



The European Law Students' Association

On Wednesday, the 22nd of April 2020

In Brussels, Belgium

## The Launch of STEP Traineeships

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Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Board of ELSA decided to postpone the upcoming STEP Cycle 2 of 2019/2020. The aim in mid-March was to gain some additional time in April to assess better how this unprecedented situation develops and what could be the possible implications for STEP.

Accordingly, the International Board of ELSA actively has been and is following the recommendations by public health organisations and other external sources of professional advice. Additionally, from the beginning, the input of the National Groups of ELSA was listened to regarding the prevailing circumstances in their respective countries and their impacts on STEP.

The International Board of ELSA decides on the cancellation of the Summer ELSA Law Schools (SELS) Cycle on **27 April 2020**. The decisions regarding the cancellation of SELS and STEP will naturally be made jointly by the International Board of ELSA. Hence, the **official decision** regarding the cancellation of the STEP Cycle will be communicated on 27 April 2020 via email.

We will **proceed on the basis of an assumption that the STEP Launch happens**, with the following in mind:

1. **The STEP Cycle 2 schedule is further postponed;**
2. **Online STEP Traineeships are offered alongside “normal” STEP Traineeships;**
3. **The promotion strategy of STEP is adjusted to the circumstances.**

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## 1. THE STEP CYCLE 2 SCHEDULE

Job Hunting deadline <sup>1</sup>	1 May
Launch of Traineeships on step.elsa.org <sup>2</sup>	8 May
External Student Hunting deadline <sup>3</sup>	29 May
Internal Student Hunting deadline <sup>4</sup>	4 June
Matching deadline <sup>5</sup>	9 June
Selection deadline for Traineeship Providers <sup>6</sup>	26 June
Selection results publication <sup>7</sup>	29 June
The earliest start date of Traineeships <sup>8</sup>	20 July

The postponement of the STEP Cycle 2 was communicated by ELSA International on Friday, 17 April 2020. Despite the postponement, the limits on the Student Hunting period are still observed.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is more time to conduct Job Hunting, including the possibility of **last-minute submissions** until **7 May**.

<sup>2</sup> The STEP Traineeships are published on Friday in the morning with information about Online STEP Traineeships and ELSA not recommending travelling at a time of restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> The length of the application period remains unchanged.

<sup>4</sup> The length of the period for verifications and approvals by National Groups remains unchanged.

<sup>5</sup> The length of the period for matching by ELSA International is shorter.

<sup>6</sup> The length of the period for the selection by Traineeship Providers is slightly longer.

<sup>7</sup> The results are published as promptly as possible although delays in selection results are expected (as always).

<sup>8</sup> This is within the limits of the International Council Meeting Decision Book. However, is strongly suggested to be later in the year (cf. **3.4 'STEP Traineeships'**).

<sup>9</sup> International Council Meeting Decision Book of ELSA, the 51<sup>st</sup> Edition (30 November 2019), Decisions relating to Student Trainee Exchange Programme (STEP), STEP Procedure, Art. 1.4(b)(ii)

## 2. ONLINE STEP TRAINEESHIPS

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### 2.1 Concept

Online STEP Traineeships are **remote internships** that are performed digitally. Remote internships can be completed by the Trainees from the comfort of their home. Thus, they do not defy the prevailing international travel restrictions and social distancing measures in place.

During this Cycle, Online STEP Traineeships may be offered by a Traineeship Provider either:

- a) **As the only offer**, i.e. the Traineeship Provider is not offering any normal/on-site STEP Traineeships;  
or
- b) **In addition to the normal/on-site STEP Traineeships** of the Traineeship Provider either as:
  - a. **Separate vacancies**, i.e. the Traineeship Provider submits separate [Traineeship Specification Forms](#) (TSF) for the Online and normal/on-site STEP Traineeships, respectively;  
or
  - b. **Flexible option**, i.e. the way that the Traineeship is performed is up to negotiation with the Trainee at a later date.

The above consideration should be detailed as well as possible in the TSF (cf. **2.7 'How to fill in the TSF for Online STEP Traineeships' below**). This is to avoid unnecessary confusion from the part of applicants.

