

## **Senate resolution on attacks on science**

Education, reasoning and science have made key contributions to the progress of the modern era, the basis of our current social interactions and our standard of living. This progress has rarely been achieved without critical discourse, but current conspiracy myths and the associated denial of science in relation to the coronavirus issue are increasingly threatening the cohesion of our society.

The coronavirus pandemic has raised a large number of important political and scientific questions. Political questions are decided by opinions, debate and majority. By contrast, scientific questions are answered by applying scientific methods. Unfortunately, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, populist efforts to discredit answers attained through scientific methods as fundamentally untrustworthy are increasingly being observed. These efforts involve in particular falsified portrayals, disregard of facts and demonstrably false statements. Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf strongly denounces such populist efforts.

Science is not flawless but it responds to criticism in a transparent and rational manner, enabling the identification of errors and flaws in order to ultimately find the best possible answers and solutions. The development of vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 – the virus that causes COVID-19 – is based on decades of fundamental research, in which risks and benefits have been weighed up on a broad factual basis. The newly developed vaccines offer significant protection against severe infection and, for the majority of people, have involved far fewer disadvantages than conventional infection protection measures such as isolation.

Scientific achievements form an important foundation for political decisions and the success of society. However, science itself does not make the decisions. Anyone who seeks to achieve the rejection of scientific findings destroys the basis for decision-making needed to shape a positive future. The current pandemic is however just one of a number of pressing global challenges, including e.g. climate change, that society and science must face up to. In order to find solutions to current and future threats, society needs scientific and technological progress as well as trust in scientific structures and their findings.

Scientists should take a clear stand against scientifically unsubstantiated claims and provide people with accurate information. As a citizens' university ("*Bürgeruniversität*"), Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf aims to foster exchange between science and society. The coronavirus situation proves how urgently needed this is.

Science helps our society. By contrast, the denial of science and spreading of conspiracy myths is exacerbating the current situation and depriving society of the ability to master future crises. The Senate of Heinrich Heine University therefore calls upon people to champion the freedom of science and an objective debate of scientific findings, and to take a stand against disinformation, conspiracy myths and in particular hate and incitement in social discourse. The Senate recognises the willingness to be vaccinated and solidarity of the vast majority of the population, acknowledges the health-related, psychological and economic suffering of many people and remembers the many victims of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Düsseldorf, 22 February 2022**

**The Senate of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf**