



## NOTES

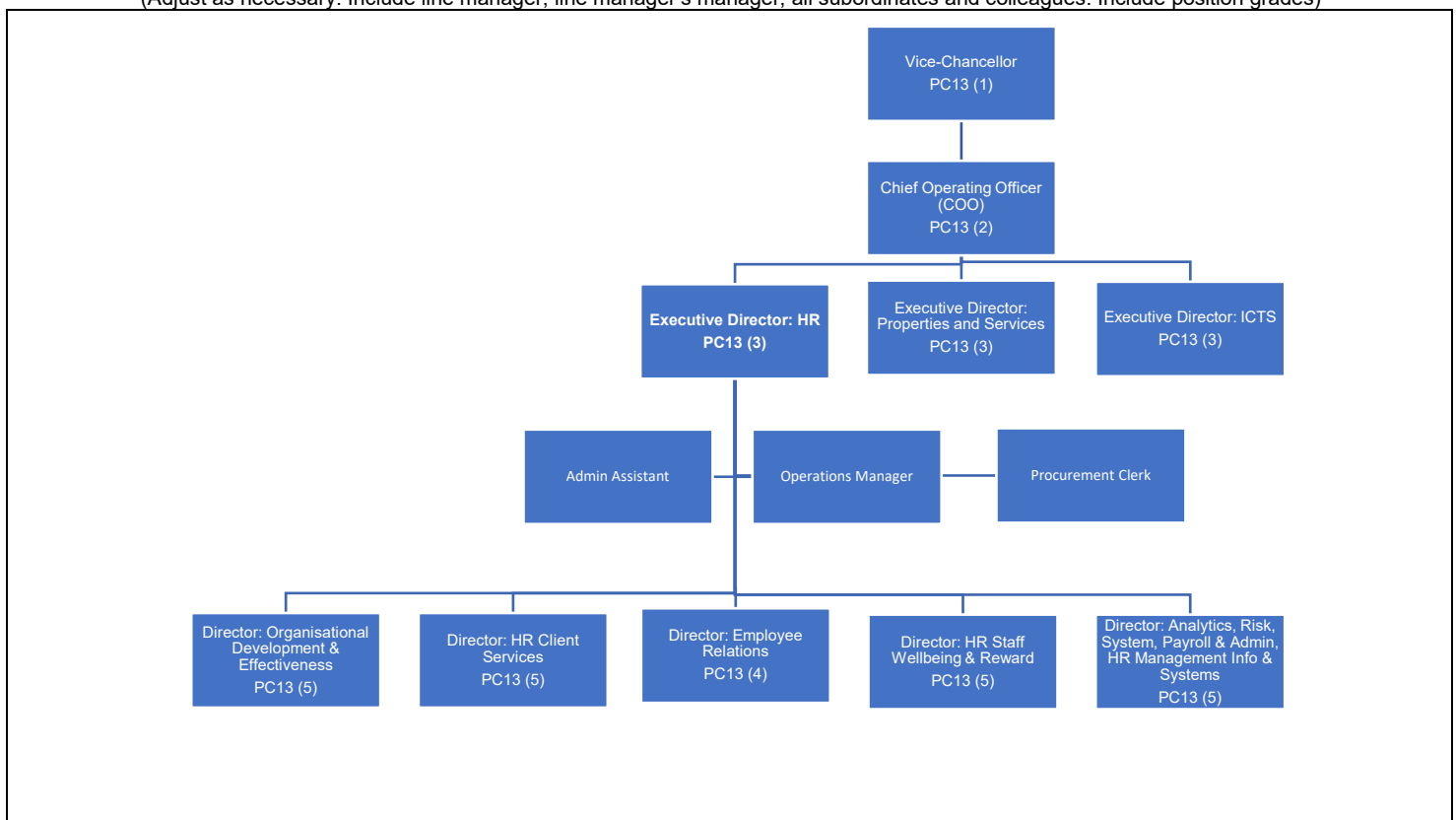
- Forms must be downloaded from the UCT website: <http://forms.uct.ac.za/forms.htm>
- This form serves as a template for the writing of position descriptions.
- A copy of this form is kept by the line manager and the position holder.

