



NUS STATEMENT

17 NOVEMBER 2020 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The National University of Singapore (NUS) would like to provide an update on the University's review of a complaint made by a staff member of the East Asian Institute (EAI) against the former director of the EAI, Professor Zheng Yongnian.

The EAI staff member had in May 2019 lodged a Police report against Prof Zheng alleging outrage of modesty. Following investigations, the Police, in consultation with the Attorney-General's Chambers, have administered a stern warning to Prof Zheng in end-April 2020.

The University also conducted its own internal investigations after it became aware of the allegations in May 2019. Prof Zheng was suspended on 20 May 2019, and was required to work from home and stay off the NUS campus for the entire duration of the University's and Police investigations. He was also issued a No-Contact Order, which prohibited him from contacting the EAI staff member. A Committee of Inquiry (COI) appointed by NUS has completed a review of the complaint made by the EAI staff member concerned. We appreciate the co-operation extended by all parties who assisted with the University's investigation.

After due consideration of the COI's report, the University has determined that Prof Zheng, who held a supervisory role in EAI, had given a fellow staff member a hug without her consent during a work meeting, and this behaviour was inappropriate in a professional setting. This is a breach of the NUS Code of Conduct for Staff and the appropriate sanction for this breach is a written warning. As with all staff disciplinary cases, the University has documented the outcome of the internal review in our staff records. This has been conveyed to Prof Zheng, who left NUS in September 2020, and the EAI staff member concerned.

NUS and EAI have been extending assistance to the affected EAI staff member since she had first raised this matter, and we will continue to provide her with the support she needs.

NUS and EAI expect all staff to treat others with dignity, consideration and respect, and we take a strong stand against all forms of inappropriate behaviour. All allegations of inappropriate behaviour are taken seriously and internal investigations are conducted to look into such allegations. Disciplinary action will be taken against staff found responsible for inappropriate behaviour.

Please refer to [Annex 1](#) for the fact sheet on the allegations and the COI's findings, and [Annex 2](#) for the timeline of events.

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Annex 1 - Fact Sheet: NUS' investigation of complaint against Professor Zheng Yongnian for allegations concerning outrage of modesty

A staff member of the East Asian Institute (EAI) at NUS had earlier, in May 2019, lodged a Police report against Professor Zheng Yongnian for allegations concerning outrage of modesty. Following investigations, the Police, in consultation with the Attorney-General's Chambers, administered a stern warning to Prof Zheng in end-April 2020.

NUS conducted its own internal investigations upon being made aware of the allegations. A Committee of Inquiry (COI) was appointed by NUS to look into the matter. The findings of the COI are summarised below:

	Allegations	Findings by COI
1	On 9 May 2018, during a meeting between the EAI staff member and Prof Zheng in his office, he put his hands on her shoulder and head.	Prof Zheng denied any physical contact with the EAI staff member at this meeting. The COI was unable to establish the veracity of this allegation in the absence of evidence.
2	On 30 May 2018, during a meeting between the EAI staff member and Prof Zheng in his office, he hugged her and patted her buttocks.	Prof Zheng admitted to hugging the EAI staff member in his room after their meeting but denied patting or touching her buttocks. The COI established that Prof Zheng had hugged the EAI staff member without her consent and the behaviour contravened provisions in the NUS Code of Conduct for Staff relating to expectations of professional behaviour. But the COI was unable to establish the veracity of the allegation that Prof Zheng had patted or touched her buttocks in the absence of evidence.
3	In October 2018, when taking a group photo, Prof Zheng held onto the back of the EAI staff member.	Prof Zheng denied holding onto the back of the EAI staff member during the group photo taking session. The COI was unable to establish the veracity of this allegation in the absence of evidence.

COI's conclusion

The COI concluded that Prof Zheng had admitted to hugging the EAI staff member without her consent during a work meeting on 30 May 2018, but the allegation that Prof Zheng had at the same meeting patted her buttocks could not be established conclusively.

The COI further determined that it is inappropriate for a male senior colleague in a supervisory role to hug a female junior colleague without her consent at a professional meeting in his office. In light of this conclusion, it was established that Prof Zheng had breached the NUS Code of Conduct for Staff.

Disciplinary Sanction

In accordance with the University's guidelines on staff discipline matters, the appropriate sanction for a breach of this nature is a written warning. As Prof Zheng is no longer a staff of NUS, the University will instead place on its staff records the outcome of the internal review.

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Annex 2 – Timeline of Events

Date	Description
May 2019	
13 May, Mon	EAI staff lodged a police report against Professor Zheng Yongnian.
18 May, Sat	Prof Zheng was arrested by the Police for Outrage of Modesty.
20 May, Mon	Prof Zheng was suspended by the University pending the investigations by the University/Police. The suspension included a No-Contact Order where he was informed not to contact any other employees, students, suppliers or customers of NUS without NUS' consent.
21 May, Tue	EAI staff concerned contacted NUS Office of Campus Security.
21 May, Tue	EAI staff concerned was interviewed by NUS regarding her complaint.
22 May, Wed	Prof Zheng was interviewed regarding the allegations.
27 May, Mon	Prof Zheng was informed not to report for work, till 12 Jul 2019. Similar to the terms of the suspension, he was informed not to make contact with any employee, student, supplier or contractor of NUS without NUS' consent.
27 May, Mon	Initial investigation completed. In the course of its initial investigations after the complaint was received in May 2019, the University was unable to make a determination if the allegations of sexual misconduct had been conclusively made out. The University therefore took the decision to wait for the outcome of the Police investigations before proceeding to appoint a Committee of Inquiry to conduct a formal inquiry into the matter. In the meantime, the University took action to ensure the safety of both the EAI staff member who filed the complaint and the wider campus community.
June 2019	
14 Jun, Fri	No-Contact Letter was issued to EAI staff concerned. This in line with NUS' policy of issuing No-Contact Letters to both parties concerned, to prevent any behaviour that could be perceived as harassment, intimidation or retaliation.
July 2019	
12 Jul, Fri	No-Contact Letter issued to Prof Zheng from 12 Jul 2019, as the letter and No-Contact instruction on 27 May was valid till 12 Jul 2019.
15 Jul, Mon	Prof Zheng worked from home until further notice.
April 2020	
27 Apr, Mon	NUS was informed that following investigations, the Police, in consultation with the Attorney-General's Chambers, administered a stern warning to Prof Zheng.
June 2020	
2 Jun, Tue	NUS notified Prof Zheng in writing regarding the allegations of misconduct.

Date	Description
16 Jun, Tue	Prof Zheng responded to NUS' Allegation Letter.
Jul 2020	
1 Jul, Wed	Committee of Inquiry (COI) appointed.
Aug 2020	
14 Aug, Fri	Oral Hearing for EAI staff concerned.
26 Aug, Wed	Oral Hearing for Prof Zheng.
Sep 2020	
6 Sep, Sun	COI submitted its report to NUS.
Oct 2020	
7 Oct, Wed	NUS accepted COI's findings and made a decision on the appropriate sanction.
Nov 2020	
16 - 17 Nov, Mon - Tue	NUS informed Prof Zheng and EAI staff concerned about the University's findings and the disciplinary sanction imposed.