

Justification for OMB Expedited Review

Foreign Service Written Examination Registration Form OMB Control Number 1405-0008 Form DS-1998E

Q: What harm would be caused by using the current registration form?

A: In July 2006, the Director General, with the support of the Secretary of State, determined, based on a study by the firm McKinsey Company, that in order for the Foreign Service Officer selection process to be competitive with the private sector and address the hiring needs of transformational diplomacy, the process needed to look at a candidate's total background (as opposed to only exam scores) and to be a shorter process. (Selecting candidates now takes from 14-18 months whereas the new process will take from 7-8 months). To address these goals, the DG authorized a new selection process to look at the "total candidate." The critical element of this approach is to review at an early stage in the selection process all the information about a candidate's skills, knowledge and abilities that are relevant to a career in the Foreign Service. The revised DS-1998E addresses this need by collecting complete education and work histories as well as specific examples of skills and abilities that relate directly to FS job requirements as defined by the FS core precepts. (Note: The work and education information was collected in previous years via the DS-1950 Application for Employment that candidates did not present until they arrived to take the oral assessment, one of the last steps in the hiring process.) The written examples are described by the candidate in response to specific questions.

Q: What unexpected event caused this change to the registration form?

A: The decision of the Director General, supported by the Secretary of State, that our hiring process was too slow to compete effectively with the private sector, especially when attracting minority groups, precipitated this change. The DG also needed to develop a selection process that looked at a broader pool of candidates to ensure that those critical qualities needed for transformational diplomacy are met, specifically, special language competencies.

Q: Why can't the normal OMB review process be used?

A: Development of a new selection method was a complex process involving industrial psychologists, expert consultants, and legal reviews. Development of the new process has progressed with astronomical speed, in part because we suspended the previous testing process. The last FS Written Exam was April 2006. However, it must continue to move along quickly so that the State Department can open registration in July in order to administer the exam in September, before the end of the fiscal year. We will be in critical need of new officers in FY08 and the selection process must begin in September to meet our FY 08 hiring needs.

Q: Why is the continued use of the existing form contrary to public interest or impractical?

A: For the reasons above, we must collect complete background information on a candidate in order to select the best qualified for the oral assessment. Without this revised form DS-1998E, we will not have the information needed. Moreover, use of this revised form eliminates the need for candidates to complete the DS-1995 Application for Employment for the oral assessment. We could have continued to use the old form, created a new form to solicit the new information we needed, but it would have been inefficient and confusing. It would create a poor image of the Department of State and of the Foreign Service. Moreover, we are putting this all on line so the application form is efficient, retrievable and printable. The DS 1950 was a PDF form where the information could not be saved or printed. It was an irritant and received more complaints than any other single factor in our hiring process.