This is an authorised extract from The Ultimate EU Test Book, Administrator edition 2012, and you are welcome to circulate it to friends and colleagues or print it out for your private use.

The extract includes the table of contents, the introduction to the book and a chapter providing an overview of the EPSO’s recruitment competitions for AD grade. It signposts you to the wealth of learning tools, practice questions and exercises and valuable tips included in the Test Book.

For all further information including ordering details visit www.eu-testbook.com
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................. vi
About the Authors ......................................................... viii

## PART I: GETTING AN EU JOB

1. Working “with” or “for” the EU ................................. 3
2. The European Union’s Personnel Selection and Recruitment Process ........ 13

## PART II: PRE-SELECTION – PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

1. Verbal, Numerical and Abstract Reasoning Tests in EPSO Administrator Exams. .... 43
2. Succeeding in Verbal Reasoning Tests ..................................... 49
3. Verbal Reasoning Test
   – Questions ................................................................. 63
   – Answers ................................................................. 124
4. Succeeding in Numerical Reasoning Tests .................................... 145
5. Numerical Reasoning Test
   – Questions ................................................................. 160
   – Answers ................................................................. 191
6. Succeeding in Abstract Reasoning Tests .................................... 205
7. Abstract Reasoning Test
   – Questions ................................................................. 215
   – Answers ................................................................. 249
8. Succeeding in Situational Judgement Tests ................................. 261
    – Sample Situational Judgement Test .................................. 267

## PART III: THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

1. About Assessment Centres and Exercises .................................. 277
2. EPSO Assessment Exercise: The Group Exercise .............................. 288
   – Sample Group Exercise ............................................... 292
3. EPSO Assessment Exercise: The Case Study .................................. 301
   – Sample Case Study Exercise ........................................ 304
4. EPSO Assessment Exercise: The Oral Presentation .............................. 332
   – Sample Presentation Exercise ........................................ 336
5. EPSO Assessment Exercise: The Structured Interview ............................ 341
   – Sample Structured Interview ....................................... 347
6. Sample Assessment Centre Reports .......................................... 360
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of *The Ultimate EU Test Book* is to help candidates prepare and practise for the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) recruitment competitions, often called by their French name, the *concours*.

The 2005-2009 editions of this book comprised extensive tests of EU knowledge, with some verbal and numerical reasoning questions, reflecting the character of the (first-phase) pre-selection tests of the time. The 2010 edition was the first to cover the radically new EPSO system introduced that year and this was followed by the creation of specialised editions for Assistant and Administrator exams for 2011.

This 2012 Administrator edition has been based on the foundations of the 2011 edition, updated and revised to reflect the experience gained from the first full cycle of new style EPSO exams in 2011. It therefore covers not only the full range of tests of reasoning ability used at pre-selection (including methodologies and a total of 400 verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning questions with detailed answers) but also the suite of tests employed in the second, assessment phase. All the questions are intended to apply to AD competition levels.

The aim is to give you, the candidate, a thorough understanding of what the tests involve and how to tackle them. While the main purpose is to help you pass the tests, without doubt an understanding of the qualities and behaviours the examiners are seeking to identify in candidates will also stand you in good stead to be “operational from Day One” when starting to work in an EU institution or body.

The Three Parts

The *Ultimate EU Test Book Administrator Edition* is divided into three parts.

**Part I** starts with a short overview of the “EU affairs” jobs arena, including the various types of permanent and temporary contracts available when working for the EU institutions and other bodies. It then moves on to a detailed step-by-step guide with timeline describing each stage of the new EU recruitment process. Including dozens of useful tips and hints, it signposts you to all the areas covered in greater detail later in the book.

**Part II** deals with the pre-selection phase of the testing system, which is the stage where the majority of candidates face the biggest challenge. Pre-selection involves computer-based testing of verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning skills and non-eliminatory situational judgement tests. Many candidates find verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning tests difficult and intimidating and the aim is to help you gain the technical skills and confidence to achieve the best you are capable of. With this in mind, individual chapters are devoted to detailed methodologies for succeeding in each of these test types, followed by comprehensive test question exercises and a detailed key.

Candidates who do not reach the required level in these three tests will not be offered the chance to proceed further in the competition. It is therefore vital to study carefully the methodology to learn the principles and shortcuts involved and then make sure to practise to increase your speed, accuracy and ratio of correct answers.

**Part II** also covers situational judgement tests. These are included in the pre-selection as a compulsory element with a significant weight in most general Administrator competitions; it is therefore vital to understand the logic and methodology behind these tests.

**Part III** deals with the second stage of the testing system, called the Assessment Centre (AC). Until 2010, EPSO used ACs only for head of unit and more senior posts, but since then, ACs have been used for all levels, including entry-levels of Administrator, Linguist and Specialist profiles
who have passed the pre-selection phase (or in the case of most Specialist profiles, the preselection phase is usually integrated into the AC itself). Consequently, based on a detailed competency framework that has been established for each profile, you will find a full set of sample questions to help you prepare for the probing questions that the assessors will most likely challenge you with.

In this part you can find an in-depth description of each exercise that you can expect to encounter, including the case study, group exercise and oral presentation, with numerous useful tips and with sample exercises to test yourself against. In addition there is a comprehensive chapter on the structured interview, with tips and samples. Finally, Part III includes sample Assessment Centre reports, based on current best practice, which will help you get an idea of how assessors will approach their task and what they will be looking for.

**Important Notice**

Despite my and the contributing authors’ best efforts to be thorough and up-to-date to the fullest possible extent, some information may become outdated over the course of 2012. The book describes a major reform launched in 2010 that is still being fine-tuned – therefore adjustments may occur after going to press. Make sure therefore that you keep up-to-date with the EPSO website and other EU news sources, including www.eu-testbook.com and The Ultimate EU Test Book Facebook page. This book being a preparation and testing tool, it is also highly recommended to read widely on EU affairs as part of your study process – as well as taking every opportunity to practise and rehearse.

The task that lies ahead of anyone seeking to pass an EPSO recruitment competition is undoubtedly very challenging. Each competition brings many good candidates contesting for a finite number of places. I hope that *The Ultimate EU Test Book* will be an ever-useful guide to help you on the road ahead.

András Baneth

*Brussels, September 2011*
2. The European Union’s Personnel Selection and Recruitment Process

Introduction

There are thousands of applicants, including trainees and those already working for the EU with a fixed term contract, who attempt to pass the open competitions knowing that this is the only way to become a permanent official of the European Union institutions and bodies. EPSO, being aware of the high interest from candidates and also from its “clients”, the EU institutions and bodies, realised the need for strategic and transparent planning. It consequently in 2010 made radical changes to the competitions by introducing annual (therefore regular) cycles.

With the implementation of this reform significant changes have been introduced compared to the previous system that had been in place for decades with only minor adjustments over the years. In this chapter, I provide a detailed overview of the system, the candidates, the eligibility criteria, the exam steps and other relevant information with numerous practical tips and hints that I hope may improve your chances of success.

The Recruitment Procedure since 2010

Applications in General

Owing to the exclusive nature of open competitions, EPSO cannot consider any ad hoc applications or CVs that are submitted outside the framework of an official competition. On the other hand, vacancies for non-permanent posts or a limited number of senior positions (director level and above) that do not require the below selection procedure are regularly posted on the EPSO website with links to the given Agency or body where applications should be submitted directly. You can find more information about non-permanent jobs below and in the chapter concerning EU jobs.

Planning and Transparency

Further reinforced by the European Ombudsman and the European Court of Auditors’ analysis, in 2008 EPSO adopted a Development Programme\(^1\) that outlined a number of improvements and changes to the selection procedure. One of the key elements was to make recruitment as transparent as possible by giving more information to candidates about the stages and methodology of recruitment, along with detailed and timely feedback about the applicants’ very own performance in the tests.

It is in this framework that strategic human resource planning was introduced in all institutions, meaning that each Directorate General or high-level administrative unit must signal a forecast of its staffing needs for the upcoming three or so years. This is to help EPSO to plan competitions and it should also help to decrease frustrations that occur when a successful laureate receives no job offer for months or even years. Planning
is further reinforced by analysing employee fluctuations, political developments (e.g. the recent creation of the European External Action Service) or other factors affecting staff turnover or intake.

Increasing transparency is an ongoing effort that includes detailed information about the flagging system (see below), disclosing the names of Selection Board members, the aim to communicate test results and Assessment Centre reports to candidates and help candidates plan their preparation efforts by knowing a relatively precise timeline of exam schedules. This trend is certainly highly appreciated by all applicants.

Skills vs. Knowledge

The most significant element in the recruitment system is a shift from primarily knowledge-based testing to a greater emphasis on competencies (meaning that multiple choice tests and essays focused on memorising facts such as the infamous “How many women Commissioners are there in the Barroso Commission?” type of question are completely a thing of the past).

