



The 2015 appraisal exercise – practical suggestions

DG-HR has launched since Wed 8.1.2015 the self-assessment exercise for all European Commission officials. This is the first step of the annual appraisal procedure and it should be normally concluded within eight (8) working days (i.e. **by Monday 19.1.2015**), unless you can justify a delay.

In this overview **Generation 2004** aims to provide you, as an "appraised official", with:

- a) the **context** within which the self-assessment is carried-out,
- b) how you should **approach** the exercise in general terms,
- c) what you should **firmly reject**,
- d) what you should **try your best to do**,
- ... plus
- e) some additional suggestions.

We hope that you will find it useful.

a) The (contradictory) **context** within which the self-assessment is carried-out

The legal basis to assess our "ability, efficiency and conduct in the service" is provided by Art. 43 of the staff regulations ([link](#)) and - at the Commission - by the General Implementing Provision ([link](#)) C(2013) 8985 final of 16.12.2013. You are advised to consult them both and to ask for interpretative help if needed.

Probably you are already aware of a couple of major contradictions between theory and reality:

- *Theoretically*, this appraisal should be related to merit of the official; *however* the *practical problem* is that there is no reference framework for assessing merit. 'Thanks' to the 2004 and 2014 reforms, grades are very loosely connected to responsibilities. Differences abound among different DGs, and even within them!
- *Theoretically*, the appraisal should be disconnected from the promotion exercise; *however* in *practical reality*, although the processes of appraisal and that of promotion are effectively separate, almost everyone (assessed officials *and* reporting officers *and* senior management) knows that they are closely linked (promotion being heavily influenced by appraisal) and plays his/her cards accordingly.

Armed with this awareness, together with good knowledge of your rights and with a precise preparation, you are already half-way to your goal; let us now speak about the other half.

b) How you **should approach** the exercise, in general terms

When compiling your self-assessment, apart from carefully respecting the standard reporting structure, you should better keep in mind the two major contradictions highlighted above and address them:

- Aiming **to create for yourself the reference framework** (of course, in combination with external elements, such as your objectives, your documented tasks, and other job-definition agreements with your management) and trying to get it recognised by your Reporting Officer (RO). In this task, insist that the specific context for your work is taken into consideration.
- Preparing the ground for **maximising your promotion chances** (in this or coming exercises) and providing the maximum information for specifically supporting the three analytical elements of merit provided under Art 45.1. of the staff regulations: reports, use of languages in the execution of your duties (beyond languages tested at your competition) and level of responsibilities exercised.

On top of that, if you are a post-2004 'juniorised officer' (i.e. somebody recruited way below what your professional experience, skills and education credentials merited), you should also assess *how* those 'above your grade' unrecognised resources are **essential for your performance**.

Still looks too general? Then let us move towards some very concrete **do's** and **don'ts**.

c) What you should **firmly reject: DON'Ts**

- **Never** allow **negative elements** which have not been explicitly discussed with your RO during the year and during your interview to **find their way into the final appraisal report**.
- **Never** tolerate the so-called '**promotion discount**'. Much too often officials hear from their RO some statement like: "*Since you were promoted recently, you should understand that now it is fair that I concentrate myself on your less favoured colleagues*". Answer that under the staff regulation promotion and appraisal and clearly set apart and that you should be appraised based on your achievements and on no other consideration.
- **Never** accept **paternalistic, generalistic, unmotivated appraisals** (even if positive!!!). Appraisal should be based on sober, specific facts.
- **Never** be mollified (appeased) by **promises for the future**. They are not worth much in the quickly-changing environment which is the Commission.
- **Never** admit **unqualified failure** in achieving an objective. If you failed on something and you feel that externally imposed constraints were the cause, have such a context clearly documented in the appraisal.
- **Never** allow that special requirements that were imposed on you along the period being appraised (including extra workload, covering for a missing colleague ... etc) are **forgotten or dismissed as 'normal'**. Insist on having in your report an accurate description of contextual elements of this kind.

d) What you should **try your best to do: DO's**

- ✓ Regarding the "forward" perspective, discuss with your hierarchy reasonable expectations for promotion(s) and what you need to do in order to maximise your chances for promotions beyond the present exercise (with a mid-term perspective).
- ✓ Be aware that your RO will likely state that it is not in his/her hands but in those of higher hierarchy (director, DG). ROs have been explicitly instructed to avoid discussing promotion perspectives during appraisals. Indeed, it is your director who will normally defend your promotion before the

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senior management of the DG; however, your director generally does not know you as well as your RO, if at all, so the latter still plays an important role.

- ✓ Plan ahead for any requirements conditioning or influencing promotion (not only the third language Art. 45.2). Your manager has a very important role in allocating training resources; prepare articulate, justified requests and present them with decision.
- ✓ Request that your assessment report deals in an explicit way (synthetic, clearly understandable) with a series of individual elements regarding your performance, such as:
 - Your achievement relative to objectives
 - Your special achievements as an individual
 - Achievements of your team, underlining your contributions
 - Your volunteer contributions to the life of the service
 - Your tasks representing the Unit/DG towards other parties
 - Your trainings successfully completed
 - Your use of job-relevant languages
 - Your communication skills, written and spoken
 - Intensity of your missions
 - Your availability for unexpected assignments
 - Your contribution to a peaceful and positive work environment; skills for conflict-avoidance and conflict-resolution.
 - Your responsibilities compared with responsibilities normally given to officials in your grade.
- ✓ Establish explicit and implicit connections to proofs of your performance (e.g. mails, communications of any kind coming from hierarchy or colleagues; improvement of key process indicators; successes obtained by your dossiers) obtained along the year you are assessing. Do not be timid about underlining your successes.
- ✓ If your RO is not able to follow you on this perspective, do not hesitate to request the involvement of the counter-signing officer and of your DG's HR unit.
- ✓ In order to best provide career context, you should have at hand at least the following quantitative elements:
 - Start of career date and net career time (having detracted from the total career time both leave on personal grounds and proportional quota of part-time periods)
 - Average career speed (grade+step today, minus grade+step of entrance, divided net career time)
 - Mobility (positions/DGs)
- Time remaining to standard pensionable age.

Do not hesitate to ask for our help if you need guidance in collecting and preparing this information. Be ready to share it with your RO and do not hesitate to ask them to take it into consideration.

e) **Anything else?** Additional hints?

- Try to **avoid routine**. Even if you copy-and-paste some sections of your past-year self-assessment report (we all do, to a certain extent!), aim at considering them with fresh eyes, edit them, connect them better to the new things that have happened and so on.
- Make sure that your RO writes a report about your performance during the past year, not a copy-paste of previous reports, nor a report about the beginning of the current year or about December of last year.
- Try to **strike a balance** between being **objective** – with detailed criticism if need be - and being **constructive and proactive**. Do not shoot yourself in the foot by pointing to your weaknesses. A note of assertive optimism is always welcome!

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- Try **to be to the point** in your self-assessment. Your RO probably has over 20 self-assessments to read. If you are to the point, it is also more likely that the RO will focus on the essentials and write a concise report.

Any **additional need** for this part of the cycle (self-assessment and discussion with your RO)? – please contact us as soon as possible. Do not leave it for the last day!

Soon we shall contact you all with additional hints for the following steps of the **promotion cycle**, trying to extract lessons from the recent past.

We sincerely hope that these few hints will be of help to you and will, as a consequence, contribute to reduce the disadvantage that post-2004 officials face in important HR processes.

Finally – please remember that this is the moment to renew your membership in Generation 2004 for 2015, if you are already a member and an excellent moment to join us, if you are not 😊

Your *Generation 2004* team