



The Office of the President of Ukraine (via Email: Letter@apu.gov.ua)
Mr Denys Shmyhal, Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
(via Email: zmi@kmu.gov.ua)

cc Yurii Boichuk, Rector, H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogic University (via Email:
zagalny@hnpu.edu.ua)

Date: 16 January 2024

Dear Sirs

Letter of Support

I am writing to indicate my support for the autonomy of H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogic University as an independent academic higher education institution.

It has been my privilege to work with the Rector and colleagues of H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogic University since we formalised our partnership in June 2022 as part of the Universities UK 'Twinning' initiative. It was the long and established history of KhNPU, forged from its focus on education, pedagogy, teacher training, and research and development for teaching and the associated range of education professions, together with its impact on schools and wider educational setting and achievements, that attracted Cardiff Metropolitan University to become an international partner.

Cardiff Metropolitan University is the largest provider of education programmes in Wales and one of the largest in the UK. The University trains more teachers than any other university in Wales and its School of Education and Social Policy is formed from a previously independent College of Education. This model of structure and delivery is now not unusual within the UK where previously autonomous Teacher Training Colleges, many formed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, have been merged into larger and more comprehensive universities and with mixed success.

While the merger of previous autonomous teacher training colleges can bring benefits in terms of access to a wider range of academic subject specialists and economies of scale in the delivery of professional and support services, such 'gains' need to be balanced against potential losses. These losses can be seen in the culture and community of the institution when subsumed within a larger institution. For example, there is often a different ethos between institutions and the professional focus of the wider university's staff may vary significantly from that of the 'service-led' occupation of teaching and the other education-related professions currently provided at KhNPU such as Special Educational Needs, Counselling, Speech and Language Therapy. These are all areas that will see increasing demand in a post-conflict society and, as such, may benefit from a coherent and focussed educational environment where the institution's purpose and mission are clearly understood by all.

Within the UK I have been President and Vice-Chancellor of two universities where previously autonomous teacher training colleges have been merged into the wider university. In both cases it has been clear to me that the culture for staff, students and the communities they serve is rather different from the rest of the university, as is the structure, funding, staffing and curriculum of programmes, and it is important that the special qualities of a culture of service are not lost in such mergers. Additionally, I have been the Dean of two Schools of Education where both Schools had previously been merged into wider institutions. In both cases neither merger had been received positively by either party and the cultural legacy of poorly planned and executed mergers was still apparent some 10 to 20 years after the mergers.

Great caution is therefore required when considering such mergers and it is important that any structural change only takes place once evaluative work has been undertaken to assess the best ways to maintain and further develop the strengths, reputation and impact of KhNPU. The University's strengths are many; KhNPU is a leader in its field, both within Ukraine and internationally and the excellent work undertaken in teaching and research must be developed. The University is already of a significant size for a pedagogic university and, with almost 6,000 students, KhNPU should have sufficient critical mass to be a financially sustainable independent institution.

I will conclude by reiterating that there needs to be a clear and evidence-based rationale for a merger, supported by a detailed evaluation of the potential impact of any merger so that a full assessment of likely benefits and disadvantages can be undertaken.

I fully appreciate that structural change of many kinds will be inevitable as a result of the impact of the Russian invasion. I only hope that the strengths of KhNPU can be preserved and built upon and we stand ready to offer what support we can to higher education in Ukraine and to our colleagues at KhNPU in particular.

Yours faithfully



Professor Cara Aitchison
President & Vice Chancellor

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