## POSITION DETAILS

Position title	Executive Director: Human Resources (HR)		
Job title (HR Business Partner to provide)	Executive Director		
Position grade (if known)	PC13 (3)	Date last graded (if known)	
Academic faculty / PASS department	UCT Human Resources		
Academic department / PASS unit			
Division / section			
Date of compilation	November 2022		

## ORGANOGRAM

(Adjust as necessary. Include line manager, line manager's manager, all subordinates and colleagues. Include position grades)



## PURPOSE

The Executive Director is responsible for providing strategic direction to the institution for its Human Resources requirements through the development and implementation of an institution-wide human capital management strategy working closely with the University Executive to strategically position UCT as an internationally recognised institution and an Employer of Choice. This position is to ensure the leadership and management of the University's HR Department and services are aligned with the University's Strategic Vision 2030.

The Executive Director: HR is to nurture an inclusive working environment that attracts and retains suitably qualified and diverse staff. The Executive Director: HR reporting line is to the Chief Operating Officer of the University.

### **HR Service, Structure and Stakeholder Management**

UCT has devolved significant accountability and responsibility for line management and operational authority to the Deans and Executive Directors and other levels of line management of the faculties and administrative departments. In this regard, HR plays a strategic, advisory and support role to its clients, which include line management and staff members, to enable the execution of the accountabilities and responsibilities through its client-centric model. The HR reporting structure may be found at [http://www.hr.uct.ac.za/hr/about/dept\\_structure](http://www.hr.uct.ac.za/hr/about/dept_structure). HR also plays a key role in developing and maintaining sound stakeholder relationships with its clients, unions and other parties such as service providers. This role has oversight and accountability for the service, structure, and stakeholder relationships.

**CONTENT**

Key performance areas		% of time spent	Inputs (Responsibilities / activities / processes/ methods used)	Outputs (Expected results)
E.g.	General and office administration	25%	<p>Takes, types up and distributes minutes and agendas for monthly departmental meeting.</p> <p>Greets visitors, enquires as to the nature of their visit and directs them to the appropriate staff member.</p>	<p>All staff members receive an electronic copy of accurate minutes and agendas, in the departmental template/format, a week before the meeting.</p> <p>Visitors are directed to appropriate staff member in a professional and efficient manner.</p>
1	<b>Strategy, Governance and Risk – Development, Review, and Implement HR Strategies and Business Continuity and Risk mitigation</b>	20%	<p><b>1.1 UCT Vision 2030 (V2030) and achievement of the Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop, review and implement HR Strategies, frameworks and policies to enable V2030. Review existing HR Work Plan 2022-2024 and set a strategic and Operational HR Work Plan for 2025-2027 to ensure that all HR strategies, policies, and projects are aligned to the V2030 and support the achievement of the MTP of “unleashing human potential for a fair and just society”.</li> <li>Contribute to UCT’s Vision 2030 Task Team, Research Group, Future of Work Reference Group and Executive V2030 Projects by providing inputs to the work of these groups and the V2030 consultants on an ongoing basis, considering points of intersection and alignment between Vision 2030 and the UCT staff strategy and how HR can be an enabler for the people strategies developed as part of this journey.</li> <li>Provide direction, oversight, and inputs to the development of HR policies and processes</li> </ul> <p><b>1.2 Business continuity (BC) and risk mitigation (RM) in the context of a changing University:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to discussions and formulation of proposals for the attention of the Executive in the context of a changing university</li> <li>Provide leadership, support and input into rethinking HR strategy, policies, procedures and the differentiated approaches required</li> <li>As part of the National HR Directors Forum for HEI, contribute to discussions and formulation of proposals for consideration by USAF.</li> </ul> <p><b>1.3 Sound governance oversight and decision making:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide leadership and oversight for support provided to HR committees of Council and inputs to the reports which are drafted by the Directors for meetings.</li> <li>Co-author annual reports of respective HR Council Committee Chairs with the Director Wellness and Rewards.</li> <li>Duly exercise Council approved ED:HR delegations of authority for university wide HR processes in faculties and PASS departments. Examples include offers of appointment, terminations, pre-suspensions and suspensions,</li> </ul>	<p>Implement UCT HR Work Plan 2022-2025 Develop UCT HR Work Plan 2025-2027 (and subsequent plans as is appropriate) which maps HR strategies, policies, procedures, and projects and timelines are aligned to V2030. UCT HR Work Plan 2025-2027 to be completed by end February 2025.</p> <p>Ongoing inputs and insights including planning of HR interventions and change processes including regular meetings with V2030 consultants.</p> <p>Ensure that there is BC with little to no interruption and risk to UCT being successfully mitigated.</p> <p>Council committees are duly supported to further the UCT HR strategy.</p> <p>Annual Reports for Council. Annual Reports of the relevant Council Committees including the University Remuneration Committee and the University Human Resources Committee (UHRC).</p> <p>Council approved ED:HR delegations duly executed.</p>

