NSW GOVERNMENT | Public Service Commission

Role description development guidelines

Contents

1 Role description

overview

This guide is designed to help NSW public sector agencies develop role descriptions that clearly explain the purpose and functions of a role and set appropriate standards for workforce management activities.

The role description is the basis for the following:

- Job evaluation
- Explaining the role to employees, managers and job applicants
- Determining assessment standards for recruitment and mobility
- Informing performance agreements and reviews
- Identifying learning and development activities
- Planning career development and progression.

About role descriptions

Role descriptions should give clear and practical information about a role including the occupation and organisational context.

NSW public sector role descriptions should generally include the following information:

- Details of the organisation
- Primary purpose of the role
- Key accountabilities
- Key challenges
- Key relationships
- Role dimensions
- Key knowledge and experience
- Essential requirements
- Capabilities for the role

These sections are explained in detail within this guide.

Generic role descriptions are best developed where multiple of the same type of roles exist (such as policy, finance or project type roles). Minor changes can be made to these to suit specific role requirements.

Role descriptions should not include short-term time-limited projects or goals that may soon become out of date. It is better to place these projects in performance agreements.

Sector role descriptions

The Public Service Commission has a library of sector role descriptions that have been developed to maximise efficiency, promote sector-wide consistency and help facilitate employee mobility. Information on how to use or adapt these is in the *Sector role description guide* and the *Sector role description FAQs* at: www.psc.nsw.gov.au.

If no suitable role description is available in the library, check for role descriptions for equivalent roles in your agency, cluster or other sector agencies.

Reviewing role descriptions

Role descriptions need regular review. A role vacancy is an opportunity to:

- ensure the role is structured to best deliver organisational objectives
- consider if the role is still appropriate in its current form or if a different role or combination of roles (varying the classification) would better meet organisational needs.

Role description template

The role description template has been designed to help agencies create consistent and comprehensive role descriptions. The template includes:

- **Mandatory fields –** These apply to all roles. They are marked with an asterisk (*) throughout this guide
- **Non-mandatory fields** – These only apply to some roles (e.g. *direct reports* or *budget* in the *key dimensions* section only apply to roles that have these responsibilities).

2 Work level standards

for NSW Public Service senior executive roles

Role descriptions for NSW Public Service senior executive (PSSE) roles should be based on the *NSW Public Service senior executive work level standards* (WLS).

The WLS indicate, in broad terms, the work expected to be performed at each of the PSSE bands across the NSW Public Service (except for Band 4, which applies to Department Secretaries). The *NSW Public Sector Capability Framework* (www.psc.nsw.gov.au/capabilityframework) works in conjunction with the WLS.

The NSW Public Service comprises a wide range of role types at the senior executive level. These are distinguished in the WLS by the following five work contribution streams:

- Service/operational delivery roles
- Policy roles
- Regulatory/compliance roles
- Professional/technical/specialist roles
- Agency head

When drafting a PSSE role description, ensure the wording of the *primary purpose, key accountabilities, key challenges* and *key relationships* sections reflects the size, scope and impact of the role, as described in the relevant WLS band description. The following examples show how the WLS can be reflected in role descriptions.

The *NSW Public Sector Capability Framework* does not align capabilities to bands or executive levels. The capabilities and levels required for a role should be determined with reference to the context of the role, *key accountabilities*, the job environment and organisational requirements.

Examples

This example of a Director (PSSE Band 1) role description is adapted from the wording used in the WLS to describe the *accountability factor* within WLS Band 1 *distinguishing characteristics.*

Work Level Standard ⇨	***Role Description***
WLS Band 1 (Accountability Factor)	***Director, Band 1 Role Description (Key Accountability)***
Effective leadership and management of a clearly defined area of organisational activity.	Lead and direct strategic policy, legislation and program development for the department to ensure that policy and legislative objectives are achieved.

The next example uses the language from the *key relationships factor* of the Band 2 *distinguishing characteristics* in an Executive Director (PSSE Band 2) role description.

Work Level Standard ⇨	***Role Description***
WLS Band 2 (Key Relationships Factor)	***Executive Director, Band 2 Role Description (Key Relationships)***
They may act as a principal representative of the organisation and government and an advocate of key positions and strategies, at peak council level.	Represent the NSW Government at cross-government, cross-jurisdictional and outside-of-government meetings, on state and national committees and working parties, and at related forums, advocating and articulating the NSW Government's position and interests.