EPSO has instead created a competency framework against which candidates are evaluated. This way EU-specific and domain-specific knowledge is only of secondary importance and these aspects are only tested to evaluate a candidate’s final suitability for the job, provided they possess all the required skills.

While this may look like a novel approach to recruitment, it has in fact been demonstrated by numerous studies that job performance predictability is best provided by a unique mix of skill and knowledge testing, jointly called “competency testing” (see especially Part 3, chapter 1). While not contradicting the above, EPSO nonetheless wishes to recruit candidates who are “operational from day one”, therefore the case study and the oral presentation (or in the case of Assistants, e-tray exercise or the practical linguistic tests for linguists), which are the items most closely related to the specific knowledge required for the job, will gain in their relative importance, being the main elements of testing on-the-job suitability.

Core Competencies

According to EPSO², the following are considered as core competencies (which are required for all profiles independent of the competition):

- **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 (only for Administrator grades)
One or two further competencies may be identified for specific job profiles or competitions, depending on the analysis of the given position. The above general competencies are always tested by two different exercises to ensure their validity and reliability as organisational psychologists and human resource experts have created a specific method to ensure the above quality criteria. For more details on what each competency means, how it is measured and how to best improve your performance on them, please refer to the relevant chapters on the Assessment phase in Part III.

**Duration**

Given candidates’ frustration with the extremely long recruitment process under the previous system (where it could easily take two years or more from the exam announcement until actual recruitment), EPSO decided to radically cut down the recruitment cycle by streamlining and professionalizing it. This in practice means that instead of ad hoc competitions, exams are announced each year on a regular, cyclical basis, complemented by exams for Specialists based on resource needs. The annual cycles start with the announcement of Administrator exams in March, followed by the publication of exams for Linguists in July, and closing with the call for application of Assistants in November or December. It is nevertheless essential to check the EPSO website for the latest information on the schedule as changes in policy or priorities may always happen.

The duration of each cycle is planned not to exceed 9 months from announcement until the publication of the reserve list, which still means that the actual recruitment may take a bit longer. In any case, it is possible to plan ahead your preparation as it is clear what type of competition is to be announced and when. On a related note, it is advisable to focus your efforts on only preparing for the given upcoming exam phase (pre-selection or Assessment Centre) and not the entire procedure as such from the very beginning.

**Soon-to-be Graduates Welcome**

A significant improvement in the new system is that the so-called “cut-off date”, meaning the date by which a candidate must meet all eligibility criteria, especially that of possessing a diploma or qualification, has been moved to a later specified date instead of the application deadline. This is true for most of the Administrator and Linguist exams, and possibly for some other profiles as well. However, always check this requirement in the Notice of Competition to ensure that you are eligible for the exam.

Take a practical example. EPSO announces the Administrator exams in March 2012. The change means that if you are a graduating student and you expect to receive your diploma in June 2012 but the exam, where a university diploma is a pre-requisite, has its application deadline in April, you could still apply as long as the diploma is obtained by the time of the date specified. The rationale behind this change is to offer soon-to-be graduates the opportunity to apply in their last year of studies, thus broadening the scope of the candidate pool – a great step forward.

**Candidates with Special Needs**

European Union institutions have always been keen to respect the principles of equal access and non-discrimination given this policy’s pivotal place in the EU Member States’ legislation and obviously inside the institutions themselves. Therefore in the EU recruitment procedure candidates with special needs, such as seriously limited eyesight, physical disability or other issues that require adaptation in the test centres, should notify EPSO well in advance to make sure that both their access to the testing and the scoring of their exams are adapted to their condition. In its Development Programme, EPSO has
also referred to the possibility of introducing supervised one-on-one tests or other measures to encourage such candidates to apply.

**Chances of Succeeding**

The total number of applications per year is very high – it reached 40,000 for the 2011 Administrator exams. This should, however, not discourage anyone from applying as this figure is far better once put into perspective. Consider that about 10% of these applicants never actually show up at the test centre (they change their minds, were not really serious about sitting the exam, could not make it due to personal reasons etc.) and thus your chances are already higher.

Further, the pre-selection phase is very challenging for those who see verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning questions for the first time at the exam centre. Those having done their “homework” to prepare well are therefore immediately at an advantage. This is the stage at which most will drop out.

EPSO estimates that for the Assessment Centre stage of the exams 1200 Administrators, 600 Linguists and 300 Specialists are to be tested in a year; in addition 900 Assistant candidates are assessed. This means that there is intense competition at the pre-selection phase (varying considerably among the profiles, which is discussed further below). It also means that it is not enough to just pass – you should aim for the highest possible score to do better than others who also reach the pass mark. This is primarily true for the pre-selection phase as those candidates who win through to the Assessment Centre are measured more against the pre-established competencies and less against each other.

**Competition and Sifting-in**

In the EPSO system, the concept of “sifting-in” is used: this means that after looking at the overall results and the number of candidates, the Selection Board determines the threshold score above which all candidates are considered for the next phase. This does not mean that all those having scored above this limit will be admitted to the Assessment Centre; however the Selection Board will examine their formal qualifications, eligibility and CVs, and only invite a certain pre-determined number of them for the upcoming stage of recruitment.

This also means that you must consider carefully which exam profile to apply for. For example, if you have a diploma in sociology, you can certainly sit a Public Administration AD5 exam and a Specialist exam if that fits your profile. Similarly, if you are an economist who considers that, based on the earmarked figures disclosed in the Notice of Competition (published on EPSO’s website and in the Official Journal), you have more chances in the Economist profile than in the Public Administration segment, you are free to choose either one as long as your diploma and other formal criteria make you eligible for both.

Let’s consider an imaginary but practical example. Depending on your profile, you may look at the Notice of Competition and discover that EPSO plans to create a reserve list of 500 Public Administration profiles and 280 lawyer profiles in the framework of an Administrator (AD5) competition. If you have a legal background, you are thus eligible to compete in either of the two categories.

While at first glance it might seem logical to apply for the one where more people are taken and thus your chances seem higher, practice shows that far more candidates apply in the “generalist” Public Administration profile – which changes the equation. If we assume that 9,000 people apply in the Public Administration profile and 3000 people apply for the lawyer one, your chances are 500:9000 compared to 280:3000 for the lawyers, therefore the latter is the smarter choice. The only problem in this logic is the
lack of actual statistics: nobody knows exactly how many applicants will apply until the deadline is up; therefore this is a unique mix of logical reasoning and chance.

Another aspect to consider is the long-term repercussions of your choice: not only will your exam profile determine the required professional knowledge but it will also affect your recruitment prospects once placed on the reserve list. It is for obvious reasons that EPSO creates sub-profiles and specialist profiles in the recruitment: if an expert on environmental infringement cases is sought, those on a lawyers’ reserve list have far better chances of being offered a job than those on a Public Administration list (though this is not a formal rule of course and depends on other external factors as well).

Deciding on which exam profile to sit is therefore a tough decision for many, given its repercussions on the chances to succeed. Nevertheless, as long as you are aware of these aspects, you can evaluate the position better for yourself – this will, in fact, be your first numerical reasoning practice exercise!

Feedback and Complaints

When discussing feedback and complaints, it must be borne in mind that given the significant number of candidates, both are handled in an automated way in the first place until human intervention is required.

Feedback (on test results) is only available in an automated format for the pre-selection phase while those who take part in an Assessment Centre are to be offered more comprehensive feedback in the form of a written report (see a sample detailed positive and negative sample report in Part III, Chapter 6). EPSO also requests feedback online from time to time, so as to improve its procedures.

Only well founded and serious complaints can be taken into account by the Selection Board, for the above reasons. This also means that individual cases are always examined by the Selection Board and EPSO as a body. Moreover, complaints can only concern the lack of respect for the exam rules or other administrative procedures but they cannot relate to the “revision” of the scores or exam results. As an example, if you missed the mark by one point, you cannot argue in favour of leniency or flexibility unless there was an error in one of the exam questions and it must be “neutralised” for all candidates (more on this below).

Another scenario when your complaint may be substantiated is when an exam rule was not respected, e.g. your relevant diploma was not accepted by the Selection Board even though the issuing university is accredited and recognized by your Member State.

As mentioned above, the first place to lodge a complaint with is the Selection Board, but both the Ombudsman and the Civil Service Tribunal may deal with the case. While the Ombudsman can only deal with “maladministration” (this term refers to a situation when an EU institution or body fails to respect the exam rules or procedures – as opposed to individual exam results or evaluations of the selection board), the EU Civil Service Tribunal does examine individual cases on their merits but acts only as a second level judicial review body after the Selection Board has refused your formal complaint. It must nevertheless be borne in mind that these are long and cumbersome procedures that are only worth the effort if you are truly and reasonably convinced that you have been discriminated against or that your application’s treatment can be challenged on legal grounds.

