



European Personnel Selection Office

Director

Brussels, 30 March 2007
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REPORT TO THE BUDGET AUTHORITY ON EPSO ACTIVITIES

As requested by the Budget Authority in budget amendment 0907, I hereby submit a report outlining the actions taken in order to improve the functioning of the Office. This report has been drawn up in agreement with EPSO Management Board and takes into account the suggestions made by several institutions.

Justification given by the Budget Authority

The Budget Authority has stated that

"EPSO has been an excellent instrument that has allowed the Institutions to absorb the impact of enlargement and guaranteed high quality staff for the Institutions. However, further improvements need to be made in order to offer to the Institutions more quickly a higher number of successful candidates to meet the Institutions needs".

The Budget Authority has requested that the following actions be taken by EPSO:

- Increasing the number of successful candidates on the reserve lists to meet the Institutions needs.
- Adopting measures to further reduce the length of the selection process
- Examining the possibility to apply stricter admissibility criteria, whilst ensuring open and equal access to competitions for European citizens
- Adopting measures to further improve and accelerate the utilisation of reserve lists
- Further examining the possibility of decentralising the interview stage of the selection process for certain competitions.

Actions taken by EPSO in relation to above request

Increasing the number of successful candidates on the reserve lists to meet Institutions needs.

In the context of the 2004 enlargement, the Commission, which accounts for approximately 70 per cent of the staff of the institutions, estimated an additional need for 3900 posts over a transitional period from 2004 to 2008. Also the other institutions expressed a need for additional staff in this context, in particular linguists, in proportion to their relative size. Since its creation in 2003 and until mid January 2007, EPSO has produced just about 5100 laureates from the new member states, this half way through the transitional period. In the same period of time, more than 4100 laureates from the old member states have been identified¹, covering well for natural turnover of staff.

¹ Of which 2600 are laureates from competitions published by EPSO and the remaining 1500 are laureates in competitions finalised by EPSO but published by the Commission.

In total, EPSO has hence produced 9200 laureates during its first four years of existence. However, even if the total number of laureates produced per year is high, there have been shortfalls in certain areas. Being well aware of the problems these shortfalls imply, a number of actions are taken by EPSO to address these imbalances.

- In consultation with all Institutions, high priority is given to areas where shortfalls have occurred when decision is taken on the forward planning, i.e. the planning of which new competitions should be published and when.
- On the initiative of the Director of EPSO, an ad hoc working group (chaired by EPSO) composed of resource Directors from the different institutions was created in 2006. The mandate of the group was to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of the selection and recruitment system and provide concrete proposals for improvements. In particular, the group was to explore means to further improve quality and quantity of laureates available for recruitment. The outcome of the discussions was concluded in a report², which was approved at the meeting of EPSO's Management board 19 October 2006. Several of the approved proposals aimed at increasing the number of successful candidates, e.g.:
 - ❖ as far as the planning of open competitions is concerned, it was decided that, for some competitions, a certain periodicity over time should be introduced;
 - ❖ achieving greater flexibility via the principle of "repêchage" (i.e. asking more candidates to send in their full application files after the pre-selection tests in order to be able to fill the potential gaps resulting from ineligible candidates).It has been decided that the group will convene additional meetings in the beginning of 2007 in order to analyse a number of issues further
- A new information and communication strategy on open competitions is currently being prepared. New objectives will help to better target and identify potential candidates to EU open competitions.
- Addressing immediate needs, ad hoc solutions have also been used. For example, in June 2006 EPSO launched a call for expression of interest, aimed at quickly creating a database with potential Temporary agents with IT-competence on assistant level, from which the institutions could recruit. This tool will, if deemed necessary and appropriate by Institutions, continue to be used.

The success of a competition in terms of number and quality of laureates depends on a number of factors, some within the sole control of EPSO³ and some depending heavily on the institutions via the Management board or the Selection boards⁴. Given this complexity and interdependence, careful evaluation of procedures and policies is key in order to prevent unnecessary shortfalls in the future. In 2006 EPSO created an evaluation function with the role to coordinate and carry out evaluations on EPSO activities – mainly the open competitions – and provide support in the formulation of policies and also in management processes based on conclusions drawn. The evaluation function will be given additional resources in 2007, in order to allow it to fully assume its task.

² "Rapport au Conseil d'administration d'EPSO sur les travaux du groupe de réflexion", le 25 septembre 2006.

³ E.g. the extent to which the information of the competition has reached the relevant population.

⁴ E.g. the identified profile required and to which extent this matches the potential population of candidates in the member state(s) in question (senior auditors in the new member states, Maltese interpreters etc.), the professionalism with which the questions used have been formulated and the correction grid constructed by the Selection board etc.

Adopting measures to further reduce the length of the selection process

As seen above, EPSO produced 9200 laureates from January 2003 to mid January 2007. This result has been made possible by the measures taken by EPSO in order to increase efficiency, such as the introduction of new IT tools. The number of laureates produced and the reduction in time needed to complete each competition should also be seen in perspective of the enlargement of the Union from 15 to 25 member states, which lead to a significantly higher degree of complexity in the practical organisation of pre-selection and written tests.