		<p>appointments without advertisement, additional appointments, various types of leave conversions, additional payments, post-retirement appointments.</p> <p><b>1.4 Risk Identification and Mitigation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular review the UCT HR Risk Register (HRRR).</li> <li>• Report and present the HRRR to the relevant UCT Risk Committees for approval.</li> <li>• Review and advise on the HR components of the UCT Strategic Risk Register where required.</li> </ul> <p><b>1.5 HR Analytics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with external partner providers for HR towards shaping the future of work for UCT in alignment with V2030.</li> <li>• Develop Requests for Proposal where required to identify value add HR partnering with relevant providers.</li> <li>• Provide oversight and guidance for the development and design of HR analytics reports for UCT and assess possibilities in accordance with automation projects.</li> <li>• Prepare submissions and provide support to the University Executive iro and requests for information for the IF, Senate and Council and Faculty Board meetings as required</li> </ul> <p><b>1.6 Automation Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide oversight and ongoing support to the Director HR Analytics, Risk, Payroll, Systems and Administration, for the full scope of automation projects underway during the cycle towards the achievement of the overall automation strategy for HR services to UCT in alignment with V2030.</li> <li>• Provide oversight and support with respect to legal agreements and contracts with service providers.</li> <li>• Provide oversight and support for matters considered by the Project Steering Committee.</li> <li>• Fulfill strategic project role and contribute to the deliberations of the Steering Committee</li> </ul> <p><b>1.7 Participation in Committees and Sub-committees of Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair the UCT Employee Relations Management Committee (ERMC) which is a subcommittee of the University Human Resources Committee (UHRC)</li> <li>• Contribute to, participate in and make presentations or report on matters where required, to the relevant committee including but not limited to the University Human Resources Committee, University Remuneration Committee, University Audit and Risk Committee, University Finance Committee and University Social, Ethics and Transformation Committee, University Building and Development (and its sub-committee the Space Allocation Committee), University Information and Communication Technology Committee</li> </ul>	<p>UCT HRRR completed and approved which comprehensively details current/inherent/residual risk ratings, risk owners and actions plans to mitigate risks effectively</p> <p>Annual engagements plan</p> <p>Regular HR Information Reports as per an agreed schedule.</p> <p>HR automation services implementation plan with a monitoring and evaluation framework in accordance with specific project plans for the defined streams of automation.</p> <p>Regular and Annual Reports providing client and stakeholder feedback</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advise and support the Chief Operating Officer in the COO role on the committees of Council</li> </ul> <p><b>1.8 Participate in, provide advice, present proposals or report on matters where required to the following UCT HR related Executive Management Committees:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PASS Appeals Tribunal, Position Evaluation Committee, 3 Consultative fora with the three separate labour constituencies (AU, EU and Coalition) including preparatory meetings, the Joint Workplace Forum</li> <li>Extended Executive, Leadership Lekgotla, Member of Financial Shared Services Project Governance Committee (FSSPGC) Steercom, Stakeholder Workshop and ongoing finance/HR meetings, Member of Student Housing and Residence Life Review and Oversight Committee, PASS Operational Management Advisory Committee and Senior Staff Management Advisory Committee, Transformation, EE Forum, Bremner Lower Campus Health and Safety Committee.</li> </ul>	Regular and Annual Reports providing client and stakeholder feedback