On a positive note regarding the feedback that you are given, the best thing is that it opens the way to identifying areas where you may need to improve. Should you not succeed, try to honestly analyse and work on the issues that the assessors pointed out as weaknesses. This will not only help in a subsequent application but, given the nature of such reports, it can help in your own personal development as well, independent of EU competitions.

Another important aspect is that regardless of any failed efforts to pass the exams you can apply for new ones without any limitations. If you do not pass an exam, EPSO does not retain your scores or keep a file on your results, therefore you can start with a “clean slate” if you decide to re-attempt passing the exams.
The Selection Boards

Selection Boards have traditionally been composed of EU officials who volunteer to take part in such tasks. Their background, motivation and interests vary greatly which ensures an objective and fair treatment based on strict guidelines that each of them must follow. Selection Boards, including most assessors, are still going to be chosen from among volunteering active and even retired personnel, though some expertise may be provided by external contractors. EPSO has been trying to professionalize the Selection Boards by extending the scope of their members’ assignment for several months or even years instead of using them on an ad hoc basis, thus ensuring the accumulation of more insight and knowledge on their part.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Qualification</th>
<th>Administrators (AD)</th>
<th>Linguists (AD)</th>
<th>Assistants (AST)</th>
<th>Specialists (AD or AST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma (min. BA level or 3 years of studies, EPSO may require it to be related to the chosen sub-profile, e.g. Audit)</td>
<td>Diploma (min. BA level or 3 years of studies)</td>
<td>High school degree or post-secondary degree (a minimum of 3 years study-related work might also be required)</td>
<td>Same as for ASTs and ADs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>None (AD5); 6 years (AD7); 12 years (AD9) (exception: see Specialists’ column)</td>
<td>None (AD5); 6 years (AD7); 12 years (AD9)</td>
<td>None or 3 years, depending on the qualification (AST1-3)</td>
<td>Same as for ASTs and ADs (with possible exceptions, e.g. AD7 lawyer-linguists may need only 3 years of work experience instead of 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Qualification</td>
<td>Arts, Law, Economics, Political Science, Statistics etc.</td>
<td>Language Studies, Interpreting</td>
<td>Clerical Studies, Arts, Finances, IT, Technical skills etc.</td>
<td>Lawyers, Linguists, Engineers, Scientists, Doctors, Veterinaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members of the Selection Boards generally perform the entire administration of an exam on behalf of EPSO but in an independent manner (hence EPSO always denies any responsibility for specific competitions and refers you to the given Selection Board), such as preparing the tests, admitting candidates on the basis of their files or marking the exercises. You, of course, may never approach a Selection Board member for any additional information other than that formally communicated to you even though the board members’ names are always made public on EPSO’s website for reasons of transparency. Some candidates think that a quick online search to find the professional background of board members could help identify their favourite topics (e.g. if a member works in DG Competition of the European Commission, it may have some bearing on the questions they ask), though this is rarely the case especially since the Assessment Centres have a very different approach in testing candidates.

Venues and Costs

The exams usually take place in Brussels and Luxembourg or, in the event that an open competition is related to the EU’s recent or upcoming enlargement or when several
Member States’ citizens are eligible (e.g. in the case of an EU-10 or EU-27 competition), the capital city of the affected Member States or to-be Member State all host an exam centre. As almost all exams under the EPSO system are administered on computers, exams are generally held over a certain period of time at the designated centres.

Candidates are required to pick and book a date and venue online that suits them most within this period, though you must be very careful in your first choice as revisions or changes are almost never allowed after the booking period is over (the very few exceptions may include issues such as childbirth or medical events).

After you validate your application (i.e. submit it formally), booking will be made available shortly thereafter. The minute the booking is opened, be sure to sign up as soon as possible given that places tend to fill up fast and to avoid any last minute internet blackout or server crash that may prevent you from securing your place in time. On the other hand, be aware that the sooner you validate (submit) your exam application, the sooner your available exam date range will be. If you feel you need more time to prepare, validate your application towards the end of the application period (but certainly not on the last day) so that your exam dates can be towards the end of the exam period.

The risk in this approach is that many other candidates think the same way and places may be limited on the date of your preference.

For the assessment phase, you will be given a specific date some time in advance with limited or no option to amend it unless compelling events prevent you from attending and you can duly justify the reason.

As a rule, no contribution is made towards any travelling or subsistence expenses associated with the pre-selection phase of the exam. As these exams take place in the exam centres located in the capital of each Member State and in case of larger countries, also in other large cities, travelling from your home to these centres is always on your own budget.

Assessment Centres are located centrally in Brussels. Candidates who need to travel there are reimbursed for their travel costs and also given some daily subsistence allowance for hotel and food. The specific rules are always communicated in advance.
either as early as in the Notice of Competition or later to those who actually make it through to the assessment phase. The underlying principle is that nobody should suffer any disadvantage in attending the competitions due to budgetary issues. The same rule of equal opportunities applies for those flying in or travelling to a specific job interview unless a telephone or videoconference is a feasible alternative.

**Motivation**

Before applying, it is useful to reflect on what factors motivate you in wanting to work for an EU institution. Usually it is a mixture of various considerations – such as the desire to work on international affairs, the opportunity to travel, getting an attractive salary and benefits, having an interesting and varied job, speaking and learning foreign languages, job security etc. Realising which factors are the most important for you can help better identify which profile to apply for and it should also help in the structured interview when assessors try to find out more about your personality. “Being part of something larger than yourself” is a vital aspect that you may also emphasize in your application’s motivation section.

**The Candidates**

It is very hard, if not impossible, to outline a “typical” candidate profile given the large number and diverse backgrounds of applicants. However, I have formed the impression that most of the serious applicants have five things in common. They:

---

**Field 1: EPA/HR** The general role of administrators in the field of European Public Administration is to support the decision-makers in fulfilling the mission of their institution or body. The main duties involved, which may vary from one institution to another, include:

- **Design, implementation, follow-up and control of programmes and action plans**
  [**Meaning:** You will need to be familiar with the EU institutional structure, the main principles of stakeholder consultation, transparency rules, major EU policies currently on the political agenda, legislative procedures including impact assessment and decision-making procedures, and be familiar with shared and exclusive EU competencies]

- **Management of resources including staff, finances and equipment**
  [**Meaning:** Know the EU Staff Regulations’ main provisions on staff rights and obligations, its principles and key formal rules related to the above issues; research some general, non-EU human resources concepts regarding employee satisfaction, training needs, equal opportunities and promotion; revise the EU financial regulations on handling administrative budgets and allocations]

- **Assisting decision-makers by means of written or oral contributions**
  [**Meaning:** Understand the main organs, bodies and structure of the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament, be familiar with the key elements of its internal operations; know how to draft notes and highlight policy priorities and link them to organisational objectives]

- **Drafting policy analysis briefings**
  [**Meaning:** You will most likely need to read about EU competencies in concluding agreements, major initiatives such as the EU2020, economic governance, trade, environment, foreign policy and others, and the main institutions involved in formulating, implementing and controlling these policies]

- **External communication as well as internal reporting and communication**
  [**Meaning:** What are the EU’s efforts to improve its communication, which are the flagship proposals of information and communication policy, be familiar with initiatives, communications and policy papers in this field; internal reporting to the hierarchy, how to present EU policies and achievements to citizens]

- **Interservice and interinstitutional coordination and consultation, as well as relations with external stakeholders.**
  [**Meaning:** Know what the rules are on the European Transparency Initiative, how stakeholder consultations are done, Green papers, White papers, European Citizens’ Initiative, have a basic understanding of intra- and inter-institutional decision-making procedures in all major EU institutions]
• Are interested in EU affairs, committed to European integration and wish to work for a “good cause”
• Have a solid knowledge of at least two foreign languages
• Are flexible and willing to work abroad in a multi-cultural environment
• Have strong motivation to study for and pass the exams to get into the EU institutions
• Understand and accept that EU institutions are different from the private sector inasmuch as they are a hybrid of a diplomatic corps, an international organisation and a government administration that is based on a hierarchic model

The above qualities will also be looked at by assessors if only on an indirect or informal level. Should you feel that any of the above features does not relate to you, you may wish to reconsider your application or divert your attention to the other sorts of EU-related jobs described in the previous chapter. In any case, EU institutions deal with such a wide variety of issues that you can certainly find the job that best suits your interests and personality if your motivation is right.

Age

There is no limitation on an applicant’s age as long as it is not overly close to the retirement age (minimum age is determined by the requirement of a diploma or work experience, therefore minimum age is never formally spelled out). Obviously the EU is keen on ensuring a level playing field in terms of candidates’ backgrounds, ensuring equal opportunities for all based on merit, regardless of whether they belong to any particular religious, sexual, ethnic or other minority, social segment or age group.

