

Preparation for the training course on *Selection and Recruitment: a practical overview for managers*

**Organised by the European School of Administration for
EU team managers involved in recruiting staff**



This course is designed to encourage reflection, discussion, and professional judgment, rather than to prescribe a single “correct” way of selecting and recruiting. Participants are invited to consider how the ideas explored may—or may not—apply to their specific context, team, and responsibilities.

In order to prepare for your course please find below:

- A background document to read before the course
- Two pre-course reflections that you should have before attending the course

The New Recruitment Landscape

Purpose of this document

The following perspectives, examples, and reflections presented are intended as learning prompts to support managers in thinking critically about their roles, responsibilities in the field of selection and recruitment. They have been prepared by the Greenhouse Group who act as training designers for this course for the European School of Administration. The views expressed throughout this course do not constitute an official position of the European Union institutions, bodies, offices, or agencies, nor should they be interpreted as formal policy, legal guidance, or binding instruction.

Evolution of the recruitment landscape

For many years, EU recruitment was largely centralised in EPSO: EPSO organised competitions, produced reserve lists, and institutions recruited from those lists in a relatively standard way. That picture is changing. EPSO is explicitly in a transformation process aimed at making selection faster, more targeted, and better aligned with a modern labour market, including updated approaches to competencies and testing.

The practical result for institutions and their managers is that recruitment and selection are now more clearly separated, and recruitment is becoming more decentralised—closer to services,

DGs, units, and local HR partners. In other words: EPSO still matters, but it is increasingly a selection service provider and enabler, while the critical focus of hiring is more heavily owned by the recruiting organisations.

1) What EPSO is (increasingly) doing—and not doing

EPSO remains responsible for organising open competitions and selection procedures that produce reserve lists (for permanent staff) and candidate pools (for contract staff testing). It is also modernising its approach through a multi-year roadmap and guiding principles such as precision, agility, and speed (choosing the right tests for the right profile, adapting to client needs, and running competitions faster).

At the same time, the operational “centre of gravity” is moving:

- Institutions recruit from EPSO reserve lists by checking profiles and inviting selected candidates to interview.
- For contract agents, recruiting services search the database and shortlist candidates who match role requirements; EPSO then provides the standardised reasoning tests, after which institutions interview and make final decisions.
- EPSO itself describes CAST as an “increasingly important recruitment channel” for institutions.

So, while EPSO still anchors fairness and comparability through common testing and structured selection frameworks, institutions are more directly shaping hiring outcomes through how they define needs, shortlist, and interview.

2) What decentralisation changes for managers

Decentralisation does not just mean “more work for HR.” It changes the manager’s role in four important ways:

Workforce planning becomes more consequential.

When hiring is less “queue-based” behind a single central competition calendar, unit-level clarity matters more: what profile do we need, when, and for how long? EPSO’s move toward shorter, more targeted selection methods puts pressure on institutions to be equally precise in translating business needs into role requirements.

Recruitment decisions are now capability investments, not just operational fixes.

In a more decentralised recruitment landscape, managers play a stronger role in shaping who enters the organisation. Each hire is no longer just about “covering the post” but about building the Institutions’ future capability mix. The question shifts from “*Who can do this job now?*” to “*Who will help us deliver our mandate over the next 5–10 years?*”

The definition of “fit” shifts earlier in the process.

If candidate pools are larger and cycles are faster, the ability to screen for motivation and role-relevant strengths moves from a central assessment centre style model toward institutional shortlisting and interview quality. For managers, this increases the value—and risk—of how interviews are structured and documented.

Candidate experience is shaped locally.

EPSO can improve testing experience, but the candidate’s perception of the EU as an employer is heavily influenced by the speed, clarity, and professionalism of local interactions: vacancy messaging, responsiveness, scheduling, feedback, and tone.

Governance and fairness rely more on consistent practice, not just central process.

A decentralised model can be faster and more tailored, but it can also feel uneven if different services apply different standards. This means managers need to treat interview structure, scoring discipline, and records management as non-negotiable—not as “admin.”

3) How this affects talent strategy: what “good” looks like now

In a decentralised recruitment landscape, strong hiring units typically do three things well:

1. They write role requirements that are genuinely ‘future-proofed’ and predicted.

Not “someone dynamic with excellent communication skills,” but a small set of deliverables and behaviours tied to the work. This aligns with EPSO’s stated direction toward using the “right type of tests for the right profile.”

Interviews should test potential, not just experience and in a decentralised system, interviews become a key lever for assessing long-term value. Asking only about past tasks risks selecting candidates who are optimised for yesterday’s problems. Structured questions that explore how candidates learn, adapt, and deal with ambiguity provide better signals of future contribution—especially in institutions facing evolving political, regulatory, and societal demands.

2. They run structured, evidence-based interviews.

A structured interview (same questions to all candidates, with possible follow-up questions, anchored scoring, documented evidence) improves fairness, speeds decisions, and makes outcomes more defensible—especially when recruiting responsibility sits with institutions. This becomes crucial when shortlisting is done by recruiting services from large pools.

3. They actively manage their talent pipeline.

Decentralisation rewards units that treat recruitment like a continuous process: staying visible to candidates, engaging with HR early, and moving quickly when a shortlist is available.

Pre-course reflection 1: A practical checklist for managers

Before the training day, reflect on the last recruitment you were involved in:

- **Need clarity:** Could you explain the role in three outcomes (what success looks like in 6–12 months)?
- **Shortlisting discipline:** Were criteria explicit, job-related, and consistently applied? (Especially important when searching candidate databases and shortlisting locally.)
- **Interview quality:** Did the panel use structured questions and a scoring rubric, or “free discussion”?
- **Speed and candidate experience:** How long did candidates wait between steps, and what did they hear from you?
- **Fairness and records:** If challenged, could you evidence why the chosen candidate best matched the role?

Pre-course reflection 2: What are your two biggest recruitment challenges?

Recent changes in EU recruitment and selection processes mean that managers play a more direct role than ever in shaping who joins their teams. Recruitment is no longer just a procedural step supported by central systems; it is increasingly a managerial judgment call with long-term consequences.

Before the training, we invite you to pause and reflect on your own experience.

1. Identify your two biggest recruitment challenges

Think about the last one or two recruitment processes you were involved in (as a hiring manager, panel member, or decision-maker). What were the **two most difficult issues** you faced?

These might relate to:

- Attracting the *right* candidates rather than simply enough candidates
- Translating operational needs into clear, future-oriented role requirements
- Shortlisting fairly and efficiently from large or diverse candidate pools
- Assessing potential, motivation, and adaptability—not just past experience
- Balancing speed and urgency with quality and defensibility of decisions
- Managing candidate expectations and experience
- Ensuring consistency and fairness across panels and services

Do not look for the “correct” answer. Focus on what genuinely felt most challenging in practice.

2. Consider what sits behind those challenges

For each challenge, ask yourself:

- Is this primarily a process issue, a capability issue, or a decision-making issue?
- How much of it is within my control as a manager?
- What assumptions do I make when recruiting (for example, about “fit”, risk, or experience)?

Often, the visible difficulty (for example, “too many candidates” or “not enough suitable profiles”) masks a deeper issue around role clarity, assessment methods, or confidence in judgment.

3. Think beyond the vacancy

Finally, reflect briefly on this question:

If recruitment shapes the organisation we will have in five to ten years, how well do my current recruitment decisions support that future?

You are not expected to have solutions at this stage. The purpose of this reflection is to bring real, lived recruitment challenges into the training so that tools and frameworks can be applied to situations that matter to you.

Please bring your two challenges with you on the day. They will be used as reference points throughout the course.