter 10: Job descriptions and other job information
 - Chapter 3: Re-evaluation of changed jobs – “4.2 To make a request for re-evaluation or re-match the post holder must submit either an amended agreed job description, or agreed evidence showing which skills and responsibilities applicable to the post have changed. They should also provide details of the changed job demands that have led them to believe there is a change in factor levels. (note: It is advised that job descriptions are kept up to date with all changes whether they are deemed significant or not).”
 - A note on ‘new jobs’ (Chapter 3): 5.3 After recruitment, the organisation should allow a reasonable period of time for the job to ‘bed down’ and this may vary according to the nature of the job. Some posts may need a period of a few months, while others may be subject to seasonal variations requiring a full year to determine the full job demands. Once the full demands of the post are clear, the post-holder and/or their manager should review the job description and, if any changes are made to it, the job evaluation outcome must be reassessed using the matching or evaluation procedure as appropriate...



Questions?

