



EPSO: the nightmare continues

In June the tests were held for candidates for the AST competition (EPSO/AST/151/22) and the examination of candidates on the AD reserve list (EPSO/AD/398/22). In both cases, the examination consisted of the usual examination of multiple-choice questions (MCQ) on verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning, followed by the case study after a break of 20 minutes.

Everything was managed remotely, as in competition EPSO/AST/154/22, which was cancelled by EPSO, following the avalanche of complaints about various technical issues raised.

It is clear that the conduct of the examination has not improved. Many candidates still encounters problems. +

Before going into details on technical problems, let us first look at the very issue of these “remote” tests.

Problem of equal treatment of candidates

Prior to the pandemics, candidates had to go to one of the Prometric Physical Examination Centres. Although traveling may have been uncomfortable for some people, the test centres ensured a similar or even identical test experience everywhere. Candidates used the same workstation model, with the same size of monitor, the same type of keyboard, in a similar type of room, etc.

This is not applicable anymore. Candidates are expected to take the exam remotely, using their own computer in a private space. However, everyone does not necessarily have a computer at home nor have a computer that meets the requirements of the competition, thus automatically excluding certain potential candidates or obliging some of them to buy or rent a computer specifically for the exam.

Finally, the competition environment is also far from being standardised. While some people may have a quiet and comfortable space, many others do not have such spaces at their disposal. Some takes their exam in their kitchen or bedroom, with all possible inconvenience when you are in a private and non-professional space (video conference with partner in the room, children shouting, neighbours who mows his lawn, shouts, etc.). A new market has even emerged recently Indeed, private companies rent suitable rooms for unhappy EPSO candidates who have to take a competition without being able to meet all the requirements of the remote tests! Of course, an additional cost for them!

Not to mention technical problems!

Unfortunately, the situation may still be worse.

Firstly, because of technical and logistical problems on the ‘Prometric’ side. As a result, many candidates had to wait up to two and a half hours (!) after their scheduled time to pass the security test and start their examination.

The slots offered were already far from optimal (many candidates had to take their exam late afternoon or evening). But it was even worse for those who had to stay watching their screen for long

minutes (or even hours) without having any idea of what was happening, often trying to get the help of a completely overloaded and saturated help desk.

Others even faced significant technical problems in the middle of the examination, with the screen suddenly becoming grey or black, with no other possibility than restarting the computer, waiting for several minutes for a 'monitor' to pass the security test again. All this was done within the time which was supposed to be devoted to the examination.

It is time to act

While EPSO claims that the remote tests improved compared to the disaster that led to the cancellation of competition EPSO/AST/154/22, the situation remains unacceptable. And the problem also affects the selection of contract agents: it would become aberrant that a staff member who is perfectly suitable for work at the Commission would not be hired solely because of a problem related to EPSO's test management.

It seems clear that 'Prometric' continues to provide very bad quality service and, more generally, that the remote competition model does not seem suitable for EPSO competitions.

EPSO and the institutions, clients and members of the EPSO Board must bear this in mind, and should acknowledge the failure and rethink the approach meaningfully. We should refuse a tool that clearly does not work. A change in attitude is, first of all, a matter of respect for candidates. But the image of the EU institutions is also at stake as well as their ability to effectively recruit the required specialised profiles.

We remain vigilant about developments on this issue and we continue to collect your experiences.