

Mr. Bearfield, when you describe your job it sounds quite dramatic: you talk of war for talent. Is the selection of future EU officials so spectacular?

Bearfield: Yes, for the future we need well-trained, dedicated young people – and we have to fight for them. We compete for staff with international organizations and companies. They're looking everywhere for the best. That's what we also do now.

How many people do you need?

For the EU institutions work, about 40,000 civil servants, in the coming years many of them will go in retirement, about one in three officers of the Commission. We need to replace these people.

EU official, it sounds dull. What do you offer graduates?

Bearfield: Our image seems not always to correspond to reality. I can confirm this as British. At home, it is not always good, when I introduce myself as an EU official. Some people think: We're sitting around in Brussels, do nothing and get a lot of money. These prejudices are wrong! The opportunities in the European institutions but also the challenges are many: employees can switch from one DG to another, working in different policy areas - agriculture, environment, industry. Or make career in financial management, human resources, among IT professionals. And you have a chance to travel, now we have delegations in almost every country in the world.

What is the entry salary?

Bearfield: The pay is very good, you get about 4000 € net per month.

The EU used to tackle the competition for top talent more slowly - graduates who applied had to wait up to two years.

Bearfield: That's true, but we have radically reduced this waiting period. We managed to carry out the last selection procedure within ten months, even though we had more than 50 000 applicants.

What has changed?

Bearfield: For example on the pre-selecting stage we do not ask factual knowledge anymore. A starting EU officials do not necessarily has to know who was president of the Commission in 1985. We used to have such tests and the candidates worked hard and accumulated a lot of useless knowledge.

So now you make it easier for the candidates?

Bearfield: It is still difficult, but the testing we do now makes more sense. It's about competence, not so much the tapping of knowledge. It is a two step process: First, cognitive abilities are tested. The best applicants are then invited to an Assessment Center, where among other things their ability to analyze complex situations and to communicate with people from other cultures will be tested.

Who can apply?

Bearfield: All EU citizens with a university degree can apply for administrative career track. Last year, we have enlarged the circle for the first time to young people who are nearing graduation. Many begin



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with a job already, while still at university, many have an offer in the pocket. If we do not respond to students early, the best are gone.

How idealistic must be an applicant?

Bear Field: We want smart people with lots of social skills that are among the best in their field. But it is just as important that their heart beats for Europe, that they are highly motivated.

Would it help me, that I know you now? Can you smuggle me in?

Bearfield: No, not at all. It is an anonymous selection process; an independent jury. There is no allocation formula for each country. Where you come from or who you know is completely irrelevant. Just like me: I come from a modest background, I applied as 20,000 others - and got the job.

Can you remember your first job interview?

Bearfield: I have applied in the public sector in the UK and also had to go through the assessment center, for two days. That was very exciting and extremely difficult. In the end I was not sure if I did it. But it struck me: If the selection procedure is tough and professional, the job must be worth. That is what we do now.

What must a candidate have studied?

Bearfield: We have almost everything. I meet people who have studied archeology or Greek. Of course we are looking for lawyers and economists each year. But in principle, everyone is welcome, no matter what background. I myself have studied foreign languages.

From where did you copy your new method?

Bearfield: We have been looking mainly at international organizations and the public sector, the IMF, the UN, the World Bank, national governments. This way we did not have to hire expensive consultants.

Who is the best in recruitment?

Bearfield: We were most impressed by the Canadian government. They do it centralized in Ottawa, bilingual, the assessment center are very professional.

How about targeted headhunting?

Bearfield: That would not be anonymous and would be contrary to our principles. With our new selection procedure, we hope to appeal to the best candidates.

A standard question: What should a candidate wear on the interview? Does it have to be suit and a tie?

Bearfield: Probably, you should' t be wearing a swimsuit. Seriously, most men opt for suit, but some also wear jeans. I do not know what the jury likes better.

Has anyone ever dressed completely inappropriate?

Bearfield: I have colleagues who dress interesting. I do not know they were wearing on the interview. But they somehow managed it.