

24 March 2020**Universities and the coronavirus pandemic:****Minimising disadvantages particularly for students and early career researchers and continuing with research**

In view of the postponements of the lecture timetables now approved by all federal states and the uncertainty surrounding the required length of these measures, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) is calling for a differentiated approach to be adopted for the 2020 summer semester in order to minimise disadvantages particularly for students and early career researchers. Research activities will continue to the greatest possible extent.

HRK President Prof Dr Peter-André Alt: "The intensification of contact restrictions, in effect throughout Germany since Monday, to contain the coronavirus crisis highlights the dynamics of the current situation. An increasing number of universities have been forced to switch to emergency mode in the past week. In spite of these difficult circumstances, universities will attach great importance to continuing research activities in the 2020 summer semester. We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all university members who are doing everything in their power to continue with teaching and research activities!"

The HRK President also sees the crisis as an opportunity. Alt: "Universities will live up to their responsibility. Research is designed to solve problems and will therefore take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalisation as far as possible."

HRK Vice-President Prof Dr Ulrich Radtke: "We want to open up examination and degree options as much as possible and give them legal certainty. However, it is essential that we recognise the fact that many candidates are currently having to prepare under difficult conditions and that, despite all our efforts, face-to-face lectures and examinations can only be replaced by digital formats to a limited extent. This should not disadvantage those affected. Compensating for disadvantages, for example by not crediting the semester towards the standard course duration or by postponing examination dates, is extremely important for all students, but especially for those who are vulnerable or have care and parental responsibilities. We must also consider medical students who currently support hospitals. The federal government has thankfully already drawn up a regulation for BAföG."

Nevertheless, the 2020 summer semester must be considered a regular part of the course of study or qualification. Radtke: "In the interests of students, teaching staff and researchers, this semester must not be written off. Universities are doing everything in their power to continue with research activities to the greatest possible extent. In other words, this time must be regarded as study time for students, if this is what they want. And there must be no gaps in

the biographies of teaching staff and researchers regarding teaching experience or research work.”