

Statement from the Board of Directors of the Norwegian Gestalt Institute University College (NGI) on institutional consequences of Russia's attack on Ukraine

The professional staff of the Norwegian Gestalt Institute University College has asked its board of directors to clarify the Institute's stance, as an institution of higher learning, on Russia's invasion of and war on Ukraine. This issue is in focus due to the Institute's participation in the international EAGT conference, which will be held in Madrid later this month.

The Norwegian Government sent a letter to the country's universities and colleges in March of 2022 recommending that all institutions of higher learning pause agreements with Russian institutions and institutes.

Russian and Ukrainian students at NGI can expect to be included in a safe environment for study. If any of these students experience harassment, exclusion, or other inappropriate behaviour, the Institute encourages them to report this via NGI's official channel for whistleblowing (*Si-fra-ordningen*).

Russian citizens can apply to be accepted into the University College's programs and can be accepted as students as long as the prerequisites and requirements for acceptance are met. Russian citizens shall receive the same treatment as all other students.

The University College shall not participate in institutional research projects where Russian educational institutions, gestalt institutes, or authorities participate. NGI's Board of Directors does not however forbid the institute's employees from having contact with Russian researchers and gestalt trainers. To forbid individuals such contact would be a severe intervention in individual employees' academic freedom. In its guidelines of March 2022, the Government did not introduce a general academic boycott of Russia.

NGI's Board of Directors is strongly critical to the fact that the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT) has not suspended its cooperation with the Association of Russian-Speaking Gestalt Institutes (ARGI) and the Saint Petersburg Institute of Postgraduate Training and Professional Improvement in Gestalt (SPI) as a result of the Russian invasion of and acts of war on Ukraine. The Board of Directors cannot see any indication that these two organisations have taken a clear stance against the Russian acts of war. The Board of Directors is of the opinion that Russian organisations and institutes should be suspended from EAGT as long as Russian acts of war in Ukraine continue. The European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA), of which the Norwegian Psychological Association is a member, has unanimously voted to exclude the Russian Psychological Society (RPS). The RPS was not allowed to participate in the European psychology congress this summer. This is an example the Board of Directors believes the EAGT should have followed in relation to the participation of Russian organisations and institutes well in advance of the coming conference in Madrid.

The Board of Directors is strongly critical that EAGT has invited participants from Russian institutions to the conference in Madrid and that several of these are conference workshop holders and facilitators. The Board of Directors is of the opinion that this violates the signals that The Human Rights & Social Responsibility Committee of EAGT and the General Board of EAGT expressed in their



statement of 26 February 2022, where the actions of Russian authorities were described as unnecessary violence. A clearer statement from EAGT on its position is lacking. The Newsletter, sent as late as in March of this year, appears elusive without a clear position in favour of Ukraine and its peoples' fight against the Russian invasion. It is not possible to speak of peace, dialogue, and conflict resolution as long as one of the parties is under unjustified attack. It is only when Russian military forces withdraw from Ukraine that a possibility for dialogue can be restored.

Against this background, the Board of Directors chooses to encourage NGI's employees to boycott those aspects of the EAGT conference that include contributions by people who represent Russian organisations or institutes. In this way, NGI can make clear to EAGT our desire that a stronger position be taken on the ongoing acts of war. At the same time, the Board of Directors chooses not to forbid NGI's employees from participating in the conference as a whole or in sessions with Russian contributors. This would be a curtailment of the academic freedom guaranteed by the Norwegian Act Relating to Universities and University Colleges.

NGI's Board of Directors is the institution's supreme governing body, in accordance with the Norwegian Act Relating to Universities and University Colleges. This statement shall be considered to be NGI's official opinion in this matter. NGI respects that there are varying opinions among its employees.

The statement of the Board of Directors is unanimous.

For the NGI Board of Directors,

Bodil Riise
Chairperson