

EPSO launches new selection procedure for officials

On 16th March, EPSO launched the first competition for administrators under its new modernised and streamlined selection procedure.

The new system will establish annual competitions for the most common job profiles in three cycles – for administrators, assistants and linguists – complemented by specific selections for specialists. It will be faster and more efficient, involving fewer steps than the current set-up. Reserve lists will remain valid for just one year, until the following year's selection cycle is completed. Most candidates on reserve lists will be invited for interview. The new competitions will also shift from knowledge to competency-based assessment.

"The new system is based on best practice across the public sector. It will provide the EU institutions with the right people at the right time, while remaining true to the principles of fair and open competition," explains Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič.

Faster process

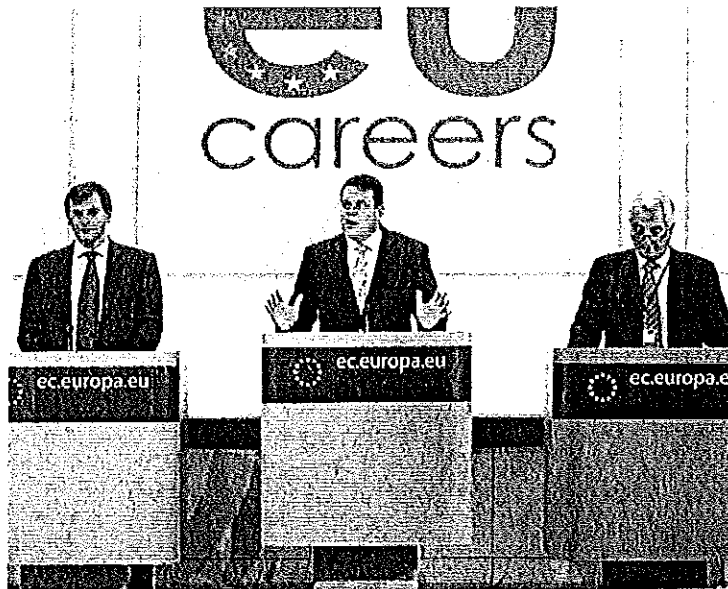
The new cycles will take between five and nine months, rather than up to two years as was the case under the previous system.

"We have to sharpen up our act and make the selection process much faster," says David Bearfield, Director of EPSO. *"We compared EU staff selection to the process in other international organisations and civil services, and we were the slowest. The previous competitions required a lot of preparation and investment and did not guarantee a job at the end of it. People are not always prepared to wait."*

From knowledge to competency

A key principle is the shift from knowledge to competency-based assessment of candidates. There will now be just two stages in the procedure – computer-based pre-selection testing in individual EU countries and an assessment stage in Brussels.

"The previous EU knowledge tests were not necessarily the best way to assess how effective



Press conference to launch the new selection procedure. Left to right: David Bearfield, Director of EPSO, Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and John Speed, Member of the board of EPSO.

someone would be in their job," notes David Bearfield.

The new assessment centres and pre-selection tests are based on a competency model of seven key skills (plus another one for AD posts) that a good official needs. *"In 2009, we carried out a comprehensive study across all institutions and job profiles to identify key skills for officials,"* explains David. *"The new selection process is based on the competency model developed as a result."*

Challenges ahead

But why such a revolution? Was it really necessary to review the whole system? For Vice-President Šefčovič the answer is clear: *"In an increasingly competitive jobs market, the European institutions have to be able to attract a diverse range of top quality applicants."*

The challenges the institutions will face over the coming decade are manifold – the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, an EU of 27 countries or more, and the fact that around 35% of Commission staff are due

to retire over the next ten years, including some 60% of managers. *"We will lose a lot of experience and talent and need to make sure we replace it,"* adds David Bearfield.

Furthermore, the number of highly talented graduates coming onto the job market over the next 20 years will diminish, in line with the falling birth rate in Europe since the 1970s. *"There is a war for talent, and we have to join the fight to attract the best of this diminishing pool,"* David comments. *"This fight is, moreover, increasingly global, with levels of mobility never before seen."*

Wide support

A general recognition of the needs and challenges ahead helped EPSO gather widespread support among all the EU institutions for the new approach. To define the new procedures, EPSO spoke to recruitment managers in other international organisations, the Member States and even third-country governments, to gather best practices. The Office has also established a network of recruitment specialists

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RAPIDO

A new era in eHealth



Neelie Kroes called on the eHealth industry, health professionals and national health Ministers to "step up a gear" in order to deliver eHealth for all in her keynote speech to the World of Health IT conference in Barcelona. *"Our finances demand it. Our citizens expect it. The technology is ripe,"* she stated. She also welcomed a new commitment by EU Health Ministers to increase cooperation on eHealth initiatives. Europe is the world leader in eHealth, thanks in part to over 20 years of Commission research (450 projects and funding of €1 billion) and eHealth will play a key part in the Digital Agenda over the next five years to accelerate the positive impact of information and communications technologies on people's everyday lives. Improving eHealth systems is one of the best ways to address the challenge of keeping people healthy and comfortable in the coming decades.

Renewable energy – EU on track

The EU will slightly surpass its target to consume 20 per cent of its energy from renewable energy by 2020, according to national forecasts submitted to the Commission.