2	<b>Policy/Process/Innovation/Future Thinking</b>	10%	<p><b>2.1 Policy, Procedures, Guidelines – Development and Review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide executive level oversight, direction and inputs to all HR policy and procedure development and review processes to ensure strategic alignment with V2030.</li> <li>Review drafts put forward by HR Directorate policy owners.</li> <li>Provide oversight and guidance in respect of governance routes to follow for approval and adoption.</li> </ul> <p><b>2.2 Approval of research requests with staff as research subjects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider and approve research requests for approval from internal and external researchers for studies which include staff as research subjects.</li> <li>Provide oversight for pre-processing to ensure that the relevant policy criteria, research and ethics requirements are met.</li> <li>Ensure that institutional research requests i.e those which are not geared towards the completion of a formal qualification, are properly assessed and duly channeled to DVC and COO for consideration and approval.</li> </ul>	<p>Relevant policies reviewed as per an agreed schedule and implementation plan and approved by the specific and agreed date.</p> <p>Research requests considered and approved timeously in accordance with UCT research policy and processes</p>
3	<b>Labour Relations Risk Mitigation</b>	20%	<p><b>3.1 Institutional Restructures - Role of Chair of the Employee Relations Management Committee (ERMC) and ERMC activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As Chair of the ERMC, provide oversight, inputs to preparation and leadership on all HR and HR-Employee Relations policy, implementation, and operational matters to be considered by the ERMC.</li> <li>Ensure that policy matters to be considered by the Executive receive due consideration by the ERMC.</li> <li>Provide advice, oversight, and leadership for restructure processes under review.</li> </ul>	<p>HR-ER matters considered and approved by the ERMC accords with relevant policy prescripts</p> <p>Annual ERMC Report prepared for the UHRC by the agreed dates</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Chair be directly available to impacted staff, in accordance with HR-ER policy, to hear their concerns and counter proposals.</li> <li>• Mitigate risk associated with restructures through regular and direct engagement with affected staff, their union representatives and line management to seek alternatives to retrenchment where necessary.</li> <li>• Provide guidance on the ERMC related committee work to Director ER and Servicing Officer.</li> <li>• Co-author with the Director-ER, the annual ERMC report on its activities for the University Human Resources Committee (UHRC).</li> </ul> <p><b>3.2 Sound Labour Relations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the practices and working environment at the university are compliant with national and international labour law</li> <li>• Build and maintain direct relationships with recognized union leadership which allows for proactive identification of employee relations risks and management and resolution of the issues.</li> <li>• Fulfil role of brokering and breaking any bargaining related deadlocks between management and unions.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing advice and support for Chief Operating Officer-Labour Union Leadership meetings.</li> <li>• Provide guidance and support to the Director: HR-ER and the HR-ER team on strategic matters and matters which fall outside of the scope of current policy.</li> <li>• Ensure direct involvement, advice and oversight for a number of labour relations matters with varied risk levels especially those impacting the executive/senior levels.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing strategic advice to members of the executive on the handling of a range of confidential university matters and whistleblowing complaints.</li> </ul>	<p>Keep abreast with changing legislation and ensure policies are aligned as required.</p> <p>Relationships with recognized labour are constructive, built on trust and mitigate risk to UCT.</p> <p>HR-ER team are supported on matters which fall outside current UCT policy in a manner that mitigates risk to UCT.</p> <p>High risk HR-ER matters are handled tactically, confidentially and with due risk mitigation to UCT.</p>
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4	<b>Stakeholder Management, Financial and organisational stability</b>	15%	<p>Effective stakeholder management to optimise the collaboration and partnership with internal and external stakeholders to achieve UCT's goals through:</p> <p><b>4.1 HR Customer Management Review -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage the cohesion of all areas of responsibility for HR to ensure Effective delivery of HR services, appropriate and fit-for-purpose organisational design and business continuity and stability in the context of the university environment.</li> <li>• Review current UCT HR Department Strategic Plan.</li> <li>• Regular feedback report to the Chief Operating Officer (COO)</li> <li>• Improve research support and provide oversight for HR work coming out of the committee and related subcommittees of DVC led Research Steercom</li> <li>• Provide direction and oversight to the HR Directorate and the HR department more generally with regard to service provision to UCT.</li> <li>• Ensure that the HR Client-Centric model is embedded within the department and communicated to clients.