EPSO DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2008 the Management Board of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) approved the EPSO Development Programme (EDP), an ambitious plan to modernise staff selection for the EU Institutions. The aim of the EDP was to put in place efficient and effective selection procedures for new staff, enabling the Institutions to better compete in the “war for talent”, and to attract and select the brightest and best applicants from across Europe.

The EDP set out a list of priority Actions (see annex) under three central pillars:

- planning and needs
- testing and professionalism
- diversity and attractiveness

The Roadmap for Implementation, published in September 2008, outlined the steps required to fully implement the changes needed in these areas within a short timeframe.

This report explains how this ambitious programme of change has led to tangible outcomes and major improvements in staff selection processes. It also acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead and the need to maintain the legacy of the EDP by continually striving for excellence and innovation in the field of staff selection for the EU Institutions.
PLANNING AND NEEDS

The EDP identified an urgent need to move towards strategic human resource planning to enable EPSO to provide the right people at the right time for the EU Institutions.

From a formerly lengthy, unpredictable and ad hoc system of competition cycles, the EDP introduced a number of key innovations in the area of planning and needs assessment, namely:

- **an annual competition cycle**: a regular annual cycle of competitions run on a fixed timetable was introduced in Spring 2010 for the main profiles (assistants, administrators and linguists, see figure 1), complemented by a flexible system of specialist competitions as required.

- **reducing the time taken to run competitions**: where formerly it often took up to two years or more between Institutions identifying staffing needs to recruiting candidates from a reserve list, the EDP set and achieved the ambitious target of reducing the average time taken to run a competition to between 5-9 months (see figure 2).

- **a three-year rolling plan and strategic annual planning exercise**: to predict and agree staffing needs with the EU Institutions. The first three annual strategic HR planning exercises have been successfully completed.

Establishing a regular and more efficient timetable of annual competitions has provided greater clarity and consistency for both prospective candidates and the Institutions. Coupled with more accurate and systematic planning, EPSO has achieved a far greater alignment between the supply and demand of laureates (see figure 3).
Figure 1: Annual competition cycle

Figure 2: Average competition cycles in months

AST 1-3
- Shortfall 31%
- Delivered 69%
- Average cycle: 9.5 months
- Target: 18 months

AD Linguists
- Shortfall 10%
- Delivered 90%
- Average cycle: 10 months
- Target: 13.5 months
- (Before 2010) Average cycle: 13.5 months
- Target: 18 months

AD Generalists
- Shortfall 8%
- Delivered 92%
- Average cycle: 10 months
- Target: 18 months

Figure 3: Laureate targets

2008-2009
- Delivered: 69%
- Shortfall: 31%

2010
- Delivered: 90%
- Shortfall: 10%

2011
- Delivered: 92%
- Shortfall: 8%
TESTING AND PROFESSIONALISM

With regards to testing and professionalism, the main driver under the EDP was to review selection methods, which had remained largely unchanged for several decades, in order to improve the quality and reliability of the selection process.

Moving from the former heavily knowledge-based system, the EDP proposed a more modern, flexible competency-based approach, in order to test candidates’ true ability to respond to real-life workplace-based challenges. In particular the EDP focussed on:

- **the shift from knowledge to competency-based testing**: following an extensive job analysis covering all entry grades across the Institutions, EPSO established a comprehensive common competency framework (see figure 4), allowing more accurate matching of assessment criteria and processes to the level and nature of specific competition profiles. Coupled with the new competency passport, both candidates and Institutions can now more accurately identify specific strengths and future career development needs.

- **a modernised application process**: the EDP introduced a new more comprehensive online application form, with obligatory self-assessment based on the admission tests and targeted questions to test candidates’ motivation. An additional ‘talent screener’ has been introduced for specialist competitions to allow more accurate screening of candidates’ skills and qualifications according to specific criteria.

- **more rounded, job specific pre-selection tests**: the EDP introduced tailor-made computer-based testing in 23 languages at the pre-selection phase, replacing the ‘one size fits all’ EU knowledge based testing with a comprehensive set of cognitive, behavioural, professional and linguistic skills tests. ESPO has developed the largest multi-lingual item bank of its kind, according to the latest innovations and expertise in psychometric testing.

