

## **EFESE format applied in the Master of European Social Security**

### **Developing the current Master of European Social Security towards a (more) 'joint' programme**

#### **Intro**

Within the EFESE project, a format has been developed on the basis of which courses can be exchanged and shared among the partners. The EFESE-format incorporates both a pedagogic component (based upon the 'flipped/reversed classroom' approach) and an exchange component (technical application) in which course materials can be uploaded in a structured manner to materialize the exchange across the partners (for an overview see Annex 1).

One of the objectives of the project was to find out to what extent the EFESE-format could contribute to the development of a joint master programme in the field of social security. To that purpose, the project team drafted a blueprint of a joint programme which has been materialised in a concrete proposal for a Erasmus+ joint programme (see Annex 2 MassiX), submitted in February 2017 to the EU Commission.

Separated from the MassiX-proposal, this note addresses how the EFESE project could be beneficial to the existing Master of European Social Security (MESS), currently offered by one of the partners (KU Leuven). The objective is to strength the involvement of the actual EFESE-network in the educational programme of the MESS. By doing so, the MESS could turn gradually into a programme commonly supported by the EFESE-network.

The MESS is currently a one-year (60 ECTS) specialized advanced Master's programme focusing upon the study of social security in its broadest sense. It was originally introduced in 1999 as a long-distance educational programme targeting mainly social security professionals. Over the years it evolved however into a hybrid programme in which the provision of residential teaching and long-distance courses has been offered in a merged manner, attracting in this way also more 'regular' students who follow the programme in a (more) residential setting. After a structural revision in 2013 the Master has been split up into an executive Summer School (20 ECTS) and the residual Master part (40 ECTS). The Summer School is organized as a postgraduate certificate programme which can be followed separately from the Master; the residual part combines residential (in Leuven) and long-distance teaching. The Master programme is offered in two options: a more practice-oriented track leading to a research paper built around an internship and a research-oriented track preparing students for a PhD programme. For a more detailed description of the

Master please refer to [https://onderwijsaanbod.kuleuven.be/opleidingen/e/CQ\\_50268925.htm#activetab=diploma\\_omschrijving](https://onderwijsaanbod.kuleuven.be/opleidingen/e/CQ_50268925.htm#activetab=diploma_omschrijving).

The EFESE-format can, in our opinion, contribute to the further development of the MESS-programme, both with regard to the educational approach (pedagogic component) and the further internationalisation of the programme (exchange component). In the end, it can help to turn the programme gradually into a global educational project in which EFESE-partners are structurally embedded.

In this note, we explore first the potential of the pedagogic component of EFESE for the MESS. This is followed by an analysis on how the exchange of staff, students and materials can improve further the international character of the programme. In a final section, we relate the MESS to the broader EFESE-partnership and explore how courses and materials can be distributed across both institutions.

#### 1. The pedagogic format applied

The pedagogic format used in EFESE is based upon the so-called flipped or reversed classroom principle. Concretely, this means that the materials are uploaded in a coherent structure containing video files, text materials, exercises which students have to consult before the face-to-face sessions (or contact teaching). Consequently, the contact teaching can be used much more to focus upon the difficult topics and, at the same time, create opportunities to schedule exercises and discussion (see Annex 3 for an example of a course arranged according to the flipped classroom principle).

The flipped/reversed classroom approach could suit very well the actual MESS, taking into account its specific profile: a *specialized* Master addressing international students, using *long distance facilities* for the participants who are already professionally active. In particular, the approach would accommodate very well the courses of the Executive Summer School, which demand an intensive preparation by the students (A), the optional courses which are designed for long-distance teaching (B), and the courses preparing the paper (C). Besides, the approach could add value to the current residential courses offered in contact teaching, depending on the learning goals of the course (D). This now will be further explained.

##### A. *Courses in the Executive Summer School*

The summer school is composed of two main courses, mainly designed to give students a basic, yet intensive, multidisciplinary introduction into social security. These courses are further decomposed in units, for which several teachers (sometimes invited from abroad) are responsible.

