

# Advancements in managing the selection and training of Spanish civil servants during COVID-19

The National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) is an autonomous body reporting to the Ministry of Territorial Policy and Civil Service via the Secretariat of State for Territorial Policy and the Civil Service.

Since it was founded, the INAP has been the institute in charge of training civil servants, as well as selecting several corps and scales of civil servants, today assigned to the aforesaid ministry. It also promotes research tasks and studies on the public administrations and upholds cooperation and collaboration relations with similar institutions, both Spanish and international.

The first declaration of a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 health crisis and the regulations that followed and modified it obligated the institute to respond quickly and effectively to several issues related to the tasks with which it is entrusted. **With the consequent need to adapt many procedures, the development of decentralised selection processes has accelerated the digital transformation of INAP services. In parallel, the requirement to implement the complete training offer entirely online has been another imperative and immediate demand that it had to handle.**

## Processes redesigned due to the pandemic

After the rapid-fire series of events caused by the pandemic spread, the INAP had to redesign the way in which selection processes were being handled. The restrictions decreed, to halt the number of infections, left its mark on the selection exams underway at that time and those that were pending completion in the near future.

The health authorities' measures decreed limited – among others – travel, freedom of circulation, social meetings, and the number of attendees in a single space, which led to the freezing of in-person selection processes that had been underway until then.

## Secure online selection processes

A significant analysis project was quickly started up, **redefining both technology and infrastructures**, which will take into account all new present and future requirements with regard to selection processes.

First, a videoconference system had to be found for holding public reading sessions, which would guarantee:

- connection security (to prevent possible intrusions or cyberattacks),
- proper quality of this service (suitable bandwidth, correct image resolution, etc.), and
- rule out non-corporate tools, as they do not ensure complete trust.

In the end, a common virtual meeting service was chosen, 'Reúnete', which is transmitted via the SARA network (Application Systems and Networks for the Administrations), which encrypts traffic and guarantees essential security issues, as well as the technical support required.

In parallel, it was **essential to determine which central offices of other public organisations** could be used by INAP to hold in-person exams for selection processes, in compliance with

capacity and social distancing rules demanded by the health crisis, as well as decentralising the selection processes. For this reason, on 2 July 2020, a protocol was signed by the Minister of Territorial Policy and Civil Service, and the National Distance Education University (UNED); this online university has study centres across Spain and internationally.

The outcome led to signing a collaboration agreement to conduct staff selection plans jointly, study alternatives to the traditional in-person selection processes and drive the relocation of the state exams, resulting in economic savings, and candidates saving on travel costs, who can take the exams at regional UNED centres. Similar agreements were signed with other public entities, such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IEF), to make use of public premises. The videoconference sessions conducted in June 2020 represented true innovation in selection processes.

### The transition to online training

As has been pointed out, with the advent of the first state of emergency, a sudden need emerged to adapt the INAP's selection courses and master's degrees – which until now had been taught either in classrooms or via blended learning – to an exclusively virtual format.

Within the INAP, the sub-directorates general involved are the Sub-directorate of Learning and the Sub-directorate of Local Training, with competencies on training civil servants in the scope of the General State Administration, autonomous-community, and local administrations.

This process has involved exponential growth in implementing new digital learning and training methodologies and tools in the INAP training activities, especially in the environment of the Google Suite for Education, with different players involved: INAP managers, internal training and learning managers, collaborating teachers, students and other external players,

thus creating a collaborative community focused on achieving a common goal.

INAP is responsible for organising and conducting the selection courses for the bodies and grades of subgroups A1 and A2 associated with the Secretariat of State for Territorial Policy and Civil Service. Three of these selection courses are university master's degrees, due to INAP's collaboration with Menéndez Pelayo International University (UIMP), until now held in a classroom or via blended learning.

To this end, and from the very outset, after the state of emergency was decreed, the INAP started working on converting them to an online format, modifying the resolutions that establish the system for these selection courses. For university master's degrees, the UIMP – with which they are held – provided the INAP with two instructions for managing and adapting COVID-19 measures in these masters.

On the one hand, **it worked actively to get students connected, both from technical and emotional viewpoints**, which entailed a great deal of work for the INAP internal training and learning managers, done via email, WhatsApp, videoconferences, forums, and the like. To also ensure the greatest connectivity possible for all students, the students in both the selection courses and masters programmes were divided into collaborative workgroups (employing the break rooms in Google Meet and Blackboard Collaborate Ultra), recording synchronous sessions for later viewing, the teachers recording audiovisual training capsules, and so forth.

On the other hand, to provide support to teachers, the INAP also organised online accompaniment and learning resources, such as the mentoring programme for trainers and the GSE-INAP Survival Kit, a Google site designed with basic contents to introduce training managers and teachers to the functions of the INAP Google environment.

Initiatives were also started up like #DirectoINAP and open YouTube streaming, where different experts handled specific subjects on learning processes, aimed at improving the skills of the public administrations' training teams.

Excellent results have been achieved in a very short period, as well as the acquisition of new professional competencies during the process by all actors involved: INAP managers, teachers and students. Our digital and learning skills have increased exponentially during this process, which will undoubtedly continue to be implemented in the future, aligned with the Digital Spain 2025 Strategy.

### **By way of conclusion**

Everyone at the INAP has taken advantage of adversity to take the initiative and rethink public services, both in selection and training processes and employees' competencies, not only by supporting teleworking but also supporting conducting its activities in this

increasingly digitised environment. The recently initiated decentralisation project of selection processes, relying on digitising training, contributes to territorial cohesion and increases the General State Administration's presence throughout Spain.

*A more complete and comprehensive vision of conducting both processes is contained in the monograph published by the CNIS and coordinated by De Bas Sotelo, M.A. y García-Monteavaro Martín, M. (Coord.) (2021). Buenas prácticas en la innovación pública: 50+1 Experiencias para la transformación. Madrid, España: El Consultor de Los Ayuntamientos.*

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