



Brussels, 14.4.2020
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COMMISSION DECISION

of 14.4.2020

**on certain measures regarding the implementation of the traineeship session of March
2020 in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic**

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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Whereas:

- (1) On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. On 11 March 2020, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. As the number of cases is increasing alarmingly and due to the lack of means to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous Member States have declared a national state of emergency.
- (2) The measures adopted by the Commission to protect its staff in view of the developments in the spread of the COVID-19 complied in full with the host countries' policies. Among these precautionary measures, as of 16 March 2020, all staff in non-critical functions was required to telework¹.
- (3) The pandemic and the working arrangements put in place to reduce the risk of infection have severely affected the implementation of the traineeship scheme. A new 5-month official traineeship session started on 1 March 2020, involving 790 trainees. However, several candidates were unable to start, the traditional welcome event in the European Parliament had to be cancelled and, two weeks after reaching their place of assignment, the trainees could no longer come to the office following the guidelines from DG HR for the whole Commission staff.
- (4) Taking into account the need to protect the trainees' safety, on the one hand, and the challenges to fulfil in these conditions the aim of the traineeship scheme, which is to provide the trainees with a practical experience on the workings of the European Commission, on the other hand, it is necessary to adopt specific measures in their regard. The COVID-19 crisis requires a quick reaction from the Commission. However, Commission Decision C(2005)458 of 2 March 2005 on the rules governing the official traineeships scheme of the European Commission does not include specific provisions covering situations of this kind.
- (5) Given the prolonged duration of the precautionary measures, uncertainty of further developments and based on considerations of meaningfulness of the traineeship, human impact (risk of isolation), public health and safety, it is appropriate to give the trainees enrolled in the March 2020 session an individual choice between (1) continuing the traineeship under the current conditions and within the framework of these exceptional circumstances or (2) interrupting their traineeship on 30 April 2020. In either case, trainees should have the option to re-start their traineeship in October

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_445

2020 (on condition that normal working conditions have resumed by then and travel to the place of assignment is possible) for a new period of 5 months.

- (6) In line with the duty of care, the trainees choosing to continue their traineeship under the working conditions determined by the pandemic should be allowed to work either from their place of assignment or from their place of origin. Most trainees do not have family in the place of assignment, might not speak the language of the place of assignment and might thus incur major difficulties if they stay and fall sick.
- (7) Trainees who had, in these exceptional circumstances, already, prior to this Decision, decided to interrupt their traineeship should not be penalised in pecuniary terms and should be able to benefit from the grant to cover the costs of their traineeship for the period from the start of their traineeship until 30 April 2020.
- (8) The European Union agencies and bodies that have a Service Level Agreement signed with the Traineeships Office for the selection and recruitment of trainees in accordance with the rules applied by the European Commission should be notified of this Decision,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

The Traineeship Office shall propose to the currently active trainees in the March 2020 session, those who have temporarily interrupted their traineeship with a view to return during this session, those who terminated because of the COVID-19 and those who were unable to start until now to choose between one of the following options:

- (1) to continue the traineeship under the existing conditions within the framework of the circumstances determined by the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., until normal working conditions are resumed, telework to the extent possible and without the activities normally provided to the trainees (e.g. trainings, seminars, visits);
- (2) to interrupt their traineeship on 30 April 2020.

Whichever option they choose, the trainees of the March 2020 session shall have the possibility to re-start their traineeship position in the October 2020 session (on condition that normal working conditions have resumed by then and travel to the place of assignment is possible) for a new period of 5 months. No other possibility will be given to re-start the traineeship at a later stage.

Article 2

Trainees who choose the first option referred to in Article 1 may be allowed to telework from their home countries until normal working conditions are restored and trainees are able to travel back to the place of assignment in order to perform their tasks while respecting the containment measures that may then be in place. Teleworking from their home country shall be subject to the agreement of the trainee's advisor and the responsible leave manager in each service of the Commission.

Article 3

Trainees interrupting or terminating their traineeship session before having reached the minimum three months for the March 2020 session shall be entitled to the travel allowance referred to in point 6.4.1 of the Annex to Decision C(2005)458 regardless of the duration of

their presence at their place of assignment. The other already applicable conditions for reimbursement of travel costs and the minimum qualifying distance shall not change.

Article 4

Trainees having decided to interrupt or to terminate their traineeship or who were unable to start due to the impact of COVID-19 prior to this Decision shall be eligible to receive the grant allowance for the period from the foreseen start of their traineeship until 30 April 2020.

Article 5

Trainees shall inform the Traineeships Office of their choices by 22 April 2020 at the latest, and in writing.

Article 6

The Director-General of DG EAC is instructed to notify this Decision to all European Union agencies and bodies that have signed a service level agreement (SLA) with the European Commission for the purposes of making use of the Blue Book traineeships programme.

Done at Brussels, 14.4.2020

For the Commission
Mariya GABRIEL
Member of the Commission