Whatever your age, you will be required to pass a medical check that will serve as a benchmark for your social security and health insurance file before taking up an EU job. This also serves to ensure that you are physically capable of doing the job you are to be required to perform.

Quotas

It is frequently asked whether EU institutions apply a quota system for allocating posts to a certain number of officials from each Member State. In fact the Staff Regulations provides that officials are to be “recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Communities”\(^4\), which explains the special treatment of so-called EU-10 and EU-2 candidates (nationals of EU Member States that joined in 2004 and 2007, namely Central and Eastern European countries, Malta and Cyprus; later Romania and Bulgaria) and explains why some niche competitions aimed at a limited number of nationalities (including to-be Member States such as Croatia or exams aimed only at Polish and Czech candidates) are announced from time to time.

Apart from the above, this provision in practice means an ongoing effort to maintain a proportional allocation of posts that more-or-less reflects the ratio of each Member State’s population and size in the EU, both for ASTs and ADs, including those for senior management. Yet, despite the above principle, there are no hard-coded quotas for Irish or Cypriot citizens given the merit-based competition system. Natural imbalances therefore always exist and they could only be challenged by the introduction of specific staff allocations, which would then likely infringe upon the principle of non-discrimination based on nationality. This is certainly not an easy issue to handle politically as it touches on the very essence of the principles guiding European integration.
**Language Rules**

One of the most common misunderstandings regarding EU competitions is the language regime: what is the exact meaning of the so-called first and second language? In fact the first language refers to your mother tongue, as long as it is an official EU language. The reason why this needs to be specified is because a Latvian candidate may have Russian as their mother tongue but that cannot be considered as their first language since it is not an official EU language.

In some cases, especially for enlargement-related or linguist exams, the candidate’s citizenship or the given exam’s specific language profile automatically determines the required first language (e.g. exams for Croatian candidates will require the first language to be Croatian, or compulsory French as first language for translator exams in the French language), whereas in other instances you are free to choose your first language as long as the above rules on citizenship and the official EU language requirements are respected (for instance if you have Luxembourgish citizenship, your first language may just as well be French or German; Luxembourgish is not an official EU language). It is important to note that “mother tongue” can also mean that you have a perfect command of a language that you “learned”, and if you are confident that your speaking and writing is close to perfect in that language, you can indicate it as your first language. For example, if your citizenship is Slovak but you speak Greek perfectly, and you wish to apply for an exam where one of the first language choices is Greek (and perhaps there is no option of Slovak as a first language), feel free to do so. But bear in mind that your second language must also be at a high level.

The second language is in fact your first foreign language and in most cases it must be English, French or German. However, for linguist exams (and sometimes for certain Assistant exams) the second language is usually the one for which candidates are sought. For example, if EPSO announces a linguist exam for Bulgarian translators, the first language is required to be Bulgarian, the second language may be any other EU official language, and there may be a third language (in fact, second foreign language) requirement as well. Note that I did not mention any Bulgarian citizenship requirement here as the goal is the perfect command of a language regardless of which EU citizenship you may have. This is a fundamental rule in the system: the citizenship requirement is almost always different from the language requirements.

An important development is that from 2011 onwards, EPSO provides for all pre-selection tests (abstract reasoning, verbal reasoning and numerical reasoning) to be done in your first language. This shows that the aim of the pre-selection is not to test your linguistic knowledge but to assess your psychometric reasoning skills, which can be done best in your “EU mother tongue”. Situational judgement tests and other tests (e.g. domain specific tests for Specialists, Assessment Centre exams and others) are in English, French or German.

A special situation is when your first language is English, French or German - either because your first language in reality is one of these, or for instance in the case of the recent Assistant (AST1) exam, the number of first language choices was limited to only a few options. Note that there was no limitation on citizenship, so that anyone having any of the EU27 citizenships could apply, but they had to choose one of the available first languages. This way an Estonian candidate could apply for the AST1 exam in Dutch as long as she spoke that language well enough. In such cases, the rule provided that the second language had to be different from the first one, therefore those with English as their first language were limited to choosing French or German as their second language.

Once recruited, AD level officials will also need to demonstrate their ability to work in a second foreign language (their “third language”) before their first promotion, though many candidates have already shown this ability at the exam if such an option was available. In any case, always be very mindful which language(s) you select when signing up
for the exam, as you would certainly not like to decode French abbreviations in your test if you had intended to take the exam in English!

Another crucial piece of advice to bear in mind is that once you know which language you will take the exam in (i.e. the choice for “second language”; in case of linguists/interpreters, your first language will also be tested), read all preparation materials only in that/those language(s). Needless to say, French, German and all other names of EU institutions, abbreviations, programmes and concepts may differ significantly from each other, and you certainly do not wish to mix up the European Council with the Council of the EU because of a language issue.

**Formal Criteria**

As a candidate applying for EU exams, you must meet certain formal (objective) criteria. These, as a general rule, say you must:

- Be a citizen of a Member State of the European Union (though exceptions occur as in the case of enlargement-related competitions)
- Be entitled to full rights as such a citizen (e.g. no legal limitations as a result of criminal acts or other issues) and meet the character requirements for the duties involved
- Have fulfilled any obligations imposed by the laws on military service (only relevant for those Member States where such service is compulsory, and even there you may prove that you were exempted from the service)
- Have a thorough knowledge of one of the official languages of the European Union and a satisfactory knowledge of a second (this is the minimum requirement but further linguistic prerequisites may be set out in the given Notice of Competition as also mentioned above)
- Have the sufficient minimum education and/or work experience as set out in the Notice of Competition

These formal criteria are required for all profiles, regardless of the specific provisions of an exam announcement; meeting these does not lead to passing any stage but their lack certainly leads to non-eligibility or if discovered later, disqualification from the exam.

**The Four Profiles**

The EPSO system comprises four main segments generally referred to as profiles. These can be summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choosing a profile is determined by both objective and subjective reasons: depending on your qualifications and work experience (which are “objective” facts you cannot change overnight), you may be limited to only one “choice”; it may nevertheless happen that you are formally eligible for multiple profiles and it remains your individual choice which one to sit for (e.g. a lawyer with three years’ experience and fluent knowledge of three languages might be eligible for all the above profiles, including Specialists [lawyer-linguists]).

**Multiple Applications**

A general approach taken by many candidates is to apply for all competitions they are
eligible for, this way increasing their chances. This is in fact a highly recommended strategy though you should be very careful not to apply for two exams in parallel that are mutually exclusive.

Such rules are usually indicated in the Notice of Competition and are limited to the sub-profiles of a given exam: an Administrator (AD5) competition in the annual cycle may have 4-5 domains such as Public Administration, Law, Economics, Audit, Finance and Statistics where candidates are required to pick only one of these options. Apart from the risk of being disqualified from both, it is also technically impossible to choose two domains at the same time given the features of the online application form. If in doubt whether you may run parallel applications for different competitions (for example an AD exam and a Specialist exam), better to ask EPSO than lose out on both counts.

The Exam Procedure Step-by-Step

Having overviewed the above general principles and hints, below are the elements and possible pitfalls of the new EPSO system.

The system comprises the following elements for the four main profiles:

As seen in the above table, the exam system comprises essentially four main phases:

1. Notice of Competition, Self-Assessment, Registration
2. Pre-selection Phase
3. Assessment Centre
4. Reserve List, Recruitment

Below I have tried to provide an introduction to each of the stages and tests, along with some practical advice. Later chapters in this book provide sample tests with detailed answer keys on these components.

Phase 1: Notice of Competition, Self-Assessment, Registration

The Notice of Competition

As mentioned earlier, the Notice of Competition (NoC) is a special administrative notice addressed to all EU citizens and it is therefore published in the Official Journal of the EU both in print and online. It is important to underline that the NoC is the only official source of information, therefore if you see any contradicting or different interpretation in the press or on a website, make sure to check the original authentic source which is always referenced on EPSO’s website.

The NoC is a rather extensive document that sets out all the formal eligibility criteria, language requirements, deadlines and other practical arrangements linked to the exam. Even more importantly, the NoC contains a wealth of information that you can use to your benefit by reading it attentively, such as the size of the reserve list (so you can estimate your chances and thus decide which sub-profile or domain to apply for after analysing the earmarked number of applicants to be accepted for the assessment phase and how many people are to be placed on the reserve list).

The job description, also detailed in the NoC, is particularly interesting as it is not only an indication of what sort of tasks you would need to carry out once inside but you can deduce lots of hints about the topics to cover when preparing for the domain-specific parts of the assessment phase.