### 2.2 Benefits of Online STEP Traineeships

1. Many organisations (including law firms) have already introduced their **own remote internship programmes** (even before and irrespective of the COVID-19 outbreak).<sup>10</sup>
2. Since March 2020, **some Traineeship Providers already offered remote work possibilities** to their respective STEP Trainees.

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. [Linklaters](#), [White & Case](#), [UN Volunteers](#)

3. ELSA International reports that **international Traineeship Providers are interested** in providing remote vacancies in addition to their “normal” on-site STEP Traineeships.
4. Online STEP Traineeships are a **temporary solution** in the form of an opportunity to provide professional experience even access to “normal” on-site STEP Traineeships is limited.
5. Online STEP Traineeships are **aligned with the spirit of STEP** (cf. 2.3 ‘STEP brand’ below).
6. **Digital transformation of ELSA projects** has been part of the current strategy of the International Board of ELSA in response to COVID-19. Examples of other Flagship Projects of ELSA which have been adapted digitally include the **ELSA Webinars Academy**<sup>11</sup> in response to the academic programme of cancelled SELS, **online events**<sup>12</sup> in response to the cancelled ELSA Delegations, and the **digital rounds** of both the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition and the European Human Rights Moot Court Competition.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.3 STEP brand

Online STEP Traineeships are in line with the **spirit of STEP**. This is irrespective of the obvious lack of cultural exchange in the form of travelling and physical exposure to foreign environment.

1. **The purpose of STEP** is to ‘*[provide] opportunities for law students and young lawyers to gain work experience in a foreign legal system while learning about other cultures.*’<sup>14</sup>
2. **The aims of ELSA** are ‘*to promote, establish and develop mutual understanding, co-operation and personal contacts among law students and young lawyers from different States and legal systems, thereby equipping them for professional life in an international environment*’,<sup>15</sup> read in conjunction with the **means of ELSA**.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. [here](#)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [here](#)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)

<sup>14</sup> Standing Orders of ELSA (30 May 2019), Art. 2(c);  
Cf. also International Council Meeting Decision Book of ELSA, the 51<sup>st</sup> Edition (30 November 2019), Decisions relating to Student Trainee Exchange Programme (STEP), Definition

<sup>15</sup> Statutes of ELSA (30 May 2019), Art. 3.1

<sup>16</sup> Statutes of ELSA (30 May 2019), Art. 3.2;  
Cf. also Preamble of Standing Orders of ELSA (30 May 2019)

3. Online STEP Traineeships provide the Trainees with learning opportunities about **foreign legal systems** (multijurisdictional work) and **work cultures** (multicultural team dynamics).
4. Online STEP Traineeships equip the Trainees with the **hard and soft skills necessary** to succeed in professional life in an international environment.
5. Online STEP Traineeships foster **direct contacts and mutual understanding** across jurisdictional/cultural boundaries and build the Trainees' **professional network**.
6. Due to the absence of barriers of participation associated with normal/on-site STEP Traineeships,<sup>17</sup> Online STEP Traineeships may be **more accessible** irrespective of the applicants' socio-economic background and circumstances.
7. There are many possibilities how to also provide **remote reception** in respect of the Online STEP Traineeships.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.4 Quality standards

To ensure that Online STEP Traineeships are of the desirable quality, the respective Traineeship Providers shall sign an [annex to the TSF Contract](#). This document explains the specific additional requirements applicable to the proper execution of Online STEP Traineeships.

## 2.5 Job Hunting

As communicated before, no National Group is obliged to conduct Job Hunting for the STEP Cycle 2.<sup>19</sup> Each National Group may consider for themselves whether Job Hunting currently fits their respective

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. the high costs (*inter alia* travel, accommodation, documentation) and time-consuming procedures (*inter alia* documentation).

<sup>18</sup> Generally, the Reception strategy is determined by the respective Hosting Group. This fact applies with regards to both on-site and Online STEP Traineeships. Some of the ideas that so far have been presented about how to engage the respective Hosting Groups in **remote reception** include *inter alia* a mentor/buddy system, sending postcards to the Trainee and hosting virtual after-work hangouts.

