

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to inform the Corvinus community that, at the end of the academic year now drawing to a close, I shall be stepping down from my role as Vice-Rector and, at the same time, bidding farewell to the Corvinus University community.

I am sure many of you are wondering: why, and why now?

I was appointed to Vice-Rector eight years ago. I served Corvinus initially as Vice-Rector for Education, then as Vice-Rector General Affairs, followed by a period as Acting Rector, and subsequently once again as Vice-Rector for Academic Programmes. I have worked alongside 2 Rectors, 1 Rector-President, 2 Chancellors, 1 President, 11 Vice-Rectors and 14 Deans, as well as 8 members of the Board of Trustees, as a member of the university leadership team; this also demonstrates that the university has undergone continuous transformation, which has required me, too, to adapt regularly. In academia, a leadership cycle of two four-year terms is customary, and although it is clear from the above that, whilst not strictly in this time-based division, I have been focusing continuously on leadership duties for the past eight years. This has perhaps demanded more than one person could manage, leaving me with no time or energy for research, writing articles and books, maintaining closer professional links with corporate practice, or delivering training and consultancy. The time has therefore come for a change, and I would like to return to these areas of my work. This form of refreshment and renewal is something every former leader is entitled to – and I believe that includes me.

And why now, of all times? There will undoubtedly be some who link this to the changes of recent months. It is worth noting, however, that this question has crossed my mind on several occasions, but a new and challenging offer would always come along, which I ultimately accepted. In the autumn of 2021, upon the arrival of Rector Előd Takáts, I, together with my fellow Vice-Rectors in office at the time, offered my resignation. The Rector accepted this only in part and entrusted me with a further challenging role as Vice-Rector for General Affairs. Then, in 2023, upon Előd Takáts's departure, I again offered my resignation to the MUC Board of Trustees. At that time, I received the honourable request from the Board to carry out the duties of Acting Rector until the arrival of the new Rector; then, one year later, upon the arrival of Rector Bruno van Pottelsberghe, I was tasked with supporting and assisting the first non-Hungarian-speaking international Rector in his integration into Corvinus and the Hungarian higher education system, as well as ensuring that the new internationalisation strategy was aligned with the Hungarian educational regulatory framework. In relation to the latter, my contract included a one-and-a-half-year clause, which expired at the end of January this year. By then, I had already made a final decision that, although I would continue to oversee the educational part of the EQUIS accreditation process and the management of the strategic educational projects that had been launched for the remainder of the academic year – until their completion at the end of the academic year or the milestones in August – I would definitely step down at that point, whatever new challenges might lie ahead. Accordingly, the Rector and I sat down together at the start of the summer, discussed the matter, and decided by mutual agreement to make the change. Over the past month, a great many people have contacted me in various ways – many have even come to see me in person – and encouraged me to continue, as they believe we have achieved many valuable results and that the strategic direction along which

the university is developing is the right one. I would like to thank them for their supportive and positive feedback, but for the reasons outlined above, I hope they will understand my decision. I would now encourage them to voice their opinions on the university's direction of development publicly as well!

Why am I leaving Corvinus beyond the end of my term of office? I believe that, for me, a fresh start now means not only research and curriculum development, but also a change of environment. But please, let no one think that this is any sort of retreat from anything! My decision has not been influenced by recent events; I have always stood before the community, discussing and explaining current issues! From now on, too, if I am invited by Corvinus, I will be happy to come and discuss any topic – whether it concerns the leadership decisions of the recent period, a comparison of operations before and during KEKVA, or a fair and constructive debate on professional issues relating to educational management. I consider it important to emphasise the phrase 'fair and constructive debate' because, unfortunately, in recent months there have been statements made by certain individuals or groups within the university which were made in an unworthy and derogatory manner and tone, and I did not respond to them because I did not wish to stoop to that level. No one at the university has ever heard me raise my voice or utter a sentence intended to deliberately insult or berate another person; I therefore rightly expect similar principles to be applied towards me. I respectfully ask these colleagues to refrain from making personal and offensive remarks when I step down!

Recently, a number of claims concerning me – claims that have never been backed up by facts – have appeared in university discourse; I would like to address each of these briefly.

- With regard to the KEKVA model, I would like to emphasise that I did not take part in the development of KEKVA, that is, the asset management foundation system. I had already been working as Vice-Rector well before the KEKVA model was introduced and continued to do so whilst it was in place. I have a basis for comparison; I have myself outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the single-tier governance model from the pre-KEKVA period, and I have spoken about the potential of the two-tier model and its spread across Europe – from which the recent KEKVA model incorporated many positive elements – but I have also pointed out where and in what respects this model was flawed. In all my duties, I acted exclusively in accordance with academic and professional considerations relating to the university's development, naturally within the given legal and governance frameworks. This did not mean representing any particular model or system, but rather a professional commitment to the university's development!
- I considered it a guiding principle never to bring politics into my work; I maintained a politically neutral stance in every respect, whilst being fully aware that those who do not align themselves with either political side can often find themselves very much alone. In university life, however, I supported political diversity. In those roles – primarily as Acting Rector and Vice-Rector for General Affairs – where I had to make personnel decisions regarding the appointment of new colleagues, I took great care to ensure that high-achieving candidates were not judged on the basis of their political views or statements made in public forums; in public life, everyone should be free to express their political views, because that is what truly makes us a university. Naturally, I will not mention any names in a letter such as this, but anyone interested in this topic is invited to examine the

facts – namely, the list of those who joined during the periods in question, or those who have spoken freely in public – and they will see the political diversity reflected in those names!

- Nor do I wish to pass over in silence the case that has been referred to in the press merely as an ‘exam scandal’. Owing to my role in reviewing the ethical matter at the second instance, I was required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Due to the ongoing court proceedings, I was also unable to comment in full detail on the case of the colleague who was dismissed from the university. The legal proceedings brought by the dismissed colleague against the university have concluded, with the court ruling in favour of the university at both first and second instance. However, given that some individuals within the university community and in the public sphere continue to make statements about these matters in a way that does not reflect the full truth, and frame certain details within a different narrative to serve a narrow agenda, I have asked the Rector to grant me an exemption from confidentiality due to the significant public interest involved. I intend to inform the public in future about the facts relating to this matter by presenting documents that support my claims.

I believe that the most important indicator in assessing the work of a university leader is what the students say about him, because they are our most important clients and partners, and they represent the intellectuals of the future. I would like to quote from a farewell letter written to me by a former student leader; I hope he will not take offence at this.

‘We had several disagreements, ..., and on some matters we probably still do not see eye to eye to this day. However, unlike many other university leaders, I never questioned – nor did we ever question – your competence and your commitment to Corvinus. Discussing matters with you always presented the most serious intellectual challenge; I often had to admit that we fell short in terms of knowledge, experience and preparedness.

But perhaps even more often than that, we found in you the partner closest to us – and one whom we also recognised – with whom we could have meaningful discussions about the university’s present and future and indeed achieve results.”

I am proud to have been able to work with this student community.

I am also proud of my colleagues with whom I have worked directly over the past few years. I thank them for their collaborative thinking and our joint efforts. I am proud of the 30 new bachelor’s, master’s and specialised postgraduate degree programmes that we have developed here at Corvinus within a new competence-based system, because with these innovations, the university can educate the well-prepared, responsible leaders of the future. I am proud that an international community has been established, and that I was able to play a part in its development and management.

I wish Corvinus every success in continuing to make steady progress along the path it has embarked upon!

Lajos György Szabó