

GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC SERVICE: PROVISIONAL, TEMPORARY, ASSISTANT ECONOMIST APPOINTMENTS

Application Process Guidance notes

Please read the following application guidance notes carefully prior to completing your application form. By applying you are agreeing to the eligibility requirements in the guidance notes. We will not contact you to query or double-check any of the information that you provide.

1. Essential eligibility requirements

To be eligible, applicants must:

- be a UK, Commonwealth, or a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) EEA Nationality for GES posts
- have an unrestricted right to work in the UK (these temporary posts are for current vacancies so departments cannot offer sponsorship for those who are subject to employment restrictions)
- have or expect to get in 2017 a 2.1 or above in Economics or an MSc/MA in Economics

If your degree is a mixed degree with economics as one of the subjects, such as business economics, then at least 50% of the course modules must be in economics. You must have studied both macro and micro economics.

If your first degree is in another subject, you either need a Postgraduate Diploma in Economics or a taught Masters that includes macro and micro economics - give **FULL** details of modules on the application form.

If you graduated more than 5 years ago, you must give examples in the competency section of the application form of how you have maintained competency in economics.

2. Completing the application form

Please ensure that you provide full details about the economic components of your degree. We can only sift on the information you provide on the application form so please ensure you complete the form as fully as possible. The following information must be included:

- All modules of Undergraduate degree/Postgraduate degree/diploma studied thus far, including grades.
- Number of credits allotted to each module and total number of credits taken thus far.
- All economics modules marked as (Econ).

Sift criteria and process

The Government Economic Service (GES) team will complete a manual sift of applications based on the following criteria:

1. Academic Qualifications (see essential criteria above)

2. Competency areas.

In sifting the applications to decide which candidates are sent to departments to consider for interview, weight will also be given to the section on competences and extra – curricular activities so do try and think of examples which best demonstrate these.

It is important that you provide written evidence of your achievements in the following areas;

- working on own initiative
- organising and prioritising time
- producing results/determination

3. Extra-curricular activities which demonstrate you can build productive relationships with others. This may be from voluntary work etc.

4. Work Experience in related or other areas.

Those candidates who best meet the sift criteria will be considered for the Provisional Assessment Centre.

Provisional Economic Assessment Centre

Candidates invited to the Economic Assessment Centre (EAC) will be assessed by GES economists against three competencies:

- knowledge of economics
- application of economics
- communication

You must pass all three competencies.

Preparation beforehand (see video from Chief EAC Assessor at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2017-government-economic-faststream-scheme>)

A common mistake among applicants is to think that they have to impress the assessors with advanced techniques. Assessors will give you the chance to discuss your specialist studies, but they are looking for a firm grasp of the fundamentals. They want to see that you can apply them, even to unfamiliar topics. Learning

advanced techniques without understanding will not get you into the GES, whereas critical facility is highly regarded.

So in terms of reading for the EAC process you may revise a 'strongest area' but also make sure that you are familiar with the broad content covered in the latest editions of excellent introductory tomes such as by Begg et al or Sloman. A good knowledge of core intermediate micro will also help, such as in Nicholson or Varian (Intermediate). Cost benefit analysis (CBA) is used extensively in government but for EAC you are expected only to understand its roots in welfare economics rather than use advanced CBA techniques. So be well versed in deviations from efficiency and distributional concerns that could lead to policy interventions. Less important, elementary econometrics may assist you and perhaps intermediate macro as in Blanchard or Carlin and Soskice.

Of all these books the first year introductory texts and intermediate micro are the most important. But even these won't help if you can't apply this knowledge. For example, you may have memorised the formula for price elasticity of demand but what is the formula when elasticity is applied to the length of an elephant's trunk with respect to the pull of an alligator? You can define opportunity cost but can you apply this to an asset? You may know $MC=MR$ as a profit maximising condition but what if there are no costs? Can you draw on economics to shed light on the pros and cons of charging for entry to museums? Should water be metered? Why don't lampposts have slot meters? What economic concepts are relevant to a smoking ban or the provision of early childcare?

