



Statement of the Czech Rectors Conference on the Vaccination Strategy and on Continuation of anti-epidemic Measures at Higher Education Institutions

Prague, 6 January 2021

Czech Rectors Conference observes with concern the development of the epidemic in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, HEIs have proven to be the strategic infrastructure of this country in the fight against the epidemic, on the other hand, contact teaching has always been limited there first, and during the loosening of the anti-epidemic measures, HEIs have always been the last in line.

For two semesters, distance learning could be applied in most areas of education without any serious impact on the higher education quality. However, we are afraid that with the continuation of this form of teaching for another one or two semesters, the impacts would be very serious and in some cases irreparable, especially in study programs, which by their very nature assume a high level of contact teaching.

The hope for a return to normal life of the society and to normal teaching at HEIs is vaccination, which is just starting to be used in our country. It is proper that the government has defined the most vulnerable groups of the citizens to receive the vaccine as a matter of priority. We also evaluate the framework criteria used for such a definition as factually correct. Logically, teachers of various types of schools are also included among these endangered groups. However, not of all types of schools. Surprisingly, the list does not include HEIs' teachers and unlike other teachers, they will not be given priority in vaccination.

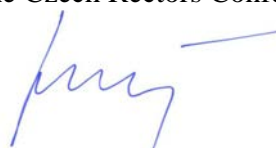
Does it mean that the government does not consider the reopening of normal higher education as soon as possible a priority? As representatives of HEIs, we are very well aware of the seriousness of the current situation and we do not intend to open HEIs hastily or uncontrollably. Since summer, we have defined systems of strict measures that respond to various degrees of threat. We are very much aware of our responsibility for the lives and health of our students and staff. On the other hand, we are also responsible for the quality of education at our institutions and for the quality of graduates who will ensure the competitiveness of the Czech Republic in the future difficult period.

We therefore ask the Government of the Czech Republic to consider the following two steps in particular:

1. In order to reopen contact teaching at HEIs as soon as possible, to include higher education teachers among the epidemic groups at risk, meaning the professions preferred for vaccination at the level of teachers of other types and levels of schools.
2. During the summer semester of the academic year 2020/2021, to keep exceptions for direct teaching of selected subjects or study programs for all HEIs to the extent already defined at the beginning of the second wave of the epidemic in terms of regulations of regional hygienic stations (e.g. Regulation of the Regional Hygiene Station of the Capital City of Prague No. 12/2020). We are sure that under the strict supervision of the management of HEIs and faculties, the direct teaching in some selected subjects in small groups of students will not bring any complications.

Prague, 6 January 2021

On behalf of the Czech Rectors Conference



Prof. Petr Sklenička
President