Below is a sample extract of a Public Administration/Human Resources competition’s NoC. The comments I have added indicate what type of documents and information
sources you should research and focus on when preparing. I suggest using the same method for your specific NoC once the exam you wish to apply for has been published.

It is therefore crucial to understand and analyse every detail provided in the NoC to make sure you can gain valuable insights. This also helps you avoid seemingly evident pitfalls that might lead to disqualification (such as a requirement to submit a certain certificate or sign a submitted document) – you would be surprised to know how many people get rejected on formal grounds by accidentally overlooking a date, a provision or a prerequisite.

**Self-Assessment**

Self-assessment as a tool is widely used in international organisations and multinational private companies (such as the Canadian civil service, universities, pharmaceutical companies etc.) and EPSO also decided to introduce it from 2010 onwards. Its goal is to make candidates realise what EU jobs are really about and dispel misconceptions or misperceptions at the earliest stage. This is hoped to result in a reduction in non-eligible applications and candidate frustration and so to decreasing overhead expenses related to the organisation of exams caused by registered applicants not showing up or refusing job offers because they had a very different idea of what working for the EU means.

Self-assessment is non-eliminatory, meaning that you cannot pass or fail based on your answers. Expect questions about your willingness to relocate to Brussels, Luxembourg or elsewhere if you are successful in the competition; your interest in working in a multicultural environment; your capacity to handle complex tasks, and various other issues related to values. This latter group of questions may include a check on whether your personal values (such as integrity, hard-work, ethics and others) and personality (flexible, self-driven, confident, autonomous etc.) match those honoured by the EU institutions (working for a public administration, serving the public interest, involvement in policy making, travelling, reward etc.).

This exercise serves both to raise awareness about the rights and obligations that come with an EU job and also to sift out those who may not be so serious about sitting the exam after all. When filling out the self-assessment, there is no real trick to it – simply be honest, think carefully about the issues and bear in mind the above comments on candidate profiles.

**Registration**

Registration is done exclusively online on the EPSO (EU Career) website at the start of the procedure, which also means that you will not need to hand in any proof, paper or document at this stage – you only need to make an honest declaration. The first step is to create an EPSO account or profile, which is an online personal profile where your correspondence with EPSO will take place. If you change your postal or e-mail address during the procedure or any other contact information becomes obsolete, make sure to update your online account immediately.

If, after registration, the confirmation e-mail does not arrive in your inbox within a few hours, check your spam or bulk mail folder as it may have been misfiled by your e-mail application; should you still not receive anything, ask EPSO for technical assistance. Make sure, however, that you do not register twice as it may lead to confusion or even to potential disqualification if other signs show you had second thoughts when doing so.

As in all other steps of the exam, make sure to re-read all input you provide as a wrong click with your mouse can lead to sitting the exam in a different language than intended or an error in choosing your citizenship from a drop-down menu may even result in you being refused for the pre-selection. Lastly, never leave anything for the final moment as many candidates may rush to complete their account in the last few days of application.
and it may cause service interruptions or outages and prevent you from securing your place – which is every candidate’s worst nightmare!

Phase 2: Pre-Selection

Having taken the above steps and provided that you meet all formal eligibility criteria, you should receive an official invitation to the pre-selection phase, communicated to you in your online EPSO profile. Once this eagerly awaited message arrives, you should start planning seriously your preparation as the booking period will open shortly and the exam is imminent. Once the booking starts, you can choose a venue and a time from the available exam centres and time slots. If you live outside Europe, you can choose an exam centre outside the Member States; EPSO has extended the reach of exam centres to other continents via international test centres in China, the USA and elsewhere, which is a welcome development.

When choosing an exam centre, make sure you are fully aware of the logistical issues: print the map of its location, find out which public transport goes there on the exam day, make sure that no strike or service interruption is foreseen for that day, and have a fallback plan in case you are running late, such as the phone number of a reliable taxi company.

My general advice for test-takers is to start practicing as early as you can; preferably straight after deciding to sit for an EPSO exam. Even though you will not need any EU knowledge in the pre-selection phase, competition is still fierce and you must achieve the highest possible score. For those who have not dealt with maths since high school (as is the case for most of us), some refreshing courses or online webinars can always help for the psychometric tests. Various websites provide online preparation tests and courses, and a number of companies offer training in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe.

As also detailed in the relevant chapters, I strongly advise creating a concrete study plan where you allocate sufficient time for the upcoming weeks and months for practice, revision, simulation and preparation. Simply saying “I’ll find the time whenever I have nothing else to do” will not lead to tangible results as watching the next episode of Desperate Housewives always seems more fun than dealing with rhombuses in abstract reasoning quizzes.

Scoring

In the EPSO system some of the multiple choice tests, such as the situational judgement tests, may have as many as six answer options, thus reducing your guessing chances from 25% (in the case of four options) to a bit more than 16% in cases where you are unsure of the answer and need to randomly pick one from six. In any event, as opposed to the system commonly used in French competitions and exams, there is only one correct answer for any given test except for Situational Judgement Tests (see below).

A small but very important piece of advice is to read the question extremely carefully to avoid overlooking words such as “not” in a question that reads “Which of the following is not an EU policy?” I have been told more than a dozen times that a certain question in the previous editions of this book was wrong when it turned out that the readers had misread the question. This of course relates to verbal and numerical reasoning tests as much as other multiple choice questions.

Another important aspect to note is that EPSO is going to evaluate your scores separately for each exercise, which means that you must reach at least 50% (or whatever pass mark is required by the NoC) in each of the tests. It will still of course be your overall score that is going to decide whether or not you make it to the next round but verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning are no longer considered as “single” tests, therefore the threshold must be reached in each of them and not just in aggregate. In some exams, however, numerical and abstract reasoning tests may be considered as one, therefore the threshold needs to be
reached as if these were a single test – which makes it slightly easier to pass. A piece of good news is that the number of questions and available time limits are different in each test type.

**Computer Screens**

As all tests in the pre-selection phase are administered on computers located in accredited exam centres, you should be prepared for the difficulties this entails. Reading a text is always slower on a computer screen than on paper, speed being also influenced by the font size and screen resolution. Highlighting, underlining or adding comments on screen is technically not available, therefore you need to take notes on the scrap paper or erasable slate that the exam centres provide. Even though an on-screen calculator is usually available, handling it is less easy than using a physical one, especially if you could not practice such operations beforehand.

Computer-based exams do have a few advantages however. The display of the available time (which is not meant to put pressure on you but rather to help time management); the automatic registration of answered and unanswered questions (which should help you keep track of the questions); the flexibility of choosing a convenient exam day (as opposed to having a single exam day); and the faster (and more reliable) correction of your answers given the electronic evaluation, are among the advantages of computer based exams.

**Verbal and Numerical Reasoning Tests**

The verbal and numerical reasoning tests, along with abstract reasoning, are commonly known as psychometric tests. These are one of the most popular methods to evaluate cognitive skills and the intelligence of prospective employees. They are widely used by multinational companies and civil service recruiters around the world given their flexible application, cost-effectiveness and proven relevance to gauge candidates’ skills. The relevant chapters of this book provide a full methodology and hundreds of practice exercises: what follows here is more of a description of how these tests are administered along with some general advice on how to tackle them.

Verbal reasoning tests are essentially reading comprehension tests where you are required to answer a question based on an 8-15 line-long text. A fundamental rule is to only consider information contained in the text and ignore all prior knowledge you may have of a given topic unless it is a law of nature or common knowledge (e.g. that the Earth revolves around the Sun or that the EU has 27 Member States).

Numerical reasoning, on the other hand, is a calculation exercise based on statistical charts and graphs based on which you are required to find a certain percentage, figure, or decide on relative values (e.g. “Based on the table, which country had the highest relative birth rate in 2008?”). Questions can be tricky as in many cases no exact calculation is required given that you can simplify the riddle by applying calculation methods and short-cuts. A comprehensive toolkit is offered in the relevant chapter of this book regarding the above.

EPSO has been using verbal and numerical reasoning tests for several years in its competitions and they have proven to be one of the most challenging parts of the exam procedure. The likely reason is that while EU knowledge could be memorised by dedicating sufficient time to this end, succeeding in verbal and numerical reasoning requires a completely different approach. Extensive practice is only part of the solution as applying a few fundamental principles and understanding the methodology are essential to succeed. Lots of practicing and learning the methodology is therefore crucial to succeed.

As mentioned above in the languages section, since 2011 all verbal and numerical reasoning tests are in your first language (along with abstract reasoning, but there the choice
of language has no relevance). Linguists can expect to have two or three different verbal reasoning tests: one in their main language (which depends on which linguistic profile they had applied for, e.g. Bulgarian translator or German interpreter); while the other two depend on the source languages available for that given exam (English, French and German have privileged status and almost always appear among the languages).