The *WLS* are available on the PSC website (www.psc.nsw.gov.au).

3 Role description

content

- Role information
- Department / agency overview
- Primary purpose of the role
- Key accountabilities
- Key challenges
- Key relationships
- Role dimensions
- Key knowledge and experience
- Essential requirements
- Capabilities for the role

All parts of the role description help to provide a complete picture of the role.

Each section should have meaningful content to assist employees, managers and job applicants understand the role.

Duplication across sections should be avoided.

3.1 Role information*

The *role information* section of the role description has the following key information:

- Role title*
- Cluster
- Department/agency
- Division/branch/unit
- Classification/grade/band*
- Executive work level standards *(roles are categorised according to five contribution streams)*
- Role number
- ANZSCO code* – Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations *(a role occupation code included in the NSW Public Sector Workforce Profile Data Collection)*
- PCAT* – Position Coding Automated Tool

  (a role function code included in the NSW Public Sector Workforce Profile Data Collection)
- Date of approval* *(i.e. date of approval of the completed role description)*
- Agency website link.

Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk (*) throughout this guide

3.2 Department/agency overview

Provide a statement of up to two paragraphs about the department or agency and its purpose, including a link to the website.

Example of agency overview

NSW Public Service Commission

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is a separate agency under the Government Sector Employment Act 2013 that supports the independent Public Service Commissioner in exercising his/her functions and powers.

The PSC leads the design, development and implementation of workforce management strategies, including those relating to workforce capability, recruitment, performance management and workforce planning.

Agency website: www.psc.nsw.gov.au

3.3 Primary purpose of the role*

Provide a short, concise paragraph summarising why the role exists. Outline how the role assists the organisation in achieving its objectives, rather than the tasks it undertakes.

Example of primary purpose

Director – Policy role

The Director, Policy provides leadership and direction for developing and implementing strategic and innovative policies to achieve organisational objectives and align with government priorities.

3.4 Key accountabilities*

The *key accountabilities* section gives a high-level description of the outcomes the role is expected to deliver. It should not be a list of tasks.

Use dot points to describe the most important parts of the role. Avoid defining every aspect of the role or duplicating information from other parts of the role description.

As a guide, include no more than eight *key accountabilities*.

Key accountabilities should be:

- Outcomes-based, not process-focused
- Ordered by what is most important to the success of the role
- As specific as possible, while not detailing tasks.

Examples of key accountabilities

Systems Administrator

Proactively identifying business risks and opportunities to continually improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Policy Officer

Preparing advice, discussion papers, briefs and submissions to contribute to the development of policies and initiatives.

Executive Officer

Preparing and coordinating strategic advice, research, information and reports on diverse and complex policy, planning and operational matters.

Executive Director, Policy

Providing strategic leadership in developing and delivering policies for investment in NSW that have positive economic outcomes for the community.

The role's relationships should generally be included in the *key relationships* section of the role description. For any specific relationships mentioned in the *key accountabilities* section, focus on the outcomes delivered through those relationships (e.g. leading a team to deliver an organisational outcome).

3.5 Key challenges*

The role's *key challenges* describe the major complexities faced by the role. *Key challenges* inform job evaluation and are an important consideration when selecting the capability levels required for the role.

Summarise and list the key challenges that the role will regularly encounter (not those that happen occasionally). Describe **what** the challenges or complexities of the role are and **why** they are challenging.

Avoid including business-as-usual activities or restating the role's *key accountabilities*.

Provide two or three *key challenges* for the role. The number of key challenges does not need to match the number of *key accountabilities*.

Examples of key challenges

Systems Administrator

Dealing with a diverse range of projects requiring strategic advice or quality assurance given tight timeframes.

Policy Officer

Contributing to policies that balance complex and multiple issues requiring sensitivity to stakeholder relationships and service delivery impacts.

Executive Officer

Managing a heavy workload with tight deadlines and competing commitments and priorities which require negotiating and re-prioritising own work and Director's schedule.

Executive Director, Policy

Supporting the Minister in developing the reform agenda while managing matters with political interest and public visibility, including issues that are highly sensitive and may impact the community, industry, economy, and environment.

