Questions and Answers ESA Astronaut Selection 2021 - Swiss Info Event

Application / Selection:

Q: Regarding age, how is being at the end of the eligibility age going to affect chances of acceptance?

A: Age is not a discriminator in the selection process. The maximum age of 50 was defined to allow at least two spaceflights until the retirement age has been reached.

Q: How many candidates will be selected?

A: At this point, 4 to 6 career astronauts should be selected. There is also a separate job announcement for an Astronaut with a physical disability.

Q: At equal knowledge/competencies, are women favored?

A: There are no quotas for women. The selection is purely based on competences and other criteria (hard and soft).

Q: Does an algorithm - meaning key words are very important, check CV and cover letter?

A: No, the applications will be checked and assessed by humans.

Q: Does the job you pick up after finishing a master’s degree until you apply at ESA matter a lot in the selection?

A: Yes, the job should be relevant to your professional education.

Q: If I get my Master’s degree in exactly one year is it too late to apply?

A: Yes, the Master’s degree is a requirement at the time of the submission of the application. In your case, the 3 years of professional experience after the Master is missing anyway.

Q: Could the questionnaire attached with the application somehow shadows the CV and motivation letter? If some nice to have are not fulfilled, would it be filtered despite the will to learn and other skills shown in the motivation letter and CV?

A: The questionnaire will help in the selection process, especially for the strict requirements such as your educational qualification and work experience. It will not overshadow the CV and motivation letter, both of which are important to your application.

Q: Is the age really quite open? Meaning being 45 vs 30 isn't an issue at all?

A: Yes.

Q: My understanding is that an astronaut's selection is highly correlated to how much their country contributed to ESA. Does ESA already know which nationalities will be considered for the 4-6+ new astronauts, or will that depend on the applicant’s pool's strengths and weaknesses?

A: There is no pre-selection based on nationalities. ESA is looking for the best candidates.
Q: Do ongoing naturalization processes in Switzerland affect application status for ESA candidates?

A: You do not have to have the Swiss citizenship you already have one from another ESA Member State or Associated State by the deadline of 28 May 2021.

Q: What is the ideal background to have before applying to be an astronaut?

A: There is no ideal background that can be described beforehand. The requirements are clearly described, which is what counts for the application.

Q: Is being a citizen of ESA Member States one of those boxes that we perhaps do not need to tick? :) Are Swiss permanent residents eligible?

A: A passport, meaning citizenship from one of ESA’s Member States or Associated States at the time of application is a firm requirement.

Q: For bi-national, do we need to provide all the copies of the passport if it is either EU citizenships or just the prime?

A: You need to submit a copy of a passport from an ESA Member State or Associated State.

Q: Around 10% applicants will be selected on the files we provide, so I guess this selection will mainly be done on the motivation letter. What is expected on that side? Are there some recommendations?

A: The Motivation Letter should be relevant and concise. For instance, 10 pages are too many.

Q: Getting an appointment for the Class 2 certificate is impossible at this point (everywhere I called so far they are booked out). Are there any other medical certificates that would be accepted?

A: No. If you cannot get your Medical Certificate please write an email to astronaut.selection@esa.int to explain the situation. Do also check all the Doctors who can perform the test in Switzerland. List available at: Civil aviation medical service (admin.ch)

Q: Regarding the medical, physical requirements: The pilot class 2 medical is required. Will there be stricter requirements than the class 2 medical exam at some point, especially in the area of vision or hearing? Or does a passed class 2 medical exam clear an applicant’s physical condition?

A: A class 2 medical exam certificate is sufficient

Q: At the time of the application I will be 2y and 9 months into my phd, in parallel i did teaching, could i check the 3y experience thanks to the teaching job?

A: You need three years of experience at the time of the submission of the application. A PhD and a teaching position counts as relevant professional experience.
Experience / Qualification:

Q: Switzerland has a very wide variety of Masters titles, some of them very specialist; how much variance is allowed from the stated sought STEM titles e.g. is Information Systems considered a sufficient specialist extension of Computer Science? Also in experience e.g. firefighting instead of lab work?

A: All Master titles are accepted as long as they fulfil the Bologna definition. Firefighting counts as work experience.