1. Comparative study of social security systems in Europe (10 ECTS)
  - 1.1. Basic concepts of social security (D. Pieters)
  - 1.2. Basic techniques of social security (W. Van Oorschot)
  - 1.3. History of social security (G. Vonk)
  - 1.4. Philosophy of social security (G. Vonk)
  - 1.5. Social security administration (G. Juhász)
2. Social security law, policy and economics, an introduction (10 ECTS)
  - 2.1. Social security policy (T. Sirovatká)
  - 2.2. Social security economics (R. Muffels)
  - 2.3. Social security law (P. Schoukens)
  - 2.4. The EU and social security (R. Cornelissen)

The study load for each course amounts to 10 ECTS. They are designed across a 'fore track' (during which the students prepare the summer school, on the basis of materials sent to them on beforehand), the residential teaching part (taking place in Leuven), and a 'post track' (assignment writing at home).

In the fore track, students have to prepare the lectures (of the residential track) on the basis of materials sent to them one month in advance. During the residential track, students follow in group the courses in Leuven. At the end of the residential part, students get for each course an individual assignment for which they have to write a paper at home and which they hand in later in the semester (November).

One of the critical points, expressed at the student evaluations and the recent programme visitation, is that students apparently are not always well enough prepared. Students apparently do not get sufficient guidance in the preparation and do not receive incentives to go systematically through all the materials. Not enough time is spent on the preparation leaving the initial phase of learning still too depending upon the contact teaching in the residential part. This, in turn, reduces the time for group discussions and exercises, something which the students would prefer to have more in the residential phase.

The flipped/reversed classroom approach in the EFESE format can be a mean to make more appropriate use of the 'fore track' and, hence, to reserve more time in the residential part for active participation (through assignments and exercises the students prepare before coming to Leuven) and for explaining better the 'difficult' and challenging parts of the course materials. To that purpose the EFESE format allocates a part for discussion within every course.

Within the EFESE project some of the course units of the Executive Summer School have been turned into an EFESE-course (as test cases), i.e., basic concepts (by D. Pieters) and law - introduction into EU law and competences social security (by P. Schoukens). We will investigate with the course responsible how this can be further expanded to the other units.

### *B. Optional courses*

The current Master has three optional courses available for the moment, all of them decomposed into two sub-units.

1. The welfare state and its services (welfare and social services) – P. Schoukens
2. The private social protection (non-state social security, and second and third pillar arrangements) – Y. Stevens
3. Social security management and informatics (general issues of managing social security and electronic data management in social security) – C. Gibbon

The courses are provided at the distance; hence, there is no residential moment scheduled for teaching in group. However, this does not preclude the application of the EFESE-format as it can accommodate virtual group teaching (e.g., focusing upon a series of discussion sessions on the results of the individual written assignments). For the sake of completeness, it can be informed that these optional courses are not shared with other student groups (from other Master programmes) as they are exclusively reserved to MESS-participants. This means that only a very limited number of participants is enrolled (5 to 10), making virtual group teaching more feasible to organise. Courses can be more easily monitored on the distance by the teacher; exams can be organised in the "open book format" at the residence of the student.

For the moment, not enough use is made of the on-line monitoring (by the teacher). Students report that the study of the optional course is becoming a rather individual and isolated experience. We think that the EFESE-format can address this problem, especially when the use of the assignments section (followed by the group discussion) is made mandatory. Furthermore the format has the advantage that teachers can make the materials livelier with the course video section.

As the EFESE-format is applying a fixed teaching structure, this can facilitate the introduction of additional (new) courses produced by the network partners and, consequently, amplify the current offer of optional courses; the fact that for the moment 'only' three courses are offered is sometimes reported as a weakness in the current programme.