3.6 Key relationships*

Key relationships are the routine (rather than periodic) interactions with key stakeholders and customers.

These relationships are important for understanding the nature of the interpersonal skills required to successfully perform the role.

Who – include relationships with internal and external stakeholders of the department or agency. All roles require interaction with internal stakeholders, but some roles may not interact with external stakeholders. As a minimum, a role will have an internal relationship with its manager and work team.

Why – explain the role's relationship with its manager and any direct reports. This is important for performance development. Show functions of the role such as providing and receiving continuous feedback and facilitating ongoing communication.

Examples of key relationships

Human Resources Consultant

Who (i.e. who is the relationship with)	**Why** (i.e. purpose of the relationship)
Internal*	
Manager	* Escalate issues, keep informed, advise and receive instructions. * Provide regular updates on key projects, issues and priorities.
Portfolio directors and managers	* Provide expert human resources advice, assistance and support.
People and Culture team	* Ensure an integrated approach to cross-organisational initiatives.
Agency staff	* Provide consulting services that support organisational objectives and employee performance and development.
Work team	* Provide direction and manage performance. * Review the work and proposals of team members. * Obtain the work group perspective and share information.
External	
Employee representatives	* Carry out consultation, liaison and negotiation.
Industry professionals/consultants	* Seek and maintain specialist knowledge and advice. * Collaborate on the implementation of organisational strategies. * Keep up to date on best practice in Human Resource management.

Project Manager ICT

Who (i.e. who is the relationship with)	**Why** (i.e. purpose of the relationship)
Internal*	
Manager	* Escalate issues, keep informed, advise and receive instructions.
	* Participate in meetings to represent the work group's perspective and share information.
	* Participate in discussions and decisions regarding innovation and the implementation of best practice.
Work team	* Provide direction and manage performance.
External	
Vendors/service providers	* Manage contracts and monitor the provision of services to ensure compliance with contracts and service agreements.
	* Provide and gather information and resolve routine issues.

3.7 Role dimensions

Role dimensions describe where the role sits in the organisation in relation to:

- **Decision making**

  Decision making responsibilities of the role and formal delegations under an Act or departmental policy.

- **Reporting line**

  To whom the role reports.

- **Direct reports**

  The number of staff reporting directly to the role. Role titles and role classification/grade/band may be included in this section, along with indirect reporting arrangements.

  If there are no direct reports, enter 'nil' in this section to give clarity to evaluators and applicants.

- **Budget**

  The size of the budget/expenditure.

  If the role has no budget/expenditure, enter 'nil' in this section to give clarity to evaluators and applicants.

The role dimensions may change over time so keep specific details to a minimum.

3.8 Key knowledge and experience

Knowledge and experience requirements should be included when they:

- Are needed for successful performance in the role
- Are not captured by capabilities from the *Capability Framework* or occupation-specific capability sets
- Cannot be developed on the job in a reasonable timeframe.

Qualifications or certifications required to perform the role are not considered to be knowledge and experience. If essential to performing the role, these should be included in the *essential requirements* section of the role description.

When to include knowledge and experience

Weigh up if knowledge and experience requirements are necessary for performing the role. Consider:

- The potential for knowledge and experience transfer within and between occupations.
  For example, having policy experience may be enough to perform successfully in most policy roles with subject matter knowledge developed on the job
- If knowledge and experience are vital for performing the role and cannot be developed on the job.

  For example, having experience specifically in family law litigation may be vital for a senior solicitor leading the family law practice
- If knowledge and experience could be included in the job ad rather than in the role description.
  This is usually when knowledge and experience are desirable rather than necessary.

When included in the role description, knowledge and experience requirements form part of the standards for the role and need to be assessed at recruitment.

How to describe knowledge and experience

Knowledge and experience requirements should be limited to one or two criteria critical for the role. Express in terms of depth, breadth and context (see below) rather than as a length of time.

If there are no knowledge and experience requirements, delete this section in the role description.

