

Brussels,  
EPSO/MO/MV

**NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF MR ATHANASIOS KATSOGIANNIS,  
PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL STAFF COMMITTEE**

**Subject: Open competition EPSO/AST/154/22 – issues with online testing**

In reply to your Note of 15 December 2022<sup>1</sup>, I would like to provide you with the full context about the first phase of online testing in the above-mentioned competition and to address the main points you raise.

**1. BACKGROUND**

EPSO published a 6-field open competition EPSO/AST/154/22 – ASSISTANTS (AST 3) on 22.09.2022. 6300 applications were received by the deadline - 25.10.2022. The testing window was 22.11 – 02.12.2022 with a contingency date on 08.12.2022 to test candidates who for justified reasons were not able to sit the test. 5693 candidates booked the online reasoning tests. 4633 candidates actually took the test (81% of bookings, 74% of applications). This was the first EPSO competition of such large scale with computer-based testing, entailing multiple-choice questions (MCQ), done exclusively online.

The Notice of Competition refers to the possibility of remote delivery mode<sup>2</sup>. The instructions to candidates sent on 4 November 2022 specified that the delivery mode for the reasoning MCQ will be exclusively online. Therefore, I consider that candidates had sufficient time to prepare for an online delivery mode before the testing window opened.

In this context, I should highlight that the transition to online testing is a strategic choice endorsed by EPSO's interinstitutional Management Board, its highest governing body. Our objective is to be faster and more modern, while contributing to the EU's green policy and ensuring cost efficiency. Therefore, encouraged by the experience gained during the pandemic period, EPSO is gradually moving to a fully digital environment for the delivery of all selection tests. Assessment Centre tests have already been delivered fully in remote format since November 2020, and computer-based testing is logically following suit. The contractor is currently dismantling its dedicated network of test centers and it is no longer possible to run large-scale testing in a physical setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Ref. Ares(2022)8710389

<sup>2</sup> Point 4. 'How will the competition be organised?' 'Remote/in-person' should be read as 'remote OR in-person' not 'remote AND in-person.'

This is an evolutionary development that will bring EPSO in line with current international standards for large-scale staff selection.

It is worth recalling that candidates are required to secure access to (i) a computer + camera + microphone connected to the Internet and (ii) administrator rights on the above-mentioned equipment (for troubleshooting purposes). Owning or buying is not the only option, borrowing a computer is perfectly acceptable, too, as long as the above conditions are met. During the Assessment Centre phase, all candidates anyhow would have to have access to that kind of equipment.

The purpose of the mock exam that you mention was, in fact, to increase the chances of a successful online testing experience by familiarising candidates with the relevant testing platform and facilitating early troubleshooting. EPSO considers that this is a useful preparatory step, which was communicated to candidates in a timely manner on 04.11.2022.

## **2. COMPLAINTS HANDLED**

EPSO's Candidates Contact Service (CCS) received 967 questions and complaints concerning the testing session via the website contact form. The deadline for complaints was 05.12.2022 (3 days after the last test day). CCS managed to process all complaints by working extra time. Basically, all issues listed in the table you enclose have come to EPSO's attention and have been duly examined.

EPSO investigated all complaints about legitimate issues – it did not investigate complaints that fall outside the framework of the Notice of Competition, did not comply with EPSO's instructions or were focused on the principle of remote testing. A total of 197 candidates logged complaints on legitimate technical or organisational issues (4,2% of tested candidates). A failure rate of up to 5% (on the first attempt) is considered acceptable in the testing industry. As a percentage of the total candidate population, we did not experience an abnormal proportion of issues in this testing. I would also like to stress that this is an *open* competition in which EPSO applied the principle of equal treatment – all candidates, whether staff members of the EU institutions or not, were considered EU citizens who were offered the same conditions.

A new opportunity to retest online was offered to 107 (54% of legitimate complaints) candidates where it could be verified that they were unable to complete the test for reasons outside their control (faulty actions by the contractor, disconnections, excessive waiting times, etc). Retaking the tests in a test centre, as you seem to suggest, is not an option for the reasons already explained above.

90 candidates who complained were not offered a retest (1,9% of tested candidates). Rejected claims were either unsubstantiated or due to the candidate not following instructions.

The Selection Board has been kept informed about the criteria applied in the investigation and its results. In light of the emerging lessons-learned from conducting the computer-based tests for this competition, and with a view to continuous improvement, EPSO has decided to implement the following follow-up measures:

- Remind all EPSO staff that all individual enquiries concerning competitions are to be directed to its dedicated Candidate Contact Service - in order to ensure consistency and equal treatment of all candidates;
- Continue working closely with the contractor to ensure it has adequate capacity to handle large volumes of candidates offering an optimal testing experience;
- Review the instructions sent to candidates and clarify certain points;
- Pay greater attention to the way language preferences expressed by candidates are handled via the respective platforms;
- Optimise gradually EPSO's capacity to handle online testing on a massive scale;
- Collect and analyse the feedback received from the EU institutions.

Whilst we are aware that a flawless online testing experience for each and every one of thousands of candidates may not be realistic, EPSO is confident that it will continue to improve its online selection methods thereby lowering the rate of problems occurring in future testing events. This will happen through a combination of better instructions and improved procedures on the contractor side.

### **3. PRIVACY ISSUES**

Regarding your point on the contractor being a US-based company, I would like to clarify that while the parent company of the EPSO contractor is US-based, the company with which EPSO signed a framework contract is EU-based (Prometric Ireland Limited) which was a precondition to qualify for applying to the call for tender in compliance with EU contracting rules. Our new framework contract ensures that the data collection that occurs during EPSO operations complies with EU data protection rules (it is stored in the EU, for a limited duration, with the usual safeguards and guarantees applying).

Finally, in relation to the checks performed by the contractors' staff, I would like to underline that these are motivated by a legitimate need to ensure exam integrity and prevent fraud and cheating. The types of checks that led to some complaints actually correspond to industry standards – they are routinely applied on remote testing platforms throughout Europe and beyond. Nevertheless, we take note that these verification and anti-cheating procedures may be perceived as excessive by some individuals and will consider whether there is scope for toning down.

I trust you will find these explanations useful. I would like to reassure you of EPSO's commitment to continue its drive to modernise the EU selection process making it shorter, more agile and fit-for-purpose.

[Electronically signed]

Minna VUORIO

Copy: Gertrud INGESTAD, DG HR.