### *C. Courses supporting the paper*

Regardless of the track (practice-oriented or research-oriented), the MESS has several courses in support of the paper:

1. Master paper, internship and reflecting (16 ECTS in the practice-oriented track)
2. Master paper, advanced research proposal (15 ECTS in the research-oriented track)
3. Report and tender writing (4 ECTS)

The courses consist of a long-distance part (during which the papers are prepared and written) and a residential part (two weeks before Easter period) where the participants resume in group (in Leuven) to discuss in class the individual paper proposals and during which additional training (paper writing and research skills) is provided. The EFESE-format can easily accommodate the current courses. It can improve the preparation of group discussions and the individual monitoring of the students through the assignment section, as foreseen by the format.

Another advantage of the EFESE-format is that its structured approach can guarantee a common approach to the individual monitoring of students who go abroad and write a paper at a partner university, in the eventuality of student mobility (student exchange).

### *D. Residential courses*

Some of the courses in the current MESS are scheduled in a more traditional residential setting (in group).

1. European social security law (P. Schoukens)
2. Global social law (P. Schoukens and guest lecturers)

These courses are also offered, as mandatory or optional, to students from other programmes, such as the initial Master of Law, LL.M., the exchange programme of the Law Faculty for incoming students, and a number of Master programmes from other faculties (e.g., social sciences, economics, etc.). Consequently, the number of students is relatively higher in these courses than in those exclusively designed for the MESS.

The introduction of the EFESE-format could make a difference (e.g., allowing for more active participation) but will require overcoming some challenges. A larger number of students, for

example, makes it more difficult to monitor group discussions; moreover, diversity in the prior knowledge of mixed groups demands diversity in the preparation of materials based in the EFESE-format. During the EFESE-project, an experiment in the course of Global Social Law showed the potential and limitations of the EFESE format for traditional residential classes with large and mixed groups.

In the case student mobility (student exchange) gets installed, a bigger number of residential courses (at the partners) will be scheduled in the MESS-programme to replace the KU Leuven courses. It is likely that these courses will have similar problems (e.g., bigger student groups; more diverse student groups). Therefore, it might be a more realistic policy to leave it open the question of whether the EFESE-format would add value to the specific learning objectives of a determined course. The format will be recommended as a good educational practice.

## 2. Developing exchange

A second objective is to internationalise the MESS more by developing the exchange of staff, students, and materials within the EFESE-network. Exchange is thus understood in its most ample way, focusing not only upon people exchange (staff and students) but also upon the exchange of educational contents. We believe that the EFESE-format can be helpful in enhancing both exchange pathways (people and material) as necessary technical tools have been developed to make the transfer of educational files possible (i.e., EFESE-app and Toledo learning platform); moreover the pedagogic concept (based upon the flipped/reversed classroom) has been designed in a structure that facilitates exchange of people and materials.

Both exchange forms (people and materials) will be explained further.

### 2.1. *Mobility of teachers and students (people exchange)*

The MESS has a long-standing tradition of inviting (foreign) guest teachers to lecture (specific) units in the programme. The majority of the guest professors come to teach in the Executive Summer School (taking the responsibility of one or two of the units of the two courses offered). Furthermore, guest lecturers are present in the optional courses (e.g., administration and IT) and in the residential course Global Social Law (in which every year a central guest lecturer is invited).

Especially, in relation to the optional courses, there is still some room for further course development and, therefore, for inviting colleagues to come to teach their field of specialisation. A series of uncovered course fields are still to be explored.

The presence of an 'international' teaching staff is highly appreciated by the students yet at the same time creates some challenges to the programme. Whereas inviting guest professors brings some diversity in teaching (e.g., approach, contents, etc.) one has to safeguard that in the end the reported learning objectives are 'commonly' reached. Some uniformity in the teaching approach is thus to be maintained, certainly when part of the students follow the programme from distance and a multitude of lecturers is teaching on invitation basis (not the most solid status when it comes safeguarding a minimum of answerability to the programme).