</li> <li>• Ensure a proactive futures approach in addition to the proactive ongoing improvement approach in delivering the HR service.</li> <li>• Collaborate with and contribute to COO – Executive Directors weekly forum meetings and infuse shared COO domain principles and approaches into the HR service approach.</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate HR organisational design which is fit for purpose.</li> <li>• Fulfil UCT planning and budgeting requirements, participate in the annual reporting and planning budgeting process ensuring that section and project budgets are managed effectively and reported on in relevant fora</li> <li>• Provide direction on appropriate levels of work through delegation, coaching and support for HR staff.</li> <li>• Engage with client feedback towards ongoing service improvement.</li> <li>• Ensure proactive planning and smooth execution of end-to-end HR services more generally and in the context of the pandemic.</li> <li>• Ensure that staff health and wellness programmes are assessed in response to prevailing environmental factors. These must be effectively managed and implemented.</li> </ul> <p><b>4.2 Planning, Resource Allocation and Budgeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfil UCT's planning, resource allocation and budgeting requirements, participate in the annual reporting and planning budgeting process ensuring that section and project budgets are managed effectively and reported on in relevant for a</li> <li>• Accountable for the departmental financial resources and managing the resources efficiently and effectively as agreed</li> </ul>	<p>Implement a regular monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure that HR services is fit-for purpose.</p> <p>Revised Strategic Plans are completed by agreed date.</p> <p>Regular Monitoring and Evaluation Reports Feedback Reports for the research management and support systems towards enabling the UCT research strategy.</p> <p>Regular and Annual Reports to the COO to ensure that HR services are aligned with futures thinking.</p> <p>Regular and Annual Reports providing client and stakeholder feedback in respect of UCT HR's role at the strategic and operational level</p> <p>Reporting to the Organisational Health Consultative Forum and other such designated governance and management structures to ensure that activities are aligned to the organisational health and wellness strategy.</p> <p>Regular reporting on the management accounts</p> <p>Annual budget</p> <p>Annual Reports in respect of achievement of the HR Plans and the management of resources including financial management</p>
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			<p><b>4.3 Other reporting as determined from time to time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accountable for the submission of the national skills development plan and report including evaluating the effectiveness of HR programmes in place for training and development opportunities for staff members</li></ul>	<p>Annual report submitted timeously</p>
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5	<b>Departmental Leadership, Transformation and Management Values</b>	25%	<p><b>5.1 Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that as a Leader and a Leadership team that the HR values are embedded in our actions – Respect, Integrity, Trust, Accountability and Responsiveness</li> </ul> <p><b>5.2 Transformation and EE goals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce Transformation and EE Report for the HR department for 2023.</li> <li>• Produce Transformation and EE Plan for the HR department for the period 2027 – 2031.</li> <li>• Provide oversight for the engagement and change management processes towards finalising the departmental transformation and EE reports, plans and intervention processes.</li> <li>• Ensure progress towards HR EE targets for 2023, which have been set as part of the HR Transformation and EE Plan for the period 2022 – 2026.</li> <li>• Provide direction and support to HR line managers in the HR department to ensure that they demonstrate accountability for transformation and EE.</li> <li>• Ensure implementation of the HR departmental Inclusivity Survey Intervention Plan which had been submitted once UCT wide implementation plan is signed off.</li> <li>• Continue to provide leadership, partner with, provide guidance and support for the HR Transformation Advisory Committee, the Chair, Deputy Chair and committee members.</li> <li>• Ensure continued engagement and partnership between management team and HRTAC</li> </ul> <p><b>5.3 Performance Management, Mentoring, Coaching and Capacity Building towards achieving the departmental transformation goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure compliance with the UCT Performance Management System (including Development Dialogue) for all HR staff and assess all direct reports in accordance with the relevant policy prescripts.