

Dear all,

We are starting a new academic year at Ramon Llull University as never before. This year is marked by the exceptional situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic that broke out in our country last March and had a big impact on the second semester and the end of the 2019-20 academic year.

Over the last few months, sudden exceptional circumstances meant that students, professors and administration and services staff had to make a huge effort to move from a presential teaching & learning model to an “emergency remote teaching” model. As a University we moved most of the activities into the virtual space, in just a few days, with synchronous activities using videoconferencing, while maintaining the majority of teaching hours. Doing this allowed students and professors to share something as close as possible to a physical space and to follow the usual timetables. Our priority was that no one should miss out on the year despite the circumstances, therefore we had to guarantee that everyone could reach the necessary skill level in each of the studies. Needless to say, teaching was not the only activity that was affected at the university, but the University stayed “up and running”, and fully operational.

Regrettably, nothing was planned for the universities during the state of alarm and the Transition Plan to a New Normal, despite our insistent demands to partially return to our activities. The fact that a return to activity by certain sectors of economic activity was prioritised over higher education is a cause for concern that should make us all think long and hard as a society. This situation was even analysed in the international press.

In the midst of this critical social situation, we were proud to see the health sciences students of our University urgently joining the health system to literally help save lives; and we also saw a great increase in volunteering and solidarity actions at all of the Schools and Faculties of the University in many different ways. Part of our research effort was also geared towards projects to fight Covid-19 and its effects. The pandemic gives us a great opportunity to humbly reflect and become aware of our fragility and sense of community. It was, and still is, a time when everyone has to give the very best of themselves. I think we can be very proud of our university community’s response to this new, gigantic challenge. I cannot say it enough, and I will never stop thanking everyone for the commitment, effort, and dedication that is making it possible.

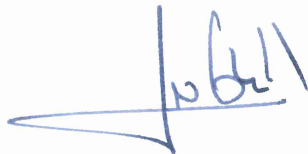
One word that everyone is currently using to describe the academic year we are beginning is 'uncertainty'. Uncertainty on every level: about the evolution of the pandemic, the measures to be taken to contain the spread of the virus, our daily routines from now on, how we will adapt to the everyday life that we must now lead, international mobility, the response from the research community, etc. We would like to assure you that we have made intensive preparations to face up to this new year with full guarantees.

We have got ready to implement a mixed teaching-learning model in compliance with the necessary health measures, combining the maximum authorised physical attendance with remote attendance that is as close as possible to the usual experience in our classrooms. We are, and we want to continue to be, a face-to-face university, but this exceptional situation has made us explore the possibilities of new technologies as never before. We are prepared to go back to full physical presence as soon as possible, and we are also prepared to intensify virtual attendance if the pandemic develops in a way that requires this. With the experience we have lived through, and the way our university community has responded, we can look to the future with full confidence.

Allow me to end this message with a few special words dedicated to the new students who are joining the University for the first time. Most of you have had to prepare for one of the biggest challenges of your student life —university entrance exams— in an unusual situation that was certainly unimaginable before. You made it! You are becoming university students in a way you will never forget. That is why we have taken special care to prepare your incorporation into the University, to make things as easy as possible for you in such an important transition in your career. Welcome to you all!

No one can imagine that this new academic year will be easy, but no one should be in any doubt that we will all do our utmost to make it possible. We are prepared, we are ready!

Let's all have a great 2020-21 academic year!



Dr. Josep Maria Garrell i Guiu
Rector

Barcelona, 14 September 2020