

Decision on how the European Parliament communicated with an applicant for a traineeship (case 1266/2022/LM)

Decision

Case 1266/2022/LM - **Opened on** 19/09/2022 - **Decision on** 15/12/2022 - **Institution concerned** European Parliament (No maladministration found) |

The case concerned how the European Parliament communicated with an individual regarding his application for a traineeship. The complainant contended that he was shortlisted, interviewed and then rejected before the period for shortlisting candidates had formally started. He argued that this was in breach of the selection procedure rules.

The Ombudsman found that the Parliament had initially miscommunicated with the complainant, but that it promptly remedied this. The Ombudsman closed the inquiry with a finding of no maladministration but encouraged the Parliament to improve the information provided on the dedicated webpage for the traineeship in question, notably about the possibility to interview candidates.

Background to the complaint

1. In May 2022, the complainant applied for a human resources trainee position at the European Parliament, in the context of the Parliament's Schuman traineeship programme starting in October 2022. [1]

2. In early June 2022, the Parliament's Learning and Development Unit informed the complainant that his application had been *shortlisted*, and invited him for an online interview. The interview took place on 17 June 2022. Following the interview, on 29 June 2022, the Parliament informed the complainant that his application had been *rejected*. On 30 June 2022, the complainant contacted the Parliament to ask why it had not asked him to submit supporting documents to his application (notably his criminal record). The Learning and Development Unit then informed the complainant that his application had been *shortlisted* and invited him to submit supporting documents.

3. At this point, the complainant was unsure about the status of his application. On 4 July 2022, following subsequent e-mail exchanges, the Parliament clarified that the complainant *had not*



been preselected for a traineeship. It apologised to the complainant for the misunderstanding.

4. Dissatisfied with how the Parliament had dealt with his application, the complainant turned to the Ombudsman in July 2022.

The inquiry

5. The Ombudsman opened an inquiry into how the Parliament had communicated with the complainant regarding the status of his application.

Arguments presented to the Ombudsman

6. The complainant claimed that the Parliament did not comply with the applicable rules [2]. The complainant argued that he had been shortlisted before the period for shortlisting candidates had formally started. He was also concerned that the Parliament did not ask him to submit any supporting documents when he was shortlisted.

7. The Parliament stated that the Learning and Development Unit had misused the term shortlisted. It had meant that the complainant was one of the candidates invited to an interview. In addition, when the complainant contacted the Parliament on 30 June 2022 and asked why he did not have to submit a criminal record, the staff member had mistakenly assumed the complainant had been preselected (in part, because the complainant had given the wrong application number). As a result, the complainant was asked to submit supporting documents (only preselected candidates have to submit supporting documents).

8. When the error was identified, the Parliament explained to the complainant that he was not among the preselected candidates and apologised for the confusion. The Parliament also informed the complainant that, as stated in the e-mail he received when he submitted his application, the unit in charge of all official communication regarding the selection procedure is the Trainee Outreach and Recruitment Unit.

9. In light of the above, the Parliament contended that, while the miscommunication was unfortunate, it promptly remedied this and updated the complainant about the status of his application. As a result, there was no material impact on the complainant.

10. Regarding the evaluation procedure of the traineeship applications, the Parliament explained that, when assessing applications, the traineeship supervisors may need additional information from the candidates in order to be able to rank them and to decide which one to select. Therefore, the Trainee Outreach and Recruitment Unit recommends to all traineeship supervisors to interview applicants before shortlisting them.

11. The Parliament contended that the 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) on the webpage for applications for the Schuman traineeship [3] informs candidates that they may be



interviewed during the selection process. The Parliament further stated that candidates are invited to read carefully the FAQs both in the e-mail they receive after creating their account for applying online and in the automated e-mail response they receive after submitting each traineeship application.

The Ombudsman's assessment

12. The Ombudsman accepts that the Parliament has clarified the misunderstanding with the complainant, which was the result of a human error, and promptly informed him about the correct status of his application. The complainant has thus not suffered any material damage due to this misunderstanding.

13. However, the Ombudsman's inquiry identified room for improvement regarding the information the Parliament publishes on its webpage concerning the Schuman traineeships.

14. The Internal Rules provide that “ *[t]he designated supervisors will examine the applications based on the candidates' qualifications and skills and the advertised criteria*”. However, the rules do not explicitly say that the supervisors may interview candidates before drawing up the shortlist. The Parliament stated that it nevertheless informs applicants that they may be invited to an interview during the selection process, and that this possibility is mentioned in the FAQs. However, the FAQs do not specify when the interview might take place and refer to it as a mere possibility. This does not seem to reflect the recommendation given to traineeship supervisors to interview candidates. Providing clear information to candidates could help avoid misunderstandings in the future. To this end, the Parliament could consider updating the Internal Rules and the information available on the traineeship webpage concerning the possibility of an interview and the timing or stage in the procedure that this may take place, that is, usually before the shortlisting of candidates.

15. In light of the above, the Ombudsman considers that there was no maladministration by the Parliament in how it handled the complainant's application. However, she encourages the Parliament to improve the information it provides to candidates about the possibility of interviews with traineeships supervisors.

Conclusion

Based on the inquiry, the Ombudsman closes this case with the following conclusion [4] :

There was no maladministration by the European Parliament.

The complainant and the Parliament will be informed of this decision .



Tina Nilsson Head of the Case-handling Unit

Strasbourg, 15/12/2022

[1] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/work-with-us/traineeships> [Link]

[2] In particular, the Internal Rules Governing Traineeships in the Secretariat of the European Parliament, available [here](#) [Link].

[3] Available at: <https://ep-stages.gestmax.eu/uploads/faq-en.pdf> [Link]. The reply to question 14 reads as follows: “It is possible that recruiters call you for a short phone interview. However, you might also be shortlisted without going through an interview.”

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