

10 June 2021**HRK Senate on prospects for the coming winter semester**

During another online meeting on Tuesday, the Senate of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) discussed the prospects for the 2021/22 winter semester in light of the latest developments in the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In view of the significant decrease in the number of infections and the widespread elimination of vaccination prioritisation, all those involved are increasingly hopeful that study conditions will gradually return to normal," said HRK President Prof Dr Peter-André Alt in Berlin today. "Universities want to take advantage of the newly available options for face-to-face lectures quickly and to the greatest extent possible. At the same time, however, they must live up to their responsibility to students and teachers and take into account uncertainty regarding how the pandemic will develop in their planning."

Given this situation, it is the unanimous position of the Senate that a policy of merely making announcements would be of no benefit to anyone. HRK President Alt: "A full return to face-to-face contact cannot be announced in earnest until it is possible to plan realistically and responsibly. However, the most important factors involved in such planning are beyond the decision-making power of universities."

In the Senate's view, clear legal regulations are needed first and foremost with regard to the prerequisites for participation in lectures and examinations. It is of the opinion that regulations need to be drawn up on maximum group sizes and testing (proof of a negative test or controlled self-testing), as well as on the requirement to maintain a distance from others and any exceptions. Due to space capacities, it claims that the distance requirements alone would result in an upper limit for the number of events that could be held. Clear regulations on any attendance requirements for lectures are also required.

The plans would also have to be feasible. The Senate states that models of alternate teaching and cohort formation that are often used in schools are wholly unsuitable for universities. Hybrid activities combining face-to-face and distance teaching cannot be implemented on a broad scale. The logistics for comprehensive access controls for face-to-face contact under pandemic conditions are neither available nor financially viable at universities.

Finally, the Senate emphatically stressed the HRK President's call for special support for students and teachers in the vaccination campaign. Prompt vaccination of as many people as possible in these groups is vital for face-to-face contact in the coming winter semester. Vaccination centres should be kept open, and university medicine and in-house university physicians should be involved. Depending on the vaccine, the Senate is of the opinion that

those who want to be fully vaccinated for the winter semester must receive an initial offer of vaccination by mid-July at the latest.

HRK President Alt: "If the framework conditions remain similar to what they are now, the universities will be able to open up at least partially with set upper limits in the coming winter semester, as they did in some cases at the end of the ongoing summer semester. In any case, however, students must be advised to return to their places of study so that they can really take advantage of face-to-face contact. Universities naturally plan for changes in the pandemic using different scenarios; these will be continuously adapted as things develop."