

20 April 2020**HRK President on the summer semester**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Peter-André Alt, has just made the following statement in Berlin regarding the upcoming summer semester:

“In the coming days, the lecture period will begin at many universities under very unusual circumstances. The coronavirus pandemic is creating unprecedented challenges for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. We must therefore show them all our utmost respect for their tremendous efforts.

Students have been affected by measures to contain the epidemic in various ways. They have to adapt to profound changes in study conditions. Lectures and seminars are now held digitally, it is likely that libraries can only be used to a very limited extent, courses held in laboratories and workshops or that require close physical contact, excursions and placements must be postponed and reorganised.

In this unusual situation, we must do what we can to enable students to focus on their seminars and examinations. The loss of income resulting from the contact restrictions, and the drop in the number of job vacancies, is hitting many people hard. International students wanting to study in Germany or enrol here and German students at foreign universities have been affected by travel restrictions, too. The situation is even more complex for students with health issues.

We are grateful that the federal and state governments have responded to signals from universities and are attempting to ease the situation by introducing regulations on semester length and relaxing BAföG rules. I am confident that assistance will also be offered to all students experiencing financial difficulties so that they can overcome any shortfalls.

We would first and foremost like to extend our thanks to the teachers and administrative staff who are doing everything in their power to continue with programmes of study. Options vary depending on subjects and equipment, although everyone is working hard to make full use of these.

The research that is so important for our country in general and now in particular, not only at universities, has also been severely affected. Flexible regulations for researchers who are receiving project funding and in the post-doctoral training phase, such as those drawn up very quickly by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) or those planned in the amendment to the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act, are of great help to those affected and the research system as a whole.

It is now a matter of being pragmatic and patient in dealing with the remaining difficulties. The carefully considered statements formulated by the federal and state governments last week regarding reopening, represent further challenges for the universities: The necessary protective measures for on-site examinations, which will soon be possible again, in laboratories and libraries must be put in place with utmost care; it must be ensured that those with chronic illnesses are given special protection. Most importantly, the cautious easing of guidelines gives us cause to be optimistic that universities will be able to fulfil their tasks in research and teaching again under simpler circumstances in the foreseeable future.”