

16 April 2021**HRK on the amendment of the German Infection Protection Act:
Protect study pathways and build on university achievements**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr Peter-André Alt, has criticised the draft amendment to the Infection Protection Act tabled today by CDU/CSU and SPD coalition fractions for initial deliberations in the Bundestag in Berlin.

It is encouraging to see that the universities have been considered in the draft. However, the wording of the law does not take adequate account of the previous achievements of universities, their wide range of duties and characteristics and the greatest possible protection of the specific study pathways of young people.

"Universities have acted in a differentiated and highly efficient manner over the last twelve months," stressed Alt. "They have reduced the infection risk on a sustained basis in their area of responsibility and continuously enabled students to pursue and successfully complete their studies. It is incomprehensible why the draft legislation should now simply put them on the same level as schools, disregarding the different prerequisites and vulnerabilities."

Although some remits of universities were excluded from the sweeping closure for an incidence rate of 200 in the justification of the draft legislation, this is far from being adequate and legally incontestable. "Besides research, exemptions are required for laboratory work, placements, practical and artistic training periods and examinations in particular," said the HRK President. "University libraries must at least be places where teaching materials can be collected and remain accessible for research. Otherwise, there is the risk of sustained damage being inflicted on study pathways and academic work. Students of music and the arts, as well as sports science and human medicine for example, would be particularly affected. In these subject groups in particular, the extensive hygiene measures introduced have proven to be essential for classroom formats."

In turn, policy-makers have clearly only considered schools and forgotten about universities when it comes to testing strategies.

Alt: "Up to now universities have adopted a cautious approach, conscious of their responsibility to protect people's health. This was and is the right thing to do. Now we must build on what has been achieved rather than roll back teaching and learning to zero across the board."