Depth	**Depth of experience or knowledge shows a high degree of demonstrated specialised expertise in, or knowledge of, a discipline**
	Examples: • Principal Auditor – Extensive knowledge of and experience in conducting technical compliance audits • Senior Employee Relations Advisor – Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the evolution of employment law, legislation and the industrial framework
Breadth	**Breadth of experience is often shown in wide-ranging proficiencies across different streams of an occupation(s)**
	Examples: • HR Business Partner – Experience in delivering integrated advice and services across a full range of Human Resources programs • Senior Project Engineer – Experience in delivering high-quality buildings and infrastructure compliant with specifications, quality, safety and environmental standards, time and budget constraints, legislative requirements, grant conditions and client expectations
Context	**Context relates to the experience or knowledge gained in a specific setting (e.g. a specialised industry setting)**
	Examples: • Senior IT Business Analyst – Current knowledge of and experience in using web-enabled consumer service delivery and eCommerce applications • Client Services Manager – Knowledge of appropriate strategies for and experience in managing the delivery of advice and information services to clients with disabilities

3.9 Essential requirements

Essential requirements are those without which it would not be possible to fulfill the functions of the role. They relate to **what** must be accomplished (results), rather than **how** it is accomplished (means). For example, 'ability to type' may not be essential when voice recognition could achieve the same outcome.

Essential role requirements may include:

- qualifications or certifications needed to practise such as a practising certificate for a legal role
- licensing or registration
- employment screening checks (such as a criminal record check or working with children check)
- security and other clearances
- health assessments and fitness requirements
- identifying with a diversity group for identified or targeted roles (e.g. an Aboriginal identified role has Aboriginality as an essential requirement as all or most of the work involves developing and deliveringpolicy, programs and services that affect Aboriginal people or liaising directly with Aboriginal people and communities).

If there are no *essential requirements* for the role, enter ‘nil’ in this section.

3.10 Capabilities for the role*

NSW Public Sector Capability Framework

The *Capability Framework* has four groups of capabilities that apply to most public sector employees:

- *Personal attributes*
- *Relationships*
- *Results*
- *Business enablers.*

There is also a p*eople management* group of capabilities for managers.

The capability groups work together to provide an understanding of the capabilities (knowledge, skills and abilities) commonly needed to work effectively in the public sector.

Three of the capability groups – *personal attributes, relationships* and *results* – apply to all public sector roles, across all classifications/grades/bands and all occupations.

The *business enablers* group of capabilities relate to processes and tools that people in the sector need to perform their work and deliver services. Most roles require some business enabler capabilities but there are exceptions. Consider the work performed by the role to decide which of these apply.

The *people management* group of capabilities apply to roles that manage employees or teams.

Occupation-specific capabilities

Many roles require capabilities that are specific to an occupation in addition to the core capabilities in the *Capability Framework*. Occupation-specific capability sets are available for roles that are common across the sector.

Agencies may also use their own occupation specific capability sets or external frameworks (such as cross-jurisdictional standards or those offered by professional associations).

Occupation-specific capability sets should be used in tandem with the *Capability Framework.* Where the capabilities overlap, agencies should use the capabilities from the *Capability Framework.*

Assigning capabilities and levels to a role description

Step 1	*Select capabilities from Capability Framework*

Work progressively through each capability group and consider the capabilities needed to perform the role.

There is the option to select ‘not essential’ in the *capability level* column where b*usiness enabler* capabilities are not required to perform the role. These capabilities may still be considered for development purposes.

Carefully consider the work the role will perform before identifying a *business enabler* capability as not essential.

Step 2	*Determine the levels for each capability*

Each capability has five levels showing a progressive increase in complexity and skill from foundational to highly advanced. The cumulative nature of capability levels mean that a person should be able to show the behaviours required for each level up to and including the capability level applied to the role.

Work progressively through the capabilities to decide the level for each capability. The behavioural indicators will help you with this. They describe the types of behaviours or actions that suggest effective performance at each capability level.

The behavioural indicators help to give a deeper understanding of the capability and level. Not all indicators will necessarily apply to a role. The level selected should be the best fit for the role. The indicators should be considered in the context of the work being performed when using them for workforce management activities such as recruitment assessments and performance development.

Whilst some of the indicators may not apply to a role, they should still be included in the role description.

The capability level chosen should relate to the role's:

- Primary purpose
- Key accountabilities
- Key challenges
- Key relationships.