The EFESE-format can guarantee structure in the courses when provided by a diverse group of international teachers (on invitation). As explained above, teachers can upload their materials in a common format and structure their teaching across the pedagogic pattern. The format alone cannot guarantee the required commitment and answerability towards the programme; this will mainly have to come from the EFESE-network and the way it will be developed further in the future (see below MESS in the broader EFESE-network). Teaching on invitation would thus induce a commitment to the network.

A field to be explored is the mobility of students. So far students are not sent on exchange to partner universities. Within the practice oriented track there is the possibility to do an internship at one of the associated institutes abroad yet the vast majority of the internships is done in the neighbourhood of Leuven and Brussels.

In order to explore student mobility further, a call will be launched in the EFESE-network addressing the university partners to receive MESS-students to follow courses for a defined minimum of ECTS and within a defined field of specialisation. Partners could then 'offer' courses within a given (research) field (in which they are specialized). The courses are thus provided on the basis of a coherent option field. Furthermore, it has the advantage that students can choose the destination in function of the available option field and/or in function of the paper topic they want to write. Apart from courses, partners can also offer internships at the university or related institutes. Students, however, would have the guarantee that a similar approach in education is guaranteed across the network independently of the courses followed and the origin of the course. Furthermore, the exchange will have to be based upon a (bilateral) exchange agreement, guaranteeing the exchange of study credits and exam marks (and the format of the agreement to be developed by the network: see further below MESS in the broader EFESE-network).

## *2.2. Using the exchange format (course exchange)*

The EFESE-format (EFESE-app) has been designed to exchange courses between partners. The network can upload in the app courses to be offered to the MESS-programme (see below MESS in the broader EFESE-network). By doing so, the number of MESS courses would be amplified. As mentioned before, this would be especially relevant for the optional courses, which are currently limited in number.

In a similar way, existing courses of the MESS (KU Leuven) can be put on offer in the network for exchange. This can make the MESS more visible abroad or can give the opportunity to have larger (coherent) MESS parts made available off-location in other parts of the world. One could think, for example, in the Executive Summer School being run abroad (outside of Leuven), which may attract the participants to follow (in the future) the remaining Master programme in Leuven.

### 3. The MESS within the broader EFESE-network

The sketched exchange of people and materials and the further development of the EFESE-format will take place within the broader framework of the EFESE-network. The EFESE-network has been materialized in Vienna on 11 September 2015 when the EFESE working group (WG) was established within the ambit of the European Institute of Social Security (EISS). The WG joins, on an institutional basis, all partners involved in the EFESE programme (see Annex 4 for a list). The WG takes over the management of the EFESE-format, as it was developed in the EFESE project, and will make it available for the organization of the exchange of EFESE courses (see [www.eiss.be](http://www.eiss.be) and [www.efese.eu](http://www.efese.eu) for more information as well as for the list of courses currently available).

By using the EFESE-format to structure further its pedagogic approach and to enhance (virtual and personal) mobility, the MESS will generate new dynamics within the WG.

Next to the actual course exchange (for the use of EFESE-App: see Annex 5) some further arrangements will have to be made in order to monitor the exchange of students, teachers and course materials within the MESS. As mentioned before, the WG will have to make sure that within its ambit the partners make the necessary bilateral agreements to make student and teaching mobility possible (between university partners). To that purpose, a model exchange agreement can be prepared. The WG can prepare procedures for accreditation in case the MESS (or other teaching initiative developed by the partners) would turn into a multiple or joint programme. Similar to the trainings for young researchers in Ljubljana and Spetses organized within the EFESE-project, the WG can launch other training initiatives in which the EFESE-format is used. The WG may become the framework in which specialization fields within social security are spread across and shared by the network members. The network will also improve the EFESE-format whenever necessary, control its



use, develop further the user conditions, and more. Furthermore, the network will oversee the various exchange patterns (of people and materials) across the partners and can even start to build in 'compensation' tools, valuing the exchange flows across the network.