Blue planet

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Personally speaking

Juhani Lännoth will retire this spring as the Head of DG Translation p.6

Votre courrier

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that meets twice a year to exchange ideas. "We spent a lot of time looking at what works well and have tried to adapt these best practices to our own needs," explains David. "The management board of EPSO comprises all seven Institutions and they have all been very supportive throughout the process, because what we proposed made sense!"

Service orientation

The changes being made to the recruitment process reflect wider changes in human resource management within the Institutions. For instance, EPSO has recently adopted a series of six values that now run throughout the organisation, such as quality of service. The Office has put in place a number of measures to improve its customer orientation and reduce the number of complaints, including a candidate contact centre. "We are working really hard to put the candidate at the forefront as a customer," stresses David. "As a result, in 2008, the number of complaints about EPSO to the European Ombudsman went down by 60%! That's not chance, that's because people here have worked really hard to address the issues we were facing."

However, improving the image of the EU Institutions and selling the idea of working for them cannot be done by EPSO alone.

"Every official has a role to play," says David. "Staff should be engaged and recognise that each of us is an ambassador in all the outside contacts we have every day. The vast majority of staff like their jobs and are proud to work here – this is a very powerful tool in encouraging European-minded and motivated citizens to apply to join us."

For more information on the new competitions system, please see Cen+ this week.

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EU legislation provides for Europe-wide air passenger rights.

Air passenger rights

Eurobarometer reveals need for greater awareness

Over five years have passed since EU legislation came into force introducing new Europe-wide rules on compensation and assistance for airline passengers who are denied boarding or suffer cancellations, long delays or involuntary downgrading.

Regulation 261/2004 applies to all airlines departing from within the EU, but only to EU carriers when departing from a non-EU country to a destination within the EU.

You would be within your rights, for instance, asking for a refund from an American carrier when you decided not to travel because you were faced with a delay of over five hours when departing from an airport within the EU, but not if faced with a similar situation when returning from the US on a non-EU carrier.

While such legislation represents an immense improvement, it is only as good as citizens' awareness of their actual rights and how to exercise them. So a special Eurobarometer was conducted last year to understand better public awareness. It revealed a clear need for more awareness-raising.

This special survey addressed the use of air transport services, information and awareness of air passenger rights, satisfaction levels, and complaints, and covered all 27 Member States.

On average, only 24% of respondents had used air transport during the preceding year, but this figure varied considerably among Member States, with island nations all having relatively large proportions of air travellers. 58% of Irish respondents, as well as 46% of Cypriots and 38% of Maltese had flown, alongside 53% of Swedish respondents, 49% of Danes and

42% of Luxembourgeois. Hungary came in bottom, with 3%, followed by Bulgaria (5%) and Romania (7%).

Both socio-economic and demographic criteria are quite revelatory. Men are slightly more likely than women to travel by air, as are those aged between 25 and 54. Furthermore, the more educated and financially secure the respondents, the more likely they are to have flown.

However, more than six out of ten Europeans are unaware of their contractual rights and obligations. Awareness levels range from 15% in Romania to 45% in Sweden, 44% in Malta, Finland, Germany and Spain, but with many Member States clustering just above or below the EU average of 34%. A similar survey was carried out in 2005, and on this issue, the direction of change varies significantly between EU countries. The most positive shifts were in Cyprus (+13%), Spain (+9%), Sweden and Estonia (+8%), Ireland and Portugal (+7%) and the most negative in Italy (-11%) and Austria (-10%). Overall, the EU average was only down 1%.

When it comes to awareness of the EU's role in strengthening air passenger rights, the results make depressing reading, the EU average having dropped by 10% since 2005 to 23% in 2009. While such awareness has significantly dropped in most Member States, it still ranges from 40% in Germany to 11% in Poland.

Clearly, more work is necessary to raise awareness among potential air passengers of their rights. To do just this, DG MOVE is now busy preparing a sustained media campaign on passenger rights covering all transport sectors for launch in all Member States before the summer holidays and which will run into 2011. To find out more

What is covered?

'Long delay' means when a flight does not depart until after the scheduled departure time by: two or more hours, for flights of up to 1,500 km; three or more hours for intra-EU flights of 1,500 km and longer, or for other flights between 1,501 and 3,000 km; four or more hours, for all other flights. A long delay may trigger different kinds of rights depending on the length of the flight and whether it is intra-EU or not.

'Cancellation' means the non-operation of a flight that was previously planned.

'Denied boarding' means a refusal by the airline to carry passengers on a flight on which they hold a confirmed reservation and who have presented themselves for check-in and at the boarding gate not later than the time advised by the airline, tour operator or travel agent (if no time was indicated, not later than 45 minutes before the scheduled departure time). This does not include situations where the airline or its agent has reasonable grounds to deny passengers boarding, such as reasons of health, safety, and/or security, or in cases of inadequate travel documentation.

'Downgrading' means the passenger involuntarily travelled in a class of service lower than the class of service for which they had a confirmed reservation.

How to lodge a complaint

Complaints should be lodged directly with the airline concerned and, if still dissatisfied, to the competent National Enforcement Body which will issue a motivated opinion on whether the air carrier has applied the Regulation correctly. A special EU complaint form for air passengers can be used for this purpose. Such complaints should NOT be sent to the Commission.

about your air passenger rights, see:

① <http://apr.europa.eu>

For the special Eurobarometer results, see:
① http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_319_sum_en.pdf

→ ZACH HESTER