<sup>19</sup> National Groups *never* have anyways been obliged to conduct Job Hunting or sanctioned for failure to find Traineeships.

Cf. International Council Meeting Decision Book of ELSA, the 51<sup>st</sup> Edition (30 November 2019), Decisions relating to Student Trainee Exchange Programme (STEP), STEP Responsibilities, Art. 2.1

Job Hunting/external relations strategy. **This fact applies with regard to both normal/on-site and Online STEP Traineeships.**

## 2.6 Promoting Online STEP Traineeships to Traineeship Providers

National Groups that wish to propose Online STEP Traineeships to their Traineeship Providers are encouraged to do so. The benefits include demonstrating the future-oriented approach of ELSA as the global representative of the future generation of legal professionals. Moreover, offering the possibility of Online STEP Traineeships to Traineeship Providers shows how ELSA is responding in a resourceful manner to the unprecedented circumstances.

1. It is suggested to reach out to only **existing/previous Traineeship Providers** that are already familiar with you, STEP and ELSA.
2. Emphasise that the remote vacancies are a **temporary solution** and introduced in order for the Traineeship Provider in question to still benefit from the best international legal talent that ELSA can provide.
3. Explain the applicable **Terms and Conditions**, including the **annex**.
4. Explain how to fill in the **TSF** with the all the necessary information (cf. **below**).
5. Ask **whether the Traineeship Provider implements already remote work** and, if so, how are they finding it so far.
6. Provide **examples** of other organisations offering remote vacancies and how they do so.<sup>20</sup>
7. Remind that the deadline to submit the TSF is on **1 May** (with the possibility of last-minute submissions up until **7 May only if strictly necessary**).

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<sup>20</sup> As an example of part of an email: “As for the examples of remote internships, one of ELSA’s partner organisations offers such vacancies in their research department. Thus, they employ from different jurisdictions for projects involving comparative and international law. These digital internships generally resemble a lot how remote work is generally done.

*An example of how to administer remote interns can look like the following:*

- The intern is assigned to a specific project or a more general supportive function within the team. The intern is also assigned a supervisor/mentor to whom they regularly report from the team;
- The intern and the supervisor/team have regular meetings online (e.g. a weekly conference call). During these meetings, the work tasks and expectations are laid out and feedback about the previously completed tasks can be given to the intern.
- The supervisor/team provides the intern with tasks and agrees on a production timeline. The intern will report on the completion of these tasks to the supervisor.

*I am sure we could find the talent and solutions customised to your needs and preferences even in these unprecedented times.”*

## 2.7 How to fill in the TSF for Online STEP Traineeships

In addition to the generally required information, the following details need to be described (generally) in the **additional information section** of the TSF:<sup>21</sup>

1. The method of **supervision** (e.g. an assigned mentor, weekly calls with the team, daily reporting via email);
2. The **tasks** of the Trainee (e.g. a specific project, different tasks as assigned by the team);
3. The work schedule:
  - a. **Full-time** (include the estimated workload (e.g. 40 hours per week);
  - b. **Part-time** (include the estimated workload (e.g. 15 hours per week, only certain weekdays);
  - c. **Other** (e.g. project-specific, negotiable with the Trainee directly, flexible);
4. Whether the Traineeship Provider wants to offer:
  - a. **Normal/on-site STEP Traineeships also;**
  - b. **Only remote vacancies;**
  - c. **Flexibly**, i.e. the way that the Traineeship is performed is up to negotiation with the Trainee at a later date.