Q: Medical studies (at least in Italy, my home country) take six years but during these six years, although as undergraduate, you are required to work in hospitals for the practical training. That time spent working as medical intern could be counted for the three years of work experience required to apply?

A: Yes.

Q: Does the years spent as a PHD student count as experience?

A: Yes.

Q: How hard in the three years professional experience criterion? Does Swiss militia or voluntary firefighting experience count towards that? Or are three years of full-time (100%) STEM professional experience absolutely imperatively required? Is your answer the same for career astronauts vs reserve astronauts?

A: Military and firefighting count as experience. The criteria are the same for all astronauts.

Q: What about travel experience, meaning about being used to other cultures?

A: This can be an asset, but is not a requirement.

Q: When is the cutoff (do I need 3 years at the deadline of application or in October 2022)?

A: You need three years of experience at the time of the application.

Q: If you already had research experience during your BSc and MSc, that doesn't count right? And the work experience needs to be in the field you studied (i.e. other work experience doesn't count)?

A: Research experience counts, and it has to be relevant, but not necessarily directly in the field you have studied.

Q: So if I get my Masters degree in 2022 I am out, is that correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Having a master is a hard requirement. Is a bachelor in engineering with some years of experience acceptable as well?

A: No.

Q: I would like to know at what point an experience in piloting could be important for the selection.
A: Experience as a pilot is an asset, but not a requirement. Skills you have learned as a pilot will become useful during the selection process.

Q: Do we need to have a pilot license of any kind?
A: No.

Q: If the Master degree was delivered a few months after I have started to work in my current job, am I eligible? I have 3 years of experience counting from the beginning of my work contract, but I received my diploma 3-4 months later during the graduation ceremony.
A: Yes, you are eligible.

Q: Is there a limit in age to apply?
A: The upper limit is 50 years at the time of the application.

Q: Does longtime teaching (math and science for teenagers) and being a mom count as professional experience? Or has it to be in that studied science domain?
A: Teaching counts as relevant professional experience but not “being a mom”, in this context.

Q: Could you say a bit more about the needed work experience after university? I have worked 5 years in an engineering consultancy does that count?
A: Yes.

Q: How strong is the requirement of the three years of experience in sciences/technologies?
A: It is a firm requirement.

Q: I have been looking into the equivalences for the medical certificates in the US, and I have struggled to confirm that a Medical Certificate Third Class from the American FAA is enough to qualify for the ESA astronaut selection. Can you please let me know if that certificate qualifies?
A: Yes, the US equivalent is fine, but it has to be Second Class.

Q: Is the experience from the Swiss Army, including promotion, or serving in an elite unit an advantage still today?
A: Not sure if it is an advantage, but it counts as experience.

Q: Is Physics and chemistry teacher a relevant job?
A: Yes.

Q: I have a Master's degree in Archaeology and more than 3 years of PhD-experience. Archaeology belongs to the humanities although we use a lot of natural science methods in our research. Can I apply?
A: Yes.
Q: how involved are astronauts' families during off-site (off-EAC) trainings? are they sometimes travelling with astronauts? and are families also "trained" or taken care of by the EAC?

A: Families can travel in case of planned trainings of long duration. There are no particular training for families.

Question to Luca Parmitano:
How well prepared were you at the start of your selection process with respect to what you know now and have experienced until now? Thank you Claude and Luca for inspiring us and leading the way! During the selection, what tests were the most difficult for you?

A: The tests are varied. Luca did not feel he did so well on the test on memorizing numbers.

Q: Do you have suggestions for training exercises (e.g. for memory retention, multi-tasking, stress control)?

A: There are a number of tests available, typically the ones aimed at preparation to become a pilot or other positions where you are required to retain large amount of information. Claude recommended the Astronaut Selection Handbook by Tim Peake,

Other Questions:

Q: What are the longest rotations away from Europe that might be expected, missions aside?

A: There is no definite period but it can usually be a few months at a time.

Q: If rejected, does one receive a feedback what was did not work, so one can improve for the next application?

A: It depends at which stage you dropped out. At the beginning no feedback will be provided.]