Note that capability levels do not determine the grade of the role. Each role may require capabilities at different levels depending on the nature of the work. For example, a Principal Research Scientist role may need *think and solve problems* at the *highly advanced* level while a Band 2 Executive Director may need this capability at the *advanced* level depending on the role.

Consider the spread of capability levels selected:

- Roles are unlikely to require all capabilities at the same level, but the spread should generally not exceed three consecutive levels
- Roles at the lower and higher ends of the organisation may only need capabilities across two consecutive levels.

The PSC’s *Capability comparison guide* gives an indication of the number or range of capabilities at each capability level by classification or band and may help to inform your decision-making.

Step 3 — *Decide if occupation-specific capabilities apply*

Consider if the role requires occupation-specific capabilities in addition to the capabilities from the *Capability Framework.* Consult with the agency's Human Resources team for advice on sector, agency or externally developed occupation-specific capability sets that might apply to the role.

Generally, no more than one occupation-specific capability set should apply to a role. The capabilities should relate to the main profession or job family. For example, an Executive Director, Corporate Services cannot be expected to be a specialist in numerous professional areas such as Legal, Finance and Human Resources.

Step 4 — *Decide on focus capabilities and complementary capabilities*

The capabilities are separated into two sections in the role description: *focus capabilities* and *complementary capabilities.*

Focus capabilities

Focus capabilities are the capabilities that the employer has decided are the most important for the effective performance of the role. They are identified from the *Capability Framework* and occupation-specific capability set (when used). The capability level and behavioural indicators for focus capabilities are included in full in the role description.

Focus capabilities form part of the standards for the role and **must** be assessed at recruitment under rule 3 of the Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014.

Complementary capabilities

Complementary capabilities are identified from the *Capability Framework* and relevant occupation-specific capability sets. They are important to performing the role. They contribute to employee performance and career development but are not necessarily assessed at recruitment – this is a decision for agencies.

Determining the focus capabilities

The following principles apply to determining focus capabilities for a role:

1. A minimum of three and a maximum of 10 focus capabilities should apply to a role. If the role contains *people management* capabilities, a minimum of four focus capabilities should apply
2. At least one focus capability from each of the *personal attributes, relationships* and *results* capability groups should be included
3. Focus capabilities may be selected from the *business enablers* group, but this is not a requirement
4. Where a role manages people, at least one focus capability should be included from the *people management* group
5. More than one focus capability can be selected from each group
6. Occupation-specific capabilities can be selected as focus capabilities and are included as part of the total number of focus capabilities for a role
7. The focus capability from each capability group does not need to be the capability at the highest level.

The balance between the number of focus capabilities selected from the *Capability Framework* and any occupation-specific capability sets depends on the role and is determined by the agency.

While capability levels will not change unless there is a significant change in the role, the focus capabilities may need to be reconsidered from time to time. For example, when:

- organisational or work unit priorities change; or
- capability strengths and gaps in the existing workforce change.

Determining the capabilities and levels for the role – summary

1 Select capabilities from Capability Framework

Work progressively through each capability group and consider the capabilities needed to perform the role.

There is the option to select ‘not essential’ in the *capability level* column where *business enabler* capabilities are not required to perform the role. These capabilities may still be considered for development purposes.

Carefully consider the work the role will perform before identifying a *business enabler* capability as not essential.

2 Determine levels for each capability

Determine the appropriate level for each capability. The level for capabilities from the *Capability Framework* and occupation-specific capability sets should be based on the role’s:

- Primary purpose
- Key accountabilities
- Key challenges
- Key relationships

3 Decide if occupation-specific capabilities apply

Consider if the role requires occupation-specific capabilities in addition to the capabilities from the *Capability Framework*. Consult with your agency’s HR team for advice on sector, agency or externally developed occupation-specific capability sets that might be relevant. Generally, no more than one occupation-specific capability set should apply to a role.

4 Decide on focus and complementary capabilities

Capabilities are separated into two sections within the role description:

focus capabilities and *complementary capabilities.*

Focus capabilities are those capabilities that the employer has decided are the most important for the effective performance of the role. They form part of the standards for the role and **must** be assessed at recruitment.

Complementary capabilities are those that are important to performing the role, although some may be developed on the job. They contribute to employee performance and career development and may be assessed at recruitment.