

Brussels,
EPSO.03/

EPSO/AST/154/22 – OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

1. BACKGROUND

The Selection Board validated the results of the reasoning tests in competition EPSO/AST/154/22 and they were communicated to candidates on 16.01.2023. The competition is now at eligibility stage: the Board had planned to start checking the eligibility of candidates who passed the reasoning tests but has now been told to put this activity on hold, pending the outcome of further discussions at Management Board level.

2. RETESTING – OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS IN GENERAL (ALL SCENARIOS)

2.1 Testing conditions

Retesting any number of candidates will happen under the same conditions: remote testing only, human proctors¹ and same technical requirements. Specifically:

- Proctors could still give erroneous instructions or wrongly terminate a test and/or be rude. It is much less likely after the improvements EPSO introduced but there is no vouching for the behavior of external staff. There may still be incidents.
- Some proctors may still be based outside the EU;
- Candidates will still not be able to use corporate laptops;
- Candidates whose equipment did not meet technical requirements will still be unable to test;
- Some candidates will experience issues (technical or other), which will have to be investigated in a context of intense scrutiny, including by the media.

2.2 The Selection Board

Retesting after results have been validated and communicated to candidates will require to overrule the Board. The Board discussed retesting, with some members in favour but more against (it did not come to a vote). On the request of the Chair, EPSO sent the Board a written communication stating it was taking responsibility for decisions on the complaints of candidates who experienced technical or organisational issues.

2.3 Results management

The competition is at a stage where the Board will check the eligibility of candidates who obtained pass marks on the reasoning test. Candidates have been ranked according to

¹ Automated proctoring to eliminate the risk associated with human proctors is not an option for the moment: it would be reckless to use a new and untried method for retesting in this competition.

their score: the Board will start with the top-scoring candidates and work down the ranking until it has accepted as eligible 3 times the number of candidates foreseen to be placed on the reserve list.

Any number of retested candidates who obtain pass marks will trigger a recalculating of results and a new ranking. Retested candidates who score sufficiently high will push down candidates who are currently ranked high enough to have a reasonable chance to end up on the reserve list.

2.4 Item exposure

If candidates are retested, the test will be based on the same Board-approved matrix² used in the initial test. Questions will be randomly drawn from the same pools and candidates who saw the questions in the first test will likely have some of the same questions when they retest.

Candidates who regularly participate in open competitions are confronted with questions they have seen before. The risk is mitigated by the relatively long intervals between competitions and the fact matrices vary from one competition to the next. In the case of a retest in this competition however, the interval will be short and the matrix identical.

2.5 Timing

The time required to organise a retest depends to a large extent on the number of candidates involved. Without guidance on numbers, it is not possible to make more than an educated guess: it would certainly not be possible to retest within a timespan shorter than 4-6 weeks after a decision has been made, but it could be several months if EPSO is to retest thousands.

3. RETESTING SCENARIOS

3.1 Partial retesting

This scenario requires identifying candidates to invite to take the test again. It will be difficult to find the right candidates among those who contacted EPSO. Indeed, there is no common denominator to be found in the messages sent to EPSO: some describe issues and ask for remedial action; some raise issues unrelated to testing; others express dissatisfaction (with remote testing for example) without claiming they were unable to test. If the purpose is to retest candidates who experienced issues or complained, EPSO will have to go through a wide variety of messages - written in free form – to isolate those which fit the purpose. This will be a subjective process and staff will need precise guidance that it may not always be possible to give.

² The matrix defines the number of questions drawn from each pool corresponding to a desired difficulty level : x% of questions of difficulty 1, Y % of difficulty 2, etc.

Exposure of test questions: a significant portion of the candidates who contacted EPSO were able to test successfully in the end or were offered a retest. Retesting would give them an advantage: they were exposed to the questions and there is a risk (see above) they will have some of the exact same questions. In conclusion, it is doubtful the exercise could be done objectively. It will be difficult to explain the criteria used and respond to accusations of favouring candidates who were already exposed to test questions.

The only clearly identified group for the purposes of partial retesting would be the 90 candidates whose complaints were investigated and for which EPSO concluded they did not follow instructions, did not meet technical requirements, etc. Retesting this group however would create a precedent that would make it very difficult for EPSO to follow its current approach³ in future competitions.

3.2 Full retesting

In this scenario, all candidates⁴ would be offered a retest, including those who already passed the test and know their score. EPSO would then invite all candidates who decide to take the test again. The resulting population would be broader than candidates who experienced issues or complained: it would include candidates who failed to book or show up the first time, candidates who took the test but did not obtain pass marks and candidates who hope to improve their scores.

Exposure of test questions would be a significant risk as many candidates who did not manage to obtain pass marks the first time would opt to take the test again. They will be advantaged: not only would they repeat the test but there is a strong probability they will have some of the same questions they got the first time around.

As explained above, with potentially hundreds receiving new test results, there will be a significant impact on the chances of candidates who currently have obtained pass scores to end up on the reserve list.

As for timing, the competition would be delayed significantly: testing windows are planned months in advance and EPSO would need to find room to test a large number of candidates.

3.3 Cancel the current competition and start over

This scenario has few operational implications. There is no heightened risk of exposure of questions, as a new matrix will be used and sufficient time will have elapsed to mitigate the risk.

³ (i) Investigate cases where candidates claim they were unable to test despite meeting requirements and following instructions and (ii) offer a retest where the investigation shows the candidate was indeed unable to test through no fault of their own.

⁴ Either the 6,300 who were invited for the initial test or the 5,693 who booked that test.

The main impact will be a long delay in producing a reserve list as the new Notice of Competition (test portfolio, language regime, etc) will have to be agreed by institutions and published. The Board and EPSO will have to redo the work done so far with a new set of candidates. It is likely one year will have passed before the new competition reaches the state EPSO/AST/154/22 has now reached (eligibility). One positive aspect is that the new competition will be able to follow the new competition model and benefit from the advantages it offers.

Cancelling the competition and not redoing it is not considered here: such action does not entail any operational constraints.
