

8 April 2020**Safeguarding qualification opportunities and honouring engagement
HRK welcomes draft legislation in support of research and students**

It is the opinion of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) that the draft legislation in support of research and students in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is being discussed today by the federal government, is appropriate to the often precarious situation of young researchers and students at present. It provides researchers in the qualification phase with additional time and any additional income earned by students as a result of their involvement in combating the coronavirus will not be credited against BAföG (Federal Law concerning the Promotion of Education or Training) payments.

"Should the Bundestag pass this legislation, it will send out a strong, encouraging signal," said HRK President Professor Dr Peter-André Alt, today in Berlin. "Highly qualified researchers lay the foundation for the performance of universities and the research system as a whole. From the perspective of the universities, the capability for social engagement is an essential objective of all university study. It is very important that the federal government honours this."

"Based on the now urgently required extension of fixed-term contracts, which is appropriately limited in the draft legislation, universities can at least compensate for some of the time that researchers will lose in the qualification phase due to the crisis," said Alt. "This is of great importance, not only as urgent support for those affected but also in terms of the long-term consequences for research as a whole. The fact that the draft legislation underlines the importance of the social engagement of students deserves special recognition. Reducing university study to economic considerations is wholly inadequate. The draft legislation also sends a signal in this regard."

The draft legislation mainly provides for the following transitional provisions, which will enter into force with retroactive effect on 1 March 2020:

Firstly, the maximum fixed-term contract period pursuant to the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG) for academic and creative staff in the qualification phase, is to be extended by six months due to the restrictions placed on university and research activities as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, universities can extend employment contracts for qualification by an additional six months based on a legislative decree issued by the BMBF, provided that this is necessary due to the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Secondly, the incentives already in place for students to get involved in combating the COVID-19 pandemic were further strengthened by the draft legislation: Income from activities related

to the pandemic in all systemically important sectors and occupations should not be considered income within the framework of BAföG, and therefore be exempted from any crediting during the approval period.