- **assessment centre**: globally recognised as the most valid means of assessment, the EDP introduced a new assessment centre structure to test candidates’ performance against each desired competency across at least two different exercises. Generally comprising of a computer-based case study, a structured interview, a group exercise and an oral presentation, the exercises are designed to simulate much more closely job-specific situations and test candidates’ personal and professional abilities.

- **professionalisation of the selection procedure**: coupled with in-house expertise in the field of test analysis, the EDP also further encouraged increased professionalisation of the selection process, by building a pool of qualified assessors and providing expert advice and guidance to selection boards. The EDP also introduced measures to improve the candidate experience through better feedback and a more streamlined process of appeal.

These measures have resulted in more modern, professional and efficient testing procedures, recognised by Institutions and candidates alike (see figure 5).
**Figure 4: Competency framework**

**Analysis and Problem Solving**
Identifies the critical facts in complex issues and develops creative and practical solutions

**Communicating**
Communicates clearly and precisely both orally and in writing

**Delivering Quality and Results**
Takes personal responsibility and initiative for delivering work to a high standard of quality within set procedures

**Learning and Development**
Develops and improves personal skills and knowledge of the organisation and its environment

**Prioritising and Organising**
Prioritises the most important tasks, works flexibly and organises own workload efficiently

**Resilience**
Remains effective under a heavy workload, handles organisational frustrations positively and adapts to a changing work environment

**Working with others**
Works co-operatively with others in teams and across organisational boundaries and respects differences between people

**Leadership**
Manages, develops and motivates people to achieve results

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**Figure 5: Candidate satisfaction survey**

How satisfied were you with the following aspects of the assessment centre?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relevance</td>
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<td>overall</td>
<td>4.39</td>
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DIVERSITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS

The EDP identified two major challenges in this field: the ability to attract and guarantee a diverse pool of candidates (including geographic and gender-balance, and candidates with special needs); and the need to build and maintain a strong employer image in order to attract the right candidates.

Seeking to build on previous good practice, the EDP identified a number of key areas for further improvement:

- **systematic item-analysis and test development**: EPSO has developed in-house expertise in the field of test analysis to identify and understand how the new pre-selection and assessment centre tests perform across a variety of parameters, including gender, age and geographical balance. EPSO’s testing methods have been constantly monitored and improved in order to remain accurate, rigorous and fair.

- **appealing to a wider pool of potential candidates**: building on the previous support which existed for candidates with additional needs, the EDP introduced the use of Braille and paper tests, additional time allowances, special test facilities and one-on-one invigilation where necessary. Extending the eligibility criteria for administrators to undergraduates in their final year of university study has also allowed EPSO to reach out to a new pool of talent. Together with the introduction of administrator competitions at AD5 (graduate-entry) and AD7 (young professionals), this has reduced the average age of AD5 laureates to below 30 for the first time.

- **building a positive employer image**: EPSO’s external communication strategy has focussed on creating a strong employer brand for the EU Institutions to appeal to a diverse range of prospective candidates. The EDP established a new ‘EU Careers’ brand and encouraged the use of new tools for promoting career opportunities, including brand ambassadors and online media. Further improvements in communication throughout the selection process range from more targeted advertising and improved Notices of Competition, to better customer relations management and information for new laureates.

All of these improvements have helped to establish and maintain a strong and positive employer image, whilst encouraging a more diverse pool of potential applicants. Competitions continue to attract very strong numbers of applicants across the EU Member States.
SUCCESS STORIES

Some of the successful candidates selected and recruited since the implementation of the EDP:

“I found the EPSO Assessment Centre to be a surprisingly pleasant experience, offering a small glimpse of how enjoyable it is to be surrounded by people from such a large range of diverse backgrounds within the EU institutions.”

Name: Willemijn de Jong
Nationality: Dutch
Languages: Dutch, French, English and some German
Current role: Research analyst in the European Parliament since June 2012

“My general experience of the application procedure is that now everything seems to be more professional and user friendly. My experience working for the institutions is positive up to now and my colleagues are friendly and open.”

Name: Thomas Fuckner
Nationality: German
Languages: German, English, French, Spanish
Current role: Administrator in the Council of the EU since December 2012

“It was a tough procedure but a rewarding one as well. I could not be happier and more satisfied than I am about working for the institutions. I had the chance to get a very interesting job in an exciting and extremely professional environment.”