EPSO continues to invest much effort in further reducing the time span between publication of a competition to establishment of the reserve list. The most important tool in this respect is currently the further development of Computer Based Testing (CBT), i.e. computerised delivery of the tests themselves. In accordance with what is stated in its Annual Management Plan, EPSO will, in 2007, consolidate the use of CBT and explore the possibility of expanding the use of these techniques to additional areas, such as practical secretarial tests and classic essay-type questions drafted directly onto computer, with an ensuing on-line correction and marking phase. CBT testing is also foreseen to be developed into "proficiency tests". The concept of "proficiency tests" envisages the separation of admission tests from individual competitions. Proficiency testing sessions would be run on a regular basis and successful candidates would qualify for several competitions within a certain time frame. This would significantly shorten the time needed to run an open competition due to a reduced number of tests and therefore allow a quicker response to the demands of the Institutions. This concept will be examined and discussed with the Institutions, for a possible gradual introduction in the latter part of 2007. All indications are that CBT will help speed up the selection process, make the tests more accessible to candidates, enhance the quality of the questions and ultimately provide a more relevant and reliable assessment of the candidates' ability.

Another priority for 2007 is to further develop the databases used in IT-delivered admission tests in conjunction with EPSO's service providers and to ensure due oversight by setting up and running an Advisory Board on Quality Control of Test Items composed of EU officials. Such development shall be in line with principles of best practice, in particular concerning equality proofing, harmonization and updating of content, the timely provision of reports and ensuing operational follow-up.

The ad hoc working group of resources Directors also agreed on the need for an increased availability of Selection Board members, which would considerably reduce the length of the selection processes.

Examining the possibility to apply stricter admissibility criteria, whilst ensuring open and equal access to competitions for European citizens

The application of stricter admissibility criteria should generate a further increase of the quality of laureates, thereby producing reserve lists which would better satisfy the needs of the Institutions by means of an improved matching between profiles of available laureates and vacancies. Whereas the works of the ad hoc working group concentrated more in 2006 on the quantity of laureates output, it will reconvene in 2007 and analyse further issues also linked to quality, including the possibility/need to apply admissibility criteria more adapted to different realities. Improvement in the quality and quantity of laureate output through the implementation of measures proposed by the inter-institutional reflection group is stated as a key priority for EPSO in its Annual Management Plan for 2007.

Adopting measures to further improve and accelerate the utilisation of reserve lists

At the end of spring 2006, EPSO introduced an updated version of e-RL⁵, which presented many improvements with respect to the previous version, such as easier and more thorough search capabilities and more transparent and accessible information. Users are also in a position to extract from the new e-RL a range of statistical information. However, some Institutions find that this often requires many and sometimes cumbersome manipulations. Consequently, they have asked EPSO to develop an automated reporting tool, providing statistical information of use to them in a simple and modular fashion. Ideally, the tool should also integrate the Institutions' forecast on short- and medium-term needs. Bearing in mind that e-RL was not originally designed for these purposes, EPSO shall in 2007 endeavour to comply with these requests.

On a more general level, discussions with the Institutions have already started on how to render the whole system of laureate repartition and attribution more dynamic and flexible. A first important measure taken was to limit the possibility for the Institutions to earmark a successful candidate in view of potential future interest. The maximum period has now been reduced to three months. If the laureate has not been recruited after this period of time, and provided the Institution does not avail itself of specific circumstances justifying a possible derogation, the laureate becomes again available for all Institutions.

Several other measures adopted on basis of the proposals of the ad hoc working group will also lead to an improved exploitation of reserve lists, e.g. the setting up of a general target rate of 80 per cent of exploitation of a reserve list before the launching of a new open competition in the same field, the reasonable application of merit groups within reserve lists, the mandate given to EPSO to examine the technical feasibility of an IT tool dedicated to the publication of inter-institutional vacancies also available to laureates, the principle of regular updating of the CVs of laureates, etc.

Further examining the possibility of decentralising the interview stage of the selection process for certain competitions.

To simplify and rationalise the selection procedure for certain competitions, the ad hoc working group of resource Directors proposed in its report to the EPSO Management board the implementation of a pilot project where the competition would be finalised after the written tests. The interview stage would thereby be decentralised as interviewing the candidate would be the responsibility of the institution in direct connection with recruitment to a specific vacant post. After lengthy discussions the Management board approved the implementation of such a pilot project in a specific competition, while underlining the absolute need for in-depth evaluation prior to any additional implementation. EPSO will now proceed to identifying an appropriate competition targeted at those institutions interested. The project will be evaluated with particular attention being paid to economies of scale.

Conclusion

A large number of actions have been taken by the Office in order to meet the requirements of the Budgetary Authority, as requested under amendment 0907. Reconvening the meetings of the resource Directors in 2007 will reinforce even further EPSO's strive to fully meet all the needs expressed by the Institutions.

⁵ Electronic Reserv List

In this context it can be noted that in mid 2007, EPSO will finalise a number of large scale competitions for both administrators and secretaries from the new Member States. Before the end of July, EPSO foresees to deliver 1525 laureates⁶ being citizens of the ten Member States joining the Union in 2004 and an additional 715 laureates⁷ from Romania and Bulgaria.

It should furthermore be noted that, stemming from the new Staff Regulations, EPSO should also take responsibility for assisting the EU agencies in selection of staff, this with the aim of promoting greater harmonisation and common practices. In-depth discussions, between EPSO and the agencies, concerning Service Level Agreements are currently on-going.

Signed
Erik HALSKOV

Copy:
Members of the EPSO Management Board
Mr. Romero Requena, DG BUDG
Mr. Hololei, Kallas Cabinet
Mr. Quest, Grybauskaite Cabinet

⁶ 850 laureates on AD5 level and 675 laureates on AST1 level.

⁷ 325 laureates on AD5 level and 390 laureates on AST1 level.