</li> <li>• Chair the departmental fora and provide oversight and direction on matters related to decisions on performance across the department to ensure consistency and fairness.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing mentoring support and coaching (one-on-one coaching) to direct reports and staff in the department.</li> <li>• Drive the strategy for and ensure planning and execution of weekly training sessions for all staff in the department on key and relevant topics which will develop current and future skills capabilities of HR staff.</li> <li>• Identify, engage with and arrange for presentations by industry experts to present at the full HR quarterly departmental meetings to improve HR services and develop HR staff.</li> <li>• Encourage attendance at free seminars hosted by credible providers to ensure access to quality training whilst simultaneously achieving financial sustainability</li> </ul>	<p>Completed feedback tool that demonstrates the extent to which values are embedded in the action of the HR leadership.</p> <p>Regular and Annual Reports on HR EE targets</p> <p>UCT HR has a clear and jointly owned plan for transformation and EE including EE targets. Finalise the 5-year Employment Equity plan (2027-2031) by 31 December 2026.</p> <p>Alignment of all heads of responsibility to plan by 31 December 2026.</p> <p>Regular and Annual Reports on agreed UCT transformation benchmarks</p> <p>HR staff Development Dialogue (DD) processes completed within the required timeframes.</p> <p>Direct reports DD processes completed within the required timeframes.</p> <p>Direct reports are mentored and coached on an ongoing basis.</p>
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6	<b>Strategic Networking/ Collaboration</b>	10%	<p><b>6.1 Higher Education Sector HR Directors Forum/Universities South Africa</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As member of South African Higher Education Institutions Executives HR team, contribute to and where relevant co-draft sector approaches to manage staffing arrangements in the context of a changing sector.</li> <li>Participate in and contribute throughout the cycle in meetings of the National HR Directors forum meetings</li> <li>Contribute on an ongoing basis to numerous HR sector proposals/matters ranging from remuneration, scarce skills, salary mandates, insourcing etc as a Steercom member. Provide ongoing support for a range of benchmarking exercises and requests from other universities, nationally and internationally</li> </ul> <p><b>6.2 Global Executive and HR Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen global HR collaboration, contribute to thought leadership and benchmarking in research led universities and to the work of the International Association of research Universities (IARU) International Inter-University Joint Working Group and draft and submit reports on participation.</li> <li>Strengthen global HR collaboration, thought leadership and benchmarking by participating networking, collaborating and contributing on and ongoing basis across the HR industry including corporate and global sectors.</li> </ul>	<p>Sector work completed in accordance with Sector timelines in October and May annually.</p> <p>Provide benchmarking reports to the sector on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Provide benchmarking reports to IARU at its regular meetings and annually. Ongoing and monthly</p> <p>Strategic HR expertise, advice oversight and support is provided on key staffing matters</p> <p>Strategic HR expertise, advice oversight and support is provided on key staffing matters</p>
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## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS				
Minimum qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant post graduate qualification, at Master's degree level.</li> <li>• Member/registration with professional authority. (advantageous)</li> </ul>			
Minimum experience (type and years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the complexity of the UCT environment, we require the Executive Director: HR to have experience engaging at Board level in organisations of comparable scale and complexity in the private or public sectors with a minimum of at least 15 years' relevant experience in Human Resources as well as appropriate senior management experience (5 years) in a large organisation.</li> <li>• Be an experienced HR professional with strong leadership and management skills suitable to a transforming environment.</li> </ul>			