At the EAC you will be asked to produce a piece of written work on a given topic, a technical report. At least 2 weeks before the date of your EAC you are given the topic to prepare for and perhaps research, this will be included in your web based invitation message. We expect this to take no more than 10 hours to research. Before EAC, you should practise writing your report so that you can maximise the use of the 30 minutes you will be allowed on the day. This invitation will also give you a range of sources to use when researching this topic. **Please note you will not be allowed to take pre-prepared material into the test room.**

Then at the interview, you will be asked to give a presentation based on your technical report. For the purposes of the presentation alone you should assume you are presenting to non-economists and therefore avoid using overly technical language.

At EAC

The whole Assessment Centre is done under examination conditions. This means you must not take any materials (books, mobile 'phones or papers) into the examination/interview rooms. Copies of your completed technical report will be given back to you by the GES team before the interview and you may use these to prepare for the interview and take them into the interview room. You must not consult any books/internet sites between completing your written economics exercises and your

interview. Any candidate doing so will be disqualified. All Assessment Centre materials are marked “Official-Sensitive” and must not be removed from the building.

1. **Technical report.** For this exercise you are encouraged to ‘showcase’ your knowledge, technical grasp and understanding of the relevant economics. For example you will need to demonstrate (briefly) that you understand and can apply the relevant principles, theory and evidence. You may set the scene with memorised facts and statistics, but it is not a good use of your time to do much of this. Concentrate instead on communicating how economic theory and evidence can inform an assessment of the potential impacts of the policy. Remember you will be tested verbally on what you write here as part of your interview, so you are advised not to attempt to exaggerate your command of economics. You may use freehand diagrams or equations where you wish, but these must be clear, labelled and explained as required. **You will have just 30 minutes to complete this report at EAC.**
2. **Short answer questions.** This will be a set of questions (10 in total) testing your breadth of macro, micro and to a much lesser extent a purely ‘technical’ topic such as simple descriptive and/or inference statistics. For guidance see on what we can expect from an honours graduate in economics see:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Subject-benchmark-statementEconomics.pdf>

You should attempt to answer all ten questions, but as you have only 30 minutes overall your answers must be brief.

The best strategy is to scan the questions through so that you complete answers for those items that you can answer most easily.

Avoid ‘getting stuck’ on a particular question or writing too much for one answer. Above all, don’t be discouraged as there is a lot you will not know, just press onto the next question, the pass mark is only 40 per cent and will have a further opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of your knowledge during the interview

N.B. The first two exercises are done back to back, this means you will spend one hour producing your written work on a PC.

The PC will not have spell-check but you will not be penalised for spelling mistakes unless they are predominant throughout the paper. Obviously, words have to be discernable and errors of grammar may be marked down e.g. not being able to distinguish between ‘there’ and ‘their’.

3. **Presentation** – For this exercise you are asked to turn your technical report into a presentation, translating it for a non-economist. You should practice doing this before your EAC.

At EAC, your technical report will be returned to you before your interview. In the presentation you will need to make a policy recommendation. The presentation is at the start of your interview and should last for 10 minutes and you will be stopped if you over run. It is an oral presentation and there are no facilities for Power Point or flipcharts. You may stand or sit to do the presentation. The interview board will comprise one academic economist and one government economist or two government economists. **For the purposes of the presentation you should assume that the audience are not economists and therefore avoid using overly technical language or assuming a prior knowledge of economics. These assessors will then ask you questions on your presentation and reports. You may answer all verbal questions assuming interviewers are economists. NB There should be a clear distinction between the technical report and your presentation as they are intended for different audiences. For your presentation you must not merely read out your technical report.**

4. Interview – this will follow on directly from the presentation and will also cover your short answer questions paper (including perhaps additional questions), and technical report. **You will also be asked to name your ‘strongest area’ for questioning on by the assessors.** Pick an area that is not too broad and not too narrow. For example, ‘Macro’ is too broad and ‘Gauss Markov conditions’ too narrow. Inflation, monetary policy, macro-stability, growth, international trade, labour markets would all be fine, but you are not limited to these topics. Again, do not aim at choosing an advanced the topic merely to impress, it is far more important to demonstrate a deep understanding of the fundamentals. There may also be a question on a topical issue. Again, the Board is interested in the economic theory and application (not the politics) and you might need to demonstrate your ability to think things through from first principles.

During the interview you may assume you are speaking to economists. The presentation and interview will take an hour in total.