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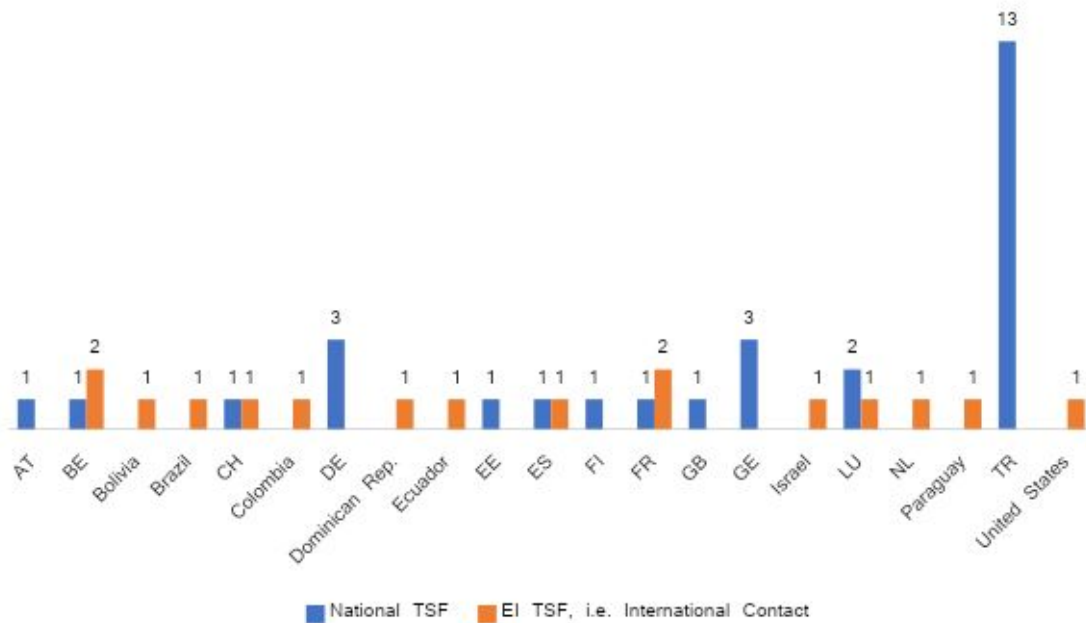
<sup>21</sup> We do not want to create a wholly separate TSF template or amend the existing form too much because that will distort the already submitted beyond necessary.



### 3. “ON-SITE” STEP TRAINEESHIPS

#### 3.1 Quality over quantity

The numbers are not the focus of the STEP Cycle 2. As of now, with nine days until the *official* Job Hunting deadline and 15 days until the *extended* Job Hunting deadline (i.e. the day before the STEP Launch), **45** separate TSFs have been submitted from **21** countries and **13** National Groups.



#### 3.2 Social responsibility

Generally, ELSA refrains from encouraging travelling during social distancing measures and international travel restrictions (cf. 4. ‘Promotion strategy’ below).

STEP Traineeships involving physical attendance should have the **earliest start date from September/October onwards only**.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, the start date could be left in the TSF “open”, i.e. to be negotiated with the Trainee at a later date.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the traineeships at the EU institutions starting in September/October have not been cancelled ([here](#)).

### 3.3 Job Hunting

As communicated before, no National Group is obliged to conduct Job Hunting for the STEP Cycle 2. Job Hunting for normal/on-site Traineeships will be understandably more difficult than normally since Traineeship Providers may be *inter alia*:

1. **Unable** to host any trainees due to the poor economic situation;
2. **Unwilling** to host any (foreign) trainees due to the fear of contact with the outside world.

### 3.4 Promoting STEP Traineeships to Traineeship Providers

In any case, when communicating with Traineeship Providers about the ongoing situation, it is suggested to:

1. **Be transparent and honest** – you are not expected to see the future;
2. **Avoid making any promises** that there will be:
  - a. Many or any applications submitted;
  - b. Many or any shortlisted applicants to present to the Traineeship Provider;
  - c. Many or any applicants accepting a Traineeship offer made by the Traineeship Provider.
3. Explain that the **STEP Cycle 2 is postponed**, meaning that:
  - a. The Traineeship Provider has until 1 May (*max. 7 May*) to assess the situation for themselves before confirming their participation and the details of their possible promotion;
  - b. The earliest start date for the Traineeships requiring physical attendance should be late in the year.

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<sup>23</sup> Applicants are not obliged to accept an offer and thus they might decide to refuse an offer due to the prevailing circumstances (e.g. travel restrictions make relocation impossible).