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic thinking, conceptual and writing skills that facilitate the development of vision-aligned HR strategies and the achievement of strategic, tactical and operational results.</li> <li>• Ability to understand business imperatives within a large and complex organisation and to translate these into operational HR strategies and plans.</li> <li>• Leading, influencing and inspiring clients and the HR team to deliver on the UCT HR strategies.</li> <li>• Interpersonal, communication (written and oral) and presentation skills.</li> <li>• Stakeholder relationship management and ability to relate to and work effectively with a wide range of constituencies and partners in differing circumstances and contexts.</li> <li>• Ability to make data-driven decisions, including a solid grounding in data analysis techniques.</li> <li>• Ability to assess complex problems and develop innovative solutions that can sustain organisational change.</li> <li>• Personal leadership, accountability and values-driven to ensure implementation of sound, fair and consistent best practice HR Risk Mitigation Approach.</li> <li>• Organisational skills to manage multiple priorities.</li> <li>• Financial resource management including budgeting, planning and reporting.</li> </ul>			
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoroughly familiar with the fundamentals of the whole range of HR domains of knowledge and practice including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HR strategy development, review and execution</li> <li>- HR policy development, review and execution</li> <li>- organisational design, resource planning, management and reporting</li> <li>- organisational development (incl. recruitment and selection, employment equity, learning and development, performance management) and wellbeing,</li> <li>- employee relations, bargaining and negotiations</li> <li>- employee reward, benefits and administration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Knowledge of a university environment and the challenges of leading an HR function in an academic enterprise will be a strong recommendation.</li> <li>• Labour legislation from an implementation perspective.</li> </ul>			
Professional registration or license requirements	With relevant Professional body			
Other requirements (If the position requires the handling of cash or finances, other requirements must include 'Honesty to handle cash or finances'.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A proven track record of strategic leadership and experience of managing the HR disciplines and people across multiple organisational units and organisational change.</li> <li>• Needs to be able to participate and thrive in a leadership environment which can present multiple demands at any time.</li> <li>• A strong communicator and influencer at an individual and collective level.</li> </ul>			
Competencies (Refer to <a href="#">UCT Competency Framework</a> )	Competence	Level	Competence	Level
	Facilitating change	4	Communication	4
	Strategic Leadership	4	People management	4
	Building partnerships	4	Resource management	4
	Analytical thinking/problem solving	4	Client service and support	4
	Policy formulation	4		

## SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Functions responsible for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the development of the University's Strategic Plan through the development, review and implementation of an institution-wide human capital management strategy working closely with the University Executive to strategically position UCT as internationally recognised institution.</li> <li>Participate fully at senior level in all the relevant governance, leadership and management structures of the university relevant to and /or assigned to the position including the university Council, Senate and Executive Leadership committees.</li> <li>Assume full accountability and operational HR responsibility for the University.</li> <li>Lead, direct and manage the HR department, ensuring good governance, best practice HR and systems functioning including digitizing the HR environment for process optimisation.</li> <li>Develop and maintain sound stakeholder relationships with internal and external constituencies/partners.</li> <li>Represent the University internally and externally on various appropriate HR fora.</li> </ul>
Amount and kind of supervision received	Reports into the Chief Operating Officer
Amount and kind of supervision exercised	HR management team (Directorate)
Decisions which can be made	Decisions within the scope of the job
Decisions which must be referred	Decisions outside the scope of the job

#### **CONTACTS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Internal to UCT	University Council, senior leadership group, academic and PASS Heads of Departments, research leaders, and trade unions
External to UCT	Government departments, local and international funding agencies, SARS, corporate and other external partners