

## 1.8 Person Specification

*What knowledge, skills and abilities does a person require for the job?*

### *Why this is important*

It is important to clearly identify what sort of person is best suited to the role you have created, so that during the recruitment and selection process you will have a greater chance of objectively choosing the best applicant for your job. The person specification also allows an employer to identify values and traits that are important to themselves, and will therefore have an impact on creating a harmonious and effective working environment.

#### *This fact sheet will cover:*

- What is a person specification?
- Why is a person specification valuable?
- How to write a person specification
- Characteristics to be considered
- Linking a person specification to performance management
- Person specification examples
- Person specification template

### *What is a person specification?*

A person specification analyses the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the tasks, duties and responsibilities identified in the job description. It is used to objectively measure the suitability of a job applicant during the recruitment and selection process (see Recruitment and Selection Fact Sheet 2.1).

The person specification is usually intended for those carrying out the selection process and is not disclosed to applicants, although in some cases, where part of the specification is crucial to the role, it may be appropriate to disclose this.

A person specification links into the employment process as illustrated in the diagram below.



## Why is a person specification valuable?

A person specification helps:

- Identify the knowledge, skills and abilities required to do the job
- Provide objectivity in the selection process
- In writing advertisements
- Form the basis for subjective performance measures.

## How to write a person specification

There are many ways to write a person specification, provided the outcome identifies the knowledge, skills and abilities required. The analysis process may identify many criteria to be included, otherwise the following process can be used:

1. Brainstorm all the characteristics of the person who would be most suited to fill the job available and divide them into essential and preferred characteristics. These are discussed below in more detail.
2. As with the job analysis, involve others in clarifying requirements:
  - Get the current employee to help in the brainstorming
  - Spend time doing the job yourself
  - Use the manager of the position to brainstorm the role.
3. Compile a person specification using the template at the end of this fact sheet or make your own.

Characteristic	Essential	Preferred
<b>Physical</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to lift 50kg calves</li> </ul>
<b>Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 year milking experience</li> <li>• Identifying, treating and recording mastitis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 year on 500 cow (min) farm</li> </ul>
<b>Attitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On time</li> <li>• Positive attitude</li> <li>• Gives things a go</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows initiative</li> </ul>
<b>Qualifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full and current driver's license</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCA</li> <li>• Heavy traffic licence</li> </ul>
<b>Fit with team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to work with a team</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy to board with owner</li> </ul>	
<b>Etc...</b>		

### Essential versus preferred characteristics

Because it is unlikely any one person will entirely meet your specification, it is useful to differentiate between preferred and essential characteristics. A good question to ask is "Can this be taught?", and "How much will it cost?" If a skill can be taught at a reasonable cost then it is likely to be preferred rather than essential.

Other characteristics may also become preferred, rather than essential, if it is practicable to rearrange work methods. The example above, of being able to lift calves, may be overcome by having a loading race the calves can walk up onto the bobby trailer.

## Characteristics to be considered

There is a wide range of characteristics that may determine a person's suitability for a position. When writing the specification and considering characteristics, be open to change to avoid overlooking a good employee who doesn't quite fit the mould.

### Attitude

Attitude is relatively difficult to measure, but it is still an important quality in an employee. A good idea is to ask previous employers about the applicant's enthusiasm, their punctuality, general outlook on life, whether they are a positive or negative person, etc. The interviewer's 'gut feel' during the interview is also valuable.

Remember, attitude is not about whether the applicant laughs at your jokes!

### Fit with the team

How well is the applicant likely to fit in with the existing team in terms of attitude, habits and cleanliness? For example, have they worked in a team before and are they happy to take instructions?

### Farming philosophies

Is the applicant a cow or machinery-oriented person? Do they believe in high or low-input farming and will that influence the way they work?

### Initiative

Can they identify work that needs to be carried out and do it without prompting?

### Flexibility

How routine is the role? Would they be the sort of person who could manage changes in their daily work routine? Would they need to be able to cope with a lot of change, or is it a role with a lot of routine work?

### Time management

Does the role require the person to time-manage effectively?

### Communication skills

Consider the level of written and oral reporting required.

### Experience

What sort of work history should the person demonstrate? Is experience necessary at all or can the tasks be taught easily?

### Qualifications

What, if any, qualifications are required to carry out the role?

### Physical abilities

The job may have some physical demands that mean a certain level of fitness or strength is required. On this basis you may ask about health but otherwise it is discrimination (see Legal Responsibilities Fact Sheet 1.1).

### Other considerations

There may be special requirements that don't fit into other headings: for example, the ability to travel away from home.

### Discrimination in the person specification

The specification must not include anything that is not related to the job performance, as this is considered discrimination. For this reason personal characteristics such as marital status, gender, age, ethnicity or personality that cannot reasonably be expected to predict success in the job must not be included in a person specification.

## Linking a person specification to performance management

A person specification is one place where an employer is likely to highlight some of the values of the organisation. These values should be turned into subjective performance measures and included in performance objectives (see Performance Management Fact Sheet). For example, the ability to work in a team is hard to measure objectively but may be one of the most important issues in terms of farm profitability.

## Budget

When going through the person specification it pays to keep the budget in mind, as this will influence the type of person employed. For example, there is no point in creating a person specification asking for feed budgeting skills and people management experience if there is only \$25,000 in the budget for salary.

## What are the benefits to me?

The benefits of preparing a person specification are:

- A better understanding of the role and the person required to fill it
- A tool that can help in drafting advertisements
- A tool that can help select the best person for the job.

## What do I do next?

- Make person specifications for the job roles on the farm
- Use person specifications when recruiting and selecting staff.

## Useful references

There are a number of rural professionals who specialise in the area of recruitment and selection of farm staff. They will be able to assist in this process or carry out the process on your behalf.



This fact sheet is part of DairyNZ's HR Toolkit - a guide to the fundamentals in establishing successful employment relationships. To access the full HR Toolkit please visit the DairyNZ website at [www.dairynz.co.nz](http://www.dairynz.co.nz)

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