

Dear student,

I'm delighted to see each and every one of you!

We have all experienced some rather exceptional times, but mass vaccination is now being rolled out and the light at the end of the tunnel is becoming increasingly brighter. I had my jab just before the holidays. I received a text message from the municipality inviting me to have my vaccination. Yes!!! Just as I was expecting. It was actually going to happen.

Many people have posted photos of their vaccination on social media. I understand that. It makes an impression when the wheels of society turn with meaning. Having the injection represents standing at a crossroads - it is a milestone. We can talk about a before and after. Thousands of injections are a sign that the tide is turning.

And soon it will be your turn. That tiny injection tells us that we are heading towards better times. The fact that it is right here in front of me today, face to face, symbolises the same thing.

I would like to welcome each and every one of you, particularly our new students.

*I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all international students to the University of Stavanger. This year we have 500 new international students from 72 countries.*

*The years as a university student are formative years. You will graduate as a different person – more mature and inspired by new knowledge and friendships – I know I did!*

*We hope you will thrive as a student at the University of Stavanger. Your academic success and well-being is as important to us as it is to you – in fact, your well-being is the **key** to your academic success! Grab every opportunity to be around people – go to classes, hang out with your course mates – anything and everything can happen.*

*The University of Stavanger is guided by innovation, green transition and entrepreneurship. Our research makes an impact in society, and that is important to us. With your help we can drive world forward, step by step.*

Just like the injection symbolises the before and after, we can talk about a before and after for those of you who are coming here as new students. Today is a crossroads in your life.

Perhaps you have left home for the first time? Your group of friends has been scattered all over the country. Best friends have been separated. Something new is about to begin. You will now start to become acquainted with new people. You will have to trust yourself. It might be scary. But take courage! Because thousands of young people have experienced the same as you. And hopefully everything will go well, both in your life as a student and otherwise.

However, you will have many expectations about what student life has to offer. There are many myths about life as a student. I hope you will have the opportunity to experience sitting in the reading room and feeling that you have understood something complicated. That you will experience an eureka moment when chatting to an enthusiastic lecturer. That you will have academic discussions with fellow students who are searching for deeper insights and recognition.

You will probably also experience intense conversations during the night with new friends. You can look forward to partying at *Folken*. And look out, because you could fall in love.

But you should also remember that life as a student is as diverse as many other phases in your life. You cannot take it for granted that things will go as planned. But suddenly something unexpected occurs, an opportunity or a challenge - and you have to change your plans. Don't be afraid to do that. You're allowed to change your mind. I myself studied both history and English – but ended up becoming an economist. Knowledge is never wasted. Knowledge is a source of life wisdom. Knowledge helps to shape you as a person.

If you allow yourself to deviate slightly from your plans, things can happen that you never even dreamed about. The University of Stavanger offers many opportunities.

How about going on a six-month **exchange**? You might not have been planning it, but maybe you should do it anyway? Studying in another country will provide you with useful insights, new perspectives, international contacts and friends for life.

Maybe you weren't the first student to volunteer for the Student Council? Not many people know you here. You have a clean slate and an opportunity to re-start yourself. You could get involved in our **Student Democracy**. Through the university's student organisation, StOr, you can work with others to improve the everyday lives of students while they are studying. In this way you can become involved in helping the UiS to become an even better learning institution.

**Folken** is our students' cultural centre and it has one of the best stages in the city. People need people – both in front of and on the stage, as well as behind the scenes.

There are huge benefits to be gained from becoming involved in activities which are not purely academic: social unity, experience with working in a team, meeting many different people.

Extracurricular involvement looks good on your CV. So please remember that the part of your life that you are now embarking on relates to both your formative years and your education.

Yes, the virus could change the world. But so can people. And unfortunately not always for the better.

We are currently releasing far too much CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere as a result of our lives and our lifestyle, and our behaviour is taking its toll on nature and the environment. The climate is becoming warmer and we are seeing a huge loss in biodiversity.

But sometimes we can also make a positive difference.

Dealing with the coronavirus is showing that the global community can really make the world a better place if we join forces and really work together as a team. Current developments and rolling out the coronavirus vaccines have shown us the importance of prioritising research.

Knowledge, research and cooperation are also essential for solving our climate and biodiversity challenges.

You have come to a town which has developed rapidly since oil was discovered in the North Sea in the 1970s. But even Stavanger is now transitioning into a new age. Here at the university you will notice that we are offering subjects and courses about transition and sustainability. We are constantly acquiring researchers who are working with renewable energy and sustainable innovations. You will also notice this during your time at and around the actual university campus. For example, bicycles and buses are now the order of the day.

If we are to achieve our goal of limiting global warming by 2 degrees, we will need new ideas, new solutions, political courage and cultural changes. I am therefore very optimistic when I see you. You are the ones who will be driving forward the restructuring that we need to engage in. And here at the University of Stavanger we are particularly keen to provide you with the knowledge you will need to achieve this.

This town is also a place where you will find the most exciting opportunities during the forthcoming decade.

Get involved! Your opportunities will then start to line up. Smile at life. And life will smile back at you.

**Thank you for listening!**