

Update by the Commandant of the BwCSC: Lessons to Start Again

The challenges we are facing in the light of the current coronavirus developments affect all areas of society, and thus also have an impact on the Bundeswehr. When a member of the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College was tested positive for the virus, the Commandant decided in the second week of March to suspend all teaching activities. Now the lessons are to start again, beginning with the International and the National General/Admiral Staff Officer Courses. Two key points, however, are that the lessons are taken up in a modified and digital way so as not to endanger the health of staff members and students. In the following interview, Major General Oliver Kohl, Commandant of the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, explains what the College's plans are.

3 Questions for Major General Oliver Kohl



Commandant of the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College

[As of 30 March classes will start again at the BwCSC. What will they look like?](#)

The decision to suspend all teaching activities was unprecedented in the 63-year-long history of our institution. Nevertheless, this was necessary to first gain clarity on the situation and to decide what further actions to take. Once more, I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all men and women — with or without uniform — who have kept us on course during this difficult time. Although some of us are still sick, they are fortunately on the mend, and I am very happy that we will start having classes again on Monday. The lessons, however, will be taken up to a limited extent only and in a substantially modified way. We have a mission to fulfil and cannot wait until the pandemic is fully defeated.

As a result, over the coming weeks and months we will always need to sensibly weigh up the health risks for us and our families against the duty to fulfil our mission. When doing so, we must above all continue to adhere to the current rules of behaviour for social interaction, with which we should all be familiar by now, in order to avoid further infections.

We will gradually start having classes again — at first, for the International, then for the National General/Admiral Staff Officer Course. At the beginning, in particular, we will focus on distance teaching and learning as much as possible to ensure that there is only a minimum number of people on site. This might not be optimal, but it is important to me that we take up our mission again in a sensible way instead of simply waiting. Taking no action at all has never been an alternative!

The Bundeswehr Command and Staff College has been looking to explore digital opportunities in education for a while. Do you think the crisis might be a chance for the College to go digital?

It is now paying off that we — especially over the course of the past year — have been dealing intensively with the question “What will be the command style of the future and what does this mean for the training of top-level military personnel?” Digital formats play a decisive role in this context. Therefore, we can now make actual use of a lot of good ideas which we have had over the past months so that we can finally catch up with many partner institutions in this area.

Indeed, the current crisis has clearly and relentlessly shown our shortcomings to us. They had been well-known already; it is not the first time that they have been pointed out to us. At the same time, this crisis has opened up ways of implementation which had seemed impossible only a few weeks ago. These opportunities must now be actively pursued in cooperation with major organisational elements of the Bundeswehr and the Federal Ministry of Defence.

In this regard, I would like to make it clear that using the possibilities of remote working and distance learning whenever needed to collaborate virtually is not just a temporary solution during the corona crisis. Constant access to unclassified course contents must become a matter of course not only at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, but also in the entire Bundeswehr training system.

There is no going back from this, looking at the progress we have made so far.

What exactly does ‘going digital’ mean for teaching and learning?

One important component is a powerful digital learning platform. For the time being, we decided to implement ‘ILIAS’, a system that has successfully been used by the Helmut Schmidt University / Bundeswehr University Hamburg for years. Again, we benefit from the good and close cooperation between the Bundeswehr organisations based in Hamburg.

As things currently stand, we will be able to set up the contents of the platform and start training the lecturers at the beginning of April already. For training is also necessary in the digital world — even the best hardware and software is of no use if the users are unable to handle them. For many of us, learning and teaching with the help of videoconferences, podcasts or other collaborative work tools for example will be a considerable change. This will not prevent us, however, from proactively taking the necessary steps which are now possible.

Digital formats will never replace traditional teaching and learning methods used in the classroom. They will, nevertheless, be able to complement those methods in a modern way opening up even more possibilities to us that we cannot yet fully imagine to finally match the frequently announced vision of ‘lifelong learning’ with concrete action.

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