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4. Encourage the Traineeship Provider to offer the vacancies with a **flexible start date set later in the year** which can be adjusted to the prevailing circumstances. If the Traineeship Provider has already submitted their TSF, suggest them to **amend the dates** of the vacancy accordingly.<sup>24</sup>
5. Explain the applicable [Terms and Conditions](#), highlighting especially that:
  - a. ELSA International may still decide to cancel the STEP Cycle 2 altogether before 27 April due to the COVID-19 situation. In such a case the Traineeship Provider is not promoted on the STEP website or on other ELSA platforms;
  - b. The Traineeship Provider is not obliged to make a Traineeship offer to any of the shortlisted/matched applicants forwarded by ELSA;
  - c. The Traineeship Provider may withdraw their participation on the basis of unforeseen circumstances rendering the execution of the Traineeship impossible.

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<sup>24</sup> STEP Officers may implement these changes themselves on the STEP Online System without the Traineeship Provider having to fill in and submit a separate TSF again.

## 4. PROMOTION STRATEGY

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### 4.1 Marketing content

ELSA International is cautious of the current circumstances and the message of STEP promotion. Hence, ELSA International refrains from references to travelling and focuses on the other valuable attributes of the STEP brand.

The promotion strategy for STEP is led by **social responsibility, professional skills, life-long learning, and cultural awareness**. The focus of promotion is on raising **awareness about professional experience from an international work environment and its benefits**.

The promotional materials focus on educational content that provides information beyond the STEP procedure for prospective applicants generally preparing for their legal career. Hence, the focus is on:

1. **Testimonials from previous Trainees and Traineeship Providers;**<sup>25</sup>
2. **Advice** how to plan for an international career, succeed with a job application/in a job interview and create a professional network.

### 4.2 Marketing structure

The marketing materials for STEP consist of two elements as before:

1. **The STEP Marketing Kit:**
  - a. The elements of the Kit are the same as previously, i.e. pictures for general promotion purposes, Facebook cover photo, a testimonial template...
  - b. The Kit is published on **1 May**.
2. **Traineeship Portfolios by National Groups:**
  - a. National Groups may create promotional posters of their respective Traineeship Provider(s) by using the same template from the previous Cycle ([here](#)).

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<sup>25</sup> If you have testimonials that ELSA International could use, send them to [step@elsa.org](mailto:step@elsa.org) preferably by **1 May**!

- b. Other National Groups will have access to these on the [STEP-MKT Facebook group](#) where the posters can freely be posted.
- c. **Each National Group may decide for themselves which specific Traineeships they promote** (e.g. only Traineeships starting late in the year, only Online STEP Traineeship vacancies) or at all.

### 4.3 Student Hunting

It is important to emphasise to any prospective applicant that ELSA neither:

1. Encourages travelling at a time of international travel restrictions and social distancing measures; nor
2. Guarantees that the specific Traineeship will not be cancelled, postponed indefinitely or moved digital due to the prevailing circumstances.

The SAF already draws the applicants' attention to the **Terms and Conditions of applying**. Additionally, **COVID-19 disclaimer** (similar to that already on the TSF) will be included on top of the SAF further elaborating that:

1. ELSA is not liable for:
  - a. Any cancellation of a STEP Traineeship;
  - b. Any changes to the description of a STEP Traineeship (e.g. changed dates);
  - c. The Traineeship Provider's decision to offer the Traineeship digitally;
  - d. The applicant's inability to attend a STEP Traineeship due to the prevailing circumstances (e.g. travel restrictions);
2. The applicant may:
  - a. Withdraw their application before the External Student Hunting deadline;
  - b. Refuse an offer made by a Traineeship Provider.



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## 5. COMMUNICATION

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In addition to **the STEP Coaching** system, ELSA International communicates with the STEP Officers of the Network any updates related to the upcoming STEP Launch on the following platforms:

- **Email** (ELSA mailing list);
- ELSA STEP Team 2019/2020 **Facebook group**;
- National STEP Officers **Facebook Messenger group**;
- The monthly **STEP Newsletter** distributed via email.

**Communication should be reciprocal.** Updates should thus go **both ways** between the Network and ELSA International. Thus, whenever you have questions, concerns, complaints, improvement ideas or just a nice word to spare, do not hesitate to proactively contact ELSA International at [step@elsa.org](mailto:step@elsa.org).