Work as hard as you can to improve your overall vocabulary in the exam’s language by reading quality newspapers, boost your spelling skills for complex words, your understanding of measurement units (billions vs. millions, how many litres is one m³ etc.) and revise basic mathematical operations. You can also find dozens of further hints and resources in this book, along with verbal reasoning tests in 10 different languages on the Online EU Training website.

**Abstract Reasoning Tests**

A new element in the reformed competition system is the abstract reasoning, which is another test type that various international employers commonly use; it is a common feature of popular IQ tests as well. Abstract reasoning is different from the other two tests as it requires no linguistic skills: there is only one main question for all tasks, such as “Which figure is the next in the series?”

Using these questions for personnel selection is practical for EPSO given that there is no need to translate the exercise into any language and also because abstract reasoning tests have been scientifically proven to be culture-neutral while effectively testing candidates’ so-called “fluid intelligence”. This latter term refers to the capability to solve new problems and understand the relationship between various concepts, independent of any acquired knowledge.

The main skill you need to efficiently resolve abstract reasoning tests is “imagination”, that is, the ability to mentally rotate, flip or turn certain figures according to a certain logic or rule. This rule is one of the main challenges of this question type as you should be able to “dissect” a figure and identify its component elements. Those capable of performing such tasks are likely to be able to cope with unknown or new situations in the workplace: this skill therefore does have more practical value for predicting actual job performance than may seem at first glance. You can find a large number of abstract reasoning tests in the relevant chapter of this book, along with an in-depth methodology that is highly practical and applicable.

**Situational Judgement Tests**

Situational Judgement Tests (or SJTs for short) have been employed for decades by different organisations, such as the Canadian Civil Service, and companies that have wished to measure potential candidates in real-life work scenarios. The objective of SJTs is to create realistic work-related scenarios in which you must determine the proper course of action given the parameters and situation. In other words, the test basically asks what you would do in a particular circumstance.

An important element of SJTs is that there are no qualitatively right or wrong answers when testing your judgement. Rather, judgement is about your ability to assess a given situation and make clearly defined decisions on how to proceed from there, based on your own unique set of experiences in life, understanding of the EU institutions’ culture and ethical rules, while applying a certain common sense to workplace situations.

For example, given a sample question about witnessing malpractice in your unit committed by a colleague, your reaction or response may be to confront that person first while another person may feel it is most appropriate to let your head of unit know about what has happened. This is therefore closely linked to the competencies that EPSO is seeking to find in future EU officials.
Since there are no right or wrong answers, the decision whether one answer is better than another would have to be in the hands of the test administrators; however, the benchmark for deciding the value of each answer is the competency list that EPSO has established (see above) and against which it evaluates candidates. SJTs therefore have the potential to measure various issues such as your organisation or team working skills, or your ability to prioritise.

It is important to point out that while real world situations can certainly be summarised into brief sentences or paragraphs, rarely do we come across situations in life that resemble these questions precisely. As in the above example, you may be confronted with a colleague who may be stealing and who may also be a friend, or someone with whom you are in direct competition for a promotion. This would certainly change your judgement and response.

For further background details on SJTs, how they are created, including a full sample that covers all competencies EPSO has determined, please refer to the relevant chapter in this book.

Notification of Results

After the pre-selection phase, or in the case of Specialist profiles, after the successful sifting-in of your CV, candidates are notified both of their positive or negative results. The scores and the answers you had given are communicated to you in all cases though for practical reasons EPSO cannot disclose the multiple choice questions themselves, only the answers you had marked.

Should you not make it to the structured interview in the assessment phase, your situational judgement tests are “lost” in the sense that your competency profile is not established. Otherwise a special algorithm interprets your SJT answers, which is then forwarded to the assessors for follow-up in the assessment phase.

Since the number of applicants in the pre-selection phase runs into the tens of thousands, EPSO decided to require the submission of supporting documents only for those who have passed the pre-selection or were “short-listed” Specialists based on their CV. This means that even those who have already cleared the first hurdle may not take their eligibility for the assessment phase for granted: EPSO will first of all require you to send in a completed and signed application form along with annexes listing your educational qualifications and if necessary, documents attesting your professional experience or other required information.

As soon as the above documents are validated and accepted, you receive an official notification in your EPSO profile that you have been admitted to the assessment phase. Shortly afterwards you will be required to confirm your presence at a given venue and date to undergo the assessment exams.

Phase 3: Assessment

An Assessment Centre, as the second round of exams for Administrators and Linguists (and in most cases, the first round for Specialists), consists of a standardized evaluation of behaviour based on multiple inputs. This in practice means that several trained observers called “assessors” evaluate your performance throughout half a day or a full day of exercises that have been developed specifically for this purpose. EPSO is using multiple types of exercises based on their competency framework: the idea is that each competency (listed above such as “Delivering quality and results”) will be tested by two types of exercises to make sure that the observations are valid.

The reason why different competencies are tested by using various exercises for various profiles is that EPSO has linked certain competencies to each profile and therefore only wishes to test you on those that are relevant for your field. Accordingly, Assistants will not
be required to give an oral presentation as their job roles will not include giving presenta-
tions; similarly, a case study is used for Administrators and Specialists as it is a highly com-
plex drafting/analytical exercise that other profiles do not need to be tested on.

Based on the above, EPSO uses the following catalogue of exercises in the Assessment
phase of the recruitment competition:

**Professional Skills Tests**

**Linguists’ Skills Tests** (Translators, Interpreters, Lawyer-Linguists)

For the Linguist profiles, the pre-selection tests already include two extra verbal reasoning
tests that concern their two “source” languages. The main verbal reasoning test is in their
“target” language (which is the language of the chosen exam profile, e.g. for Spanish inter-
preters it is Spanish). More information on the languages is given in the section above on
this topic.

As for the professional skills tests, they are similar to a classic language exam, comprising
the translation of two 500 to 1500-word-long texts from each of the source languages into
the target language (for translators) and a “live” interpretation with the above language
combinations (for interpreters). A listening comprehension test (answering multiple choice
tests based on an audio recording) is also possible in the near future.

Translators and interpreters are also going to have various exercises in the assessment
phase such as the structured interview, group exercise, oral presentation and the above-
mentioned professional skills test. These exercises will not necessarily cover EU affairs,
though they will certainly cover a wide range of topics such as economics, history or polit-
ics, given that these issues feature prominently in the day-to-day work of an EU translator
or interpreter.

For lawyer-linguists the translation of a legal (though not necessarily EU) text is going to
be maintained in the Assessment Centre phase, along with verbal, numerical and abstract
reasoning tests and other competency tests (structured interview, group exercise). Traditionally, lawyer-linguists have not been allowed to use a dictionary for their transla-
tions, which made this testing more challenging than that of translators. Interestingly and
importantly, lawyer linguists will have an extra test in the Assessment Centre which covers
their general knowledge of and linguistic skills related to national (!) law. The reason for this
test is not so much the knowledge of national paragraphs and regulations but the require-
ment to be familiar with the judicial and legal terminology that is a pre-requisite to per-
forming a lawyer linguist’s job well.

**Specialists’ Tests**

It is important to note that for Specialists, the pre-selection exams described above may
be moved into the Assessment Centre stage, depending on the number of applicants. As
a general rule, EPSO says that if the number of specialist (e.g. nuclear scientist, cohesion
policy expert, competition lawyer etc.) applicants exceeds 20 times the number of places
available on the reserve list, it would organise a pre-selection round for specialists as
well, otherwise these exam items would be included in the assessment phase. Moreover,
specialists need to go through an online pre-screening questionnaire, called a “Talent
Screener”, that tries to identify their work experience in the given field, whether they
have had publications in academic journals, done research in the field and many other
declarations that can help the Selection Board evaluate specialist candidates’ suitability
and eligibility for the post. (Even though these are declared on “word of honour”, they
may be checked by requesting supporting documents any time in the selection process
or at recruitment.) Should a large number of such candidates remain even after the pre-
screening, a pre-selection round may be organised to filter candidates further. For all
other profiles (Administrators, Linguists and contract agent posts), a pre-selection phase
is the default rule without any in-depth online screening other than basic formal eligibility criteria.

Specialist knowledge is tested in the assessment phase mainly in the form of a practical exercise, a special domain-focused and targeted interview, and/or in the framework of the case study. This latter is closely related to the exam profile and the sub-profile or domain that you had chosen at the time of application. EPSO sometimes decides to include multiple choice specialist (though almost certainly not EU knowledge) questions even in the pre-selection or later in the assessment phase of all profiles, especially for Assistants and Specialists (e.g. “office skills” tests for AST1 candidates). If applied, these questions cover practical issues such as financial or project management, public administration and human resources issues, depending on the profile sought. Even if some aspect of the specialist knowledge is tested by multiple choice questions, these take a less theoretical and more job-oriented approach than the tests used beforehand, though as a general rule, such knowledge is tested in the case study exercise.