Name: Daniela Lenzu
Nationality: Italian
Languages: Italian, English, French, Spanish
Current role: Political administrator in the Council of the EU since July 2011

“The process felt very rigorous and challenging. But equally, it was just testing real-life skills, which I’m now using in my every day work. It’s great to be finally working in the Commission, in an atmosphere that’s hard-working, political, and really making a difference.”

Name: Jack Schickler
Nationality: British
Languages: English, French, German
Current role: Speechwriter in the European Commission, since August 2012

“The new system doesn’t have so much emphasis on EU knowledge but more work related knowledge. It’s not easy but the hassle is worth it. I like the working environment. It’s interesting, multicultural and an all-round great time.”

Name: Rory Spellman
Nationality: Irish
Languages: Irish, English, French
Current role: Irish translator in the Council of the EU since November 2012
NEXT STEPS

The four years since the adoption of the EDP have seen a fundamental shift, from a system which had remained largely untouched for many years, to a more modern, agile and efficient model that delivers a high-quality staff selection service for the EU Institutions.

EPSO has successfully completed this ambitious programme of change, identifying scope for major improvements and implementing large-scale change, within a very short timeframe and in a rational and cost-effective way. These improvements were built on best practice from the public sector and EPSO continues to review the latest developments in the field, whilst establishing its own reputation and expertise in international public sector staff selection.

Since the effective implementation of the EDP, EPSO has continued to consolidate and build on the progress made. In the area of planning and needs EPSO has now completed the fourth strategic HR planning cycle, succeeding in further aligning the needs of the EU Institutions with the appropriate supply of Europe’s top talent. Further adaptations in the field of testing and professionalism have been introduced, including computer-based testing in all official EU languages, situational judgement and professional skills testing for assistants and linguists. EPSO has also continued to innovate in the field of diversity and attractiveness, including through the use of new tools, such as podcasts, webcasts and web chats; by expanding our social media following; and in extending our use of brand ambassadors, through the EU Careers Ambassadors and Raconteurs projects.

EPSO has since redefined a new strategic roadmap, which sets out an ambitious and achievable plan for further improvements in staff selection. At its heart is the mission to ‘serve the EU Institutions by providing high quality, efficient and effective selection procedures that enable them to recruit the right person, for the right job at the right time.’

Looking to the future, selection and recruitment for the EU Institutions will face a number of important challenges, including significant staff turnover and budgetary constraints, against the backdrop of an increasingly competitive war for talent. The successful implementation of the EDP does not therefore mark the end of the chapter, but rather lays the foundations for more flexible, responsive and professionalised staff selection procedures, which will ensure that the EU Institutions can adapt and respond to future challenges.
Annex 1: Actions agreed by the EPSO management board and delivered under the EDP

Planning and needs

✓ Strategic HR planning cycles in partnership with the Institutions.
✓ Annual competitions cycles, complemented by individual competitions for specialists.

Testing and professionalism

✓ Measures to eliminate ineligible applications, through application form and admission.
✓ Non-eliminatory but compulsory self-assessment.
✓ Addition of abstract reasoning and removal of EU knowledge testing at pre-selection stage.
✓ Situational/behavioural testing based on well-founded competency framework.
✓ Professional competency testing at the pre-selection phase where appropriate.
✓ Internally organised Assessment Centres for AD staff, including case study, structured interview, oral presentation and group exercise.
✓ Competency-based assessment for the selection of all other EU staff.
✓ Competency passport for laureates to facilitate feedback, recruitment and career development.
✓ Professionalisation of selection boards, with full-time seconded Selection Board members.
✓ Creation of pool of appropriately qualified assessors, trained in readiness for deployment.

Diversity and attractiveness

✓ Further measures to support candidates with special needs, including better guidelines, and ability to request special arrangements through the application form, accommodated where possible.
✓ Length of reserve lists better aligned with strategic HR planning needs.
✓ Better support for recruitment through a laureate information pack and access to vacancies.
✓ Enhancement of the EPSO website and social media presence.
✓ Opening of graduate recruitment cycle to applications from final year students, widening the potential talent pool.