

Decision in case 10/2021/DDJ on how the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) assessed the experience of a candidate in a selection procedure for EU staff in the field of international cooperation

Decision

Case 10/2021/DDJ - Opened on 02/02/2021 - Decision on 18/05/2021 - Institution concerned European Personnel Selection Office (No maladministration found) |

The case concerned how the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) assessed the complainant's professional experience in a selection procedure for recruiting EU civil servants in the field of international cooperation.

The Ombudsman found nothing to suggest a manifest error how the selection board assessed the complainant's qualifications. The Ombudsman therefore closed the inquiry with a finding of no maladministration.

The complaint

1. The complainant took part in a selection procedure for recruiting EU civil servants, which was organised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) [1]. The selection procedure was organised to recruit experts in the field of international cooperation.

2. EPSO informed the complainant that he was not admitted to the final stage of the selection procedure (the assessment centre), as he had not obtained the sufficient score in the 'talent screener' stage. In the talent screener, candidates have to answer questions about their professional experience and qualifications. The questions are based on the selection criteria [2] for the selection procedure. The 'selection board' [3] then assesses and scores the candidates' answers. [4] On the basis of the complainant's answers in the talent screener, the selection board gave the complainant a score below the threshold required to be admitted to the next stage of the selection procedure.

3. The complainant considered that he should have received a higher score in the talent screener, and asked EPSO to review its decision. Following the review, EPSO informed the complainant that the selection board had decided to increase his score. However, this increased score was still not sufficient for the complainant to reach the necessary threshold to be admitted



to the next stage of the selection procedure.

4. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, and in order to have his concerns addressed by an objective third party, the complainant turned to the Ombudsman in January 2021.

The inquiry

5. The Ombudsman opened an inquiry into the complaint about how EPSO assessed the complainant's professional experience in the selection procedure. The complainant also raised concerns about how the talent screener questions were formulated and about the lack of transparency of the talent screener assessment.

6. In the course of the inquiry, the Ombudsman's inquiry team inspected EPSO's file relevant to this case. The inspection report, with EPSO's detailed explanations, is annexed to this decision.

The Ombudsman's assessment

7. In assessing candidates, selection boards are bound by the selection criteria for the selection procedure in question. At the same time, according to EU case-law, selection boards have a wide margin of discretion when assessing a candidate's qualifications and professional experience against those criteria. [5] The selection board thus has a wide margin of discretion in formulating the talent screener questions. For this reason, the Ombudsman's role is limited to determining if there was a manifest error by the selection board. [6]

8. The talent screener aims to select those eligible candidates whose profiles best match the duties to be performed. In order to make that choice, the selection board first determines evaluation criteria and a scoring grid for each talent screener question. The Ombudsman acknowledges that, without knowing the details of the relevant scoring grid, it is sometimes difficult for the candidates to understand the scores given to their talent screener answers. The Ombudsman is working with EPSO with a view to increasing transparency for candidates.

9. The documents and explanations given to the Ombudsman during the inspection of EPSO's file (see the inspection report annexed to this decision) do not indicate that there was any manifest error in how the selection board carried out the talent screener phase of the selection procedure, including how it assessed the complainant's answers in the talent screener.

10. The selection board assesses candidates solely on the basis of the information provided in their applications. It is the responsibility of candidates to provide the selection board with clear and comprehensive information in their applications.

11. A candidate's personal belief about the relevance of their experience cannot call into question the selection board's assessment and does not constitute evidence of manifest error by the selection board. [7]



12. On the basis of the above, the Ombudsman finds no maladministration in this case.

Conclusions

Based on the inquiry, the Ombudsman closes this case with the following conclusion [8] :

There was no maladministration by the European Personnel Selection Office.

The complainant and EPSO will be informed of this decision .

Tina Nilsson Head of the Case-handling Unit

Strasbourg, 18/05/2021

[1] EPSO/AD/380/19 – Administrators (AD 9) in the field of international cooperation and managing aid to non-EU countries Competition. Notice of competition:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2019%3A409A%3ATOC>
[Link].

[2] The selection criteria are defined in the ‘notice of competition’, which sets out the criteria and rules applying to the selection procedure.

[3] Each selection procedure has a selection board, which is responsible for selecting candidates at each stage, based on pre-determined criteria, and drawing up the final list of successful candidates.

[4] For more information on the talent screener, see https://epso.europa.eu/help/faq/2711_en
[Link].

[5] Judgment of the General Court of 11 February 1999, Case T-244/97, *Mertens v Commission* , paragraph 44: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:61997TJ0244>
[Link]; judgment of the General Court of 11 May 2005, Case T-25/03, *De Stefano v Commission* , paragraph 34:
<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/celex.jsf?celex=62003TJ0025&lang1=en&type=TXT&ancre> [Link]=.

[6] See Decision of the European Ombudsman closing the inquiry into complaint 14/2010/ANA against the



European Personnel Selection Office, paragraph 14 (decision available here:

https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/decision.faces/en/10427/html.bookmark#_ftnref5 [Link]); and judgment of the Court of First Instance of 31 May 2005, Case T-294/03, *Gibault v Commission*, paragraph 41:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:62003TJ0294> [Link].

[7] Judgment of the Court of First Instance (Third Chamber) of 15 July 1993 in Joined Cases T-17/90, T-28/91 and T-17/92, *Camara Alloisio e.a. v Commission*, paragraph 90:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:61990TJ0017> [Link]; judgment of the Court of First Instance of 23 January 2003, Case T-53/00, *Angioli v Commission*, paragraph 94:

<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=47998&pageIndex=0&doclang=FR&mode=lst&dir=> [Link].

[8] This complaint has been dealt with under delegated case handling, in accordance with Article 11 of the [Decision of the European Ombudsman adopting Implementing Provisions](#) [Link]