In any case, specialist knowledge is tested for all profiles as no capable candidate who otherwise lacks the proper knowledge of the chosen field can be recruited, given EPSO’s wish that all new officials should be operational from “day one”. Moreover, even specialists need a solid understanding of EU institutions, procedures and stakeholders, which can add valuable points to your performance in the assessment phase of the exam.

For instance, if you are familiar with the overall context of the EU’s environmental policy, know which institutions and agencies are involved, which are the formal rules to enact policy in this field, which European associations and NGOs are taking an active part in influencing decision-makers and what the strategic thinking is on this policy’s future, you are immediately in a position to make more out of the group exercise, the case study or the oral presentation than many other candidates who lack such knowledge would be able to do.

Here are a few further examples of EU and specialist questions to give you an idea of the wide range of issues that may be touched upon by the specialist tests and other exercises such as the case study (see below):

- What is an impact assessment and which are its governing rules?
- How can an EU tender procedure be launched and what are the exclusion criteria?
- What are the main competencies and tasks of the European Parliament?
- Which are the main EU institutions and what does each deal with?
- What is the ordinary legislative procedure? What other procedures exist?
- What does the European Investment Bank do?
- If you were asked to highlight 5 improvements introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, which ones would you pick?
- What is the EU2020 plan?
- What is the so-called climate change and energy package?
- What is meant by the concept of “economic governance” and how is it being addressed?
- What should EU institutions do to improve access to EU documents for EU citizens?
- What are the sources of EU law?
- What instruments can EU institutions use against the non-respect of EU law?
- What is an Excessive Deficit Procedure and why is it used?
- Which institutions and bodies are involved in concluding an external trade agreement?
– What is performance audit and how is it used in the EU institutions?
– Which procedures ensure budgetary control in the EU?
– What is the European Arrest Warrant and how does it work?
– What are the rights and obligations of an EU official, based on the Staff Regulations?

Case Study

The case study exercise is meant to test your professional skills along with other behavioural items such as organisation and prioritisation skills. You will be given a comprehensive dossier including various policy communications, statistical data, legal and/or technical background information, based on which you will be required to answer some open-ended but profile-specific questions.

This type of exam item is very similar to an essay but in this case you are required to use the background file in a structured manner in order to produce a position paper, an analysis or a line of argument in favour of or against an initiative. This task is in fact the one where your professional skills related to the chosen profile (Economics, Law, Building Manager, Engineer etc) are tested as much as your competencies to structure your thoughts in a logical and compelling manner, argue in a convincing way and express yourself in writing to a high standard.

It is understandable that EPSO will want to see your ability to draft reports, understand complex files and provide similar input that your to-be superior may request from you one day. This book provides a large number of sample questions for a diverse range of profiles and a full exercise with scoring grid and sample answer file to help you understand how your performance is evaluated, and further tips on drafting effectively.

Oral Presentation

Your exam profile’s tasks may require you to make an oral presentation. This is a special opportunity to speak in front of a small audience of assessors or possibly fellow candidates to present your case and answer challenging (and sometimes purposely probing) questions. Similarly to other Assessment Centre exercises, this one also relates to the competency catalogue items against which EPSO wishes to measure you.

The oral presentation is therefore a unique mixture – examining your professional knowledge and understanding of the European Union along with your ability to talk about a specialist topic in a clear manner and awareness of your vocabulary and body language while withstanding pressure from various “stakeholders”. This is an exciting exercise in the Assessment Centre, but it certainly requires thorough preparation with friends or a professional coach, especially for those who have no experience in public speaking or giving presentations. Recording yourself while making a speech is a good first step to improve, followed by a careful analysis of your body language, choice of words, reactions to questioning and managing pressure.

In the relevant chapter we have included an in-depth collection of tips and hints on how to make the most out of your oral presentation.

Group Exercise

Unlike the case study, the group exercise is not specifically related to your chosen profile and its focus is purely on testing your competencies. Skills relevant to working in a team, interacting, arguing intelligently with and listening to others, cooperating and coming to an agreement are being assessed in this exercise. This emphasis on skills, however, does not mean that your EU knowledge and understanding of the various crosscutting policies, terminology and institutional-political system would not be crucial to achieving a high score: the underlying scenario is likely to be related to EU affairs or a
key policy such as the fight against climate change, enhancing the internal market, creating equal opportunities or the EU’s global role.

While you perform other exercises individually, this one will test your ability to work with potentially stubborn, silent or extrovert candidates in an efficient manner: a true simulation of your future unit with a diverse personal and cultural background. You can find in the relevant chapter a full group exercise scenario with scoring guide and preparation tips to help you perform your best.

A common misunderstanding concerning the structured interview is to look at it as a job interview, which it is not. While a job interview focuses on your suitability for a very specific role such as “Case handler in DG Competition State Aid unit”, the structured interview aims to gauge your skills and take on certain competency-related situations such as your skill to communicate with clarity or manage tight deadlines, reinforced by examples from your earlier work or other experience. Not only will your body language, oral expression and choice of words be evaluated, but the example situations and answers will also be listened to with great attention.

As candidates in all EPSO profiles will be required to undergo a structured interview, this chapter is one of the most comprehensive ones in this book, covering all eight competencies against which EPSO wishes to evaluate you. For each of these competencies we have included sample questions and follow-up probes, a thorough description, possible issues to think of and a scoring guide with sample answers. This should prove to be a valuable asset in your preparation as it should allow you to come up with examples that will likely be useful in the exam (e.g. it is certainly far better to consider a question such as “Tell me about a time when you experienced a difficulty in a working relationship with someone” beforehand rather than freeze at the exam if no good example comes to mind under pressure).

Assessment of Heads of Unit

The assessment for Head of Unit and Director posts has traditionally been carried out via an Assessment Centre, which is nevertheless likely to undergo changes based on the reformed selection of non-managerial candidates. In any case, potential Heads of Unit should prepare along the same lines as Administrators, even though the competency model against which they are evaluated is somewhat different, having a strong focus on management-related issues.

This means that questions testing the candidate’s people/time/team/financial/operational/conflict management skills feature prominently in the structured interview and possibly impact other exam items such as the group exercise and the case study as well. Moreover, candidates for these exams are advised to be familiar with the EU Financial Regulations and general principles of handling budgets and funds (see relevant links below).

Further to the samples described above and in the relevant chapters, here are a few example questions focusing on management issues:

- List a few examples of management challenges from your work experience.
- What approach would you adopt with your subordinates who are older than you?
- How can you motivate your staff within the framework of the Staff Regulations?
- How would you handle a situation in which you found out that a subordinate had applied for the same post as the one you were selected for and was acting rather jealously?
- How would you handle underperformance in your unit?
- Describe a project where you efficiently used your delegation skills.
• What methods would you use for internal communication in your unit or directorate?
• What is your negotiating experience? Please also provide examples.
• How would you react if a member in your unit had a serious medical problem and would need to be absent from work for several weeks?
• How do you prioritize tasks on a busy workday?
• If a member of your unit came to work dressed inappropriately, how would you react?

Assessment Report

After both the Assessment Centre and other forms of assessment, a report will be drawn up by the assessors to evaluate you against the pre-established competencies. This also means that first and foremost you will not be judged against other candidates but rather against the objective behavioural criteria EPSO seeks in candidates. The ranking of suitable candidates will come afterwards and will be largely influenced by your performance in professional knowledge metrics.

Based on a streamlined and structured methodology, assessors draw up a report that summarises your performance, along with your strengths and weaknesses. For the sake of understanding and to draw conclusions, you can find two such sample reports in this book (Part III chapter 6) relating to an imaginary candidate who performed well and one for a candidate who was not deemed to be suitable for the given profile.

Upon request or even automatically, EPSO plans to reveal this report to all candidates regardless of whether or not they were successful in the assessment phase. This report can add a lot to your self-development as it provides a comprehensive analysis of your personality traits as observed during the assessment. It can also be very helpful in deciding which of your skills or competencies may need to be developed.

Phase 4: Reserve List, Recruitment

For those candidates who successfully passed both stages and survived other potential pitfalls in the exam procedure, a notification including the words “we are happy to inform you” arrives in their virtual EPSO account’s mailbox. This also means that your name will be published in the reserve lists that appear in the EU’s Official Journal and on EPSO’s website and your competency passport, based on the above assessment, will be added to your profile once you take up employment. Those who did not succeed this time should not despair as they can re-apply for any later exam with the advantage of being familiar with the working methods of the system.

Validity of the Reserve List

Once a reserve list is published, it is always clearly indicated when it expires, meaning until which date can you be recruited from it. However, EPSO has regularly extended the validity period of a reserve list to make sure that all available candidates are recruited from it. In the new system, the idea is to have the Administrator (AD) competitions’ reserve list valid until the next annual cycle results in a new list; for linguists it is the same approach but instead of the next annual cycle, it will be the next competition in the same language that replaces the previous list; for Specialists, the lists are valid as long as they still contain recruitable (available) laureates.

Flagging

Once on the reserve list, candidates (or as they are called at this stage, “laureates”) are
“flagged” by the institutions. This means that your profile listed in the “E-laureates” database can be assigned different statuses (marked in colours) as follows:

- **Green**: Any institution may recruit the candidate; they are not reserved for any specific EU institution or body

- **Yellow**: A specific institution or EU body has a keen interest in the candidate or the candidate passed an exam which was specific for a given institution (e.g. a lawyer-linguist exam to recruit officials for the European Parliament); as a general rule, this reservation is valid for three months, after which the candidate regains a “green” flag

- **Orange**: It is similar to the yellow flag but an interview has already been scheduled with the laureate or an extension of the above 3-month rule has been requested

- **Blue**: It is again similar to the yellow flag but it also shows that the laureate is already employed by an EU institution (e.g. an Assistant who is working for DG SANCO has passed an AD5 exam)

- **Red**: The laureate has already been recruited or their recruitment is happening right now

- **Grey**: The laureate is temporarily not available (e.g. the person is interested in taking up a job but currently cannot due to family or work reasons)

- **No Flag**: The candidate is no longer available for an EU job despite having passed the competition and being on the reserve list

**Job Interview**

Once on the reserve list, you can try to lobby for yourself by indicating your exam’s reference number and presenting your CV to targeted heads of unit; this, however, is of mixed effectiveness: while it works for some, it may yield no result at all for others. EPSO much rather recommends that you wait to be contacted by interested institutions or if you wish to get in touch with them yourself, they provide a candidate contact service list on their website.

Any time between a few weeks and several months, you may receive a phone call or e-mail asking whether you would be interested in an interview for a position at x or y EU institution. Always make sure your contact data is up-to-date and that you regularly check your EPSO profile as well in order not to miss such important events.

Once offered the chance to attend a job interview, it is highly recommended to participate even if the job itself may not be the most appealing. You can always decide to decline and wait for a better or different offer, but it is better to have such options than decline flatly in the first place. You can also gain useful interview experience and find out more about the position; you might even realize that the job is in fact meant for you.

The job interview itself is different from other parts of the recruitment competition as it is focused on your suitability for the specific position and it does not include any general EU questions. If you apply for a consumer health expert position, you can expect a number of technical questions on this specific topic but nothing on e.g. the Treaty of Lisbon or the EU’s immigration policy (unless the job in question is in the Commission’s DG Home).

Your interviewers will most likely speak in English, French or German, unless you are applying for a translator or interpreter post where the rule is rather your second language (if different from the above three). Be aware, however, that questions may be put to you in any other language specified in your CV. Should you feel that you need to further clarify matters, take care not to patronise the interviewer and that your body language is also entirely respectful. It is very much recommended to review the hints and
tips described in detail in the structured interview and oral presentation chapters of this book as they contain dozens of practical bits of advice for this stage as well.

Medical Check

A medical check is required for all new recruits; it may take place even before you know the result of your job interview. Should you not be chosen, the medical check results are valid for a few months so you will not need to re-take it if you attend another interview and you are accepted for another post. In any case, avoid the temptation of having that delicious-looking ham-and-eggs for breakfast or you risk further check-ups due to an excessive cholesterol level.

Travelling

You will most likely need to travel to Brussels or Luxembourg for the interview unless a video- or phone-conference call can be arranged at the EU representation or delegation office of your country of residence. Should you need to travel, all costs will be reimbursed and you will be given a modest daily subsistence allowance as well (based on strict formal conditions), but be prepared to receive the reimbursement only several weeks later.

Recruitment

If your interview was successful, you will be offered a job first by phone or e-mail, then formally by letter. Should this not arrive in time, make sure you ask your future EU institution’s HR department or the unit in which you will work to send it to you. Generally you can agree on the starting date of employment with your future boss, so you can look for accommodation (if in Belgium, try www.immoweb.be) and arrange paperwork in due course.

Moving costs are paid for unless you have lived in the country where you were recruited to for more than a certain period of time (e.g. if you had done an EU traineeship at the Commission in Brussels right before you got recruited, this may prevent you from having your moving costs paid or being granted a so-called “expatriation allowance”, though the rule is generally six months of residence and for traineeships, the duration is five months). The detailed rules can be found in the EU officials’ Staff Regulations, listed in the section below on further resources.

Preparation Methods

Preparing for EPSO tests is far from being an easy exercise and experience has shown that most test takers have had feelings of apprehension as they prepared. The way of preparing for the tests is really an individual choice. You may find that simply looking at the tests’ objectives and preparing on your own makes you feel confident; conversely, you may want to read text books, take web-based training courses, or actually go through instructor-led preparatory classes offered by a training centre. Another great way of preparing is forming a study group where you can evaluate each other’s written and oral expression skills based on the guidelines of this book.

Whatever method you choose, know that timing and motivation are the linchpins. As you prepare for your test, make sure to start soon enough and take it very seriously all the way. Knowing when to begin your preparation process is critical to having enough time without feeling rushed. The change in EPSO’s communication, where the timelines of subsequent exam phases are transparently published, will make the planning much easier than it has been in the past, and it is strongly advised to start preparation at least two months before the exam day.
The key thing to remember is that tests are not written with the intention of catching you out. In fact they are only meant to probe your skills and competencies in various “reasoning” exercises and assess whether you have a concise understanding of the chosen field while ensuring that you possess the right competencies at the same time.

**What to Study**

Regarding your EU knowledge, make sure to have a good understanding of the “Treaties”, meaning the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This is something that can add greatly to your performance and potentially impress the assessors (as long as you get all the other items right).

A solid knowledge of how EU institutions and decision-making procedures work and what the key priorities of the European Commission and Parliament are; an idea about some milestones in EU history; and familiarity with the latest European Council Presidency Conclusions, key judgements of the European Courts, basic Eurostat data, and strategic policy papers such as the EU2020 programme – these are all useful for learning the specific character and vocabulary of the EU. Lastly, reading EU news on a daily or weekly basis can help you understand how a seemingly abstract or complex piece of legislation works in real life.

**Preparation Resources**

For the pre-selection phase, I recommend reading through this book’s concise methodology chapters and practicing the exercises multiple times. You can find further resources online as indicated above and in the collection of links below, while EU specialist bookshops such as [www.eubookshop.com](http://www.eubookshop.com), [www.libeurop.eu](http://www.libeurop.eu) and [www.eurobookshop.be](http://www.eurobookshop.be) also offer a wide range of books. For the assessment phase, several YouTube videos can help you see real life examples and tips for each exercise, and this book should also help in identifying the key concepts to be aware of.

Browsing the Commission Directorates Generals’ websites for “hot” issues and checking the relevant Commissioner’s website and speeches on your topic will help you understand where to focus your attention; having a look at the various European Parliament committees’ meeting reports can also serve as time-saving and efficient tools.

Linguists can find excellent resources on the Commission DG Translation’s website regarding terminology; finding and comparing the terminology of various EU documents in different linguistic versions is also a powerful preparation method.

Having reviewed the above rules and general advice, let’s get started with the preparation!
Endnotes


2 http://europa.eu/epso/discover/selection_proced/selection/index_en.htm#chapter2


4 The wording “Communities” may be changed to “Union” according to the changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon.

5 For the official list of diploma types accepted by EPSO, please refer to http://europa.eu/epso/doc/diplomasfortheweb.pdf

6 Regarding work experience, generally a copy of references from the current and previous employers is sufficient to demonstrate that the required level and length of professional experience have been attained


8 http://www.assessmentcenters.org/pdf/00guidelines.pdf

Further General Resources (see other specific resources in the relevant chapters)

Europa: http://europa.eu
EU CV Registration for Temporary Jobs:
http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/job/cvonline/index_en.htm
European Parliament Fact Sheets:
European Court of Justice: http://www.curia.europa.eu
European Court of Auditors: http://www.eca.europa.eu
Eur-lex: http://eur-lex.europa.eu
European Personnel Selection Office: http://europa.eu/epso/
Staff Regulations: http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/docs/toc100_en.pdf
Citizens’ Europe: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm
DG Translation Aids: http://ec.europa.eu/translation/index_en.htm
Euractiv: http://www.euractiv.com
EU Observer: http://www.euobserver.com
EU Politix: http://www.eupolitix.com

To find this list with updated information, visit www.eu-testbook.com