



# A Message

FROM THE PRESIDENT

17 December 2020

Dear alumnus,

## **A Holistic Approach to Tackling Sexual Misconduct**

Over the past few months, a number of cases of sexual misconduct in local universities has come to the public's attention. A few recent cases in NUS involved faculty members. Regardless of whether these incidents took place on or off campus, such behaviour threatens the safety and well-being of our NUS community. It desecrates the campus atmosphere which is precious to all of us. The sad truth is that no matter how hard we try, sexual misconduct cannot be completely eradicated. Yet, we must be unrelenting in our desire and effort to tackle the issue head-on. Our approach has to be holistic, just, transparent and sensitive.

Sexual misconduct is a growing concern for universities around the world. For example, in 2019, Harvard University received 500 complaints, Yale University received 298 complaints, and Stanford University had 187 reported incidents of sexual misconduct.

In the same year, in Singapore, a total of 1,605 cases of outrage of modesty were reported to the police. The Ministry of Education (MOE) reported that in the three academic years 2015, 2016 and 2017, the six local universities handled a total of 56 student-related disciplinary cases involving sexual misconduct, 14 of which took place outside campuses. Of the 56 cases, 20 were from NUS, two were from Yale-NUS College (which has its own Board of Discipline, separate from that of NUS), 20 were from NTU, and six were from SMU. SUTD, SIT and SUSS had one case each.

**At NUS, we are sparing no effort to institute strong safeguards against incidents of sexual misconduct.**

We are taking a holistic approach towards addressing sexual misconduct. We recognise the importance of sensitising the NUS community, enhancing infrastructure for better campus safety, instituting a strict framework for disciplinary sanctions, and offering comprehensive victim support.

Over the last 18 months, the Office of the Senior Deputy President and Provost has reviewed our staff sexual harassment and misconduct policies. We also set up a cross-campus committee on sexual misconduct by staff. We are now evaluating how best to implement the committee's recommendations. Details will be shared later.

Further, I have personally met with NUS senior administrators, students and alumni to seek their views and elicit ideas and suggestions on how, as a community, we can take further firm and effective steps to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct on campus. These consultations will be ongoing. In the spirit of greater transparency, I would like to share some key threads that were conveyed to the stakeholders.

### **1. Reaffirming NUS' Strong Stand Against Sexual Misconduct**

NUS gives the highest priority to creating a safe learning and working environment on its campuses. **Every victim of sexual misconduct is one too many.** The University takes a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual misconduct. We have instituted strict policies and regulations to tackle such misconduct. Enforcement will be swift, firm and unwavering.

To further affirm our stand, we will develop a common **sexual misconduct policy applicable to all staff and students.** The policy will provide for an integrated approach for managing cases of sexual misconduct in NUS.

### **2. Holding Staff to the Highest Standards**

Disciplinary action will be swift for staff who are found to have breached the **NUS Code of Conduct for Staff**, especially for cases involving professional or sexual misconduct. There are instances of sexual misconduct involving the interplay of unequal power relations, which are more egregious. This is why the University must treat them very seriously. The recent dismissal of two teaching faculty members who were found to have behaved inappropriately towards students is evidence of this.

NUS has acted on the suggestion by the NUS Students' Union for the NUS Code of Conduct for Staff to be made public. We strive to be transparent in our communications involving cases of sexual misconduct. Once the disciplinary sanctions against staff have been determined for cases of sexual misconduct or integrity offences, the University may share details of the offence(s) with the NUS community. This would include sharing the name of the staff offender(s), on condition that the victim's identity remains confidential.

### **3. Instituting a Fair and Transparent Process**

It is important that every incident of sexual misconduct be managed in a just and sensitive manner, guided by the principles of fairness and neutrality. Each complaint is taken seriously and investigated thoroughly following due processes. NUS' disciplinary system is guided by the principles of natural justice in a bid to ensure that all parties are treated fairly without bias and are given a fair hearing. An important factor in this equation is ensuring that all parties – students and staff – are aware of the rules of engagement and code of conduct, and the consequences of wrong doing.

The policies and disciplinary processes are encapsulated in our **Statutes and Regulations**, which are reviewed regularly. Appropriate disciplinary sanctions are imposed for every infringement that is proven. This includes the dismissal of staff members and the expulsion of students where the nature of the misconduct is considered serious.

#### 4. Providing Maximum Support for Victims

We are seeing more individuals coming forward to file reports against alleged perpetrators of sexual misconduct. Even though it may not augur well for the image and reputation of the University, I feel it is a good thing that more individuals are stepping forward. It shows a certain level of trust in the institution. No student or staff should suffer in silence. NUS will continue to strive to provide a safe and conducive platform for affected parties to verbalise and share their experiences and come forward in confidence. We are committed to provide care, support and redress. We now offer student victims varying levels of help, with the **Victim Care Unit (VCU)** serving as a central point of contact for all NUS students who are or have been affected by sexual misconduct. Staff can seek help and support through the **Employee Assistance Programme**.

As a result of a recent review, we have further strengthened our framework to handle cases of sexual misconduct. The key components are summarised below.

- a. Building a culture of respect is a top priority: Sustained education and sensitisation are critical to addressing the incidence of sexual misconduct on our campuses. Each one of us has a responsibility to be vigilant and proactive in preventing such incidents. We must ensure that every member of the NUS community – from the leadership team to staff and students – is aware of the risk of sexual misconduct, is committed to averting it, and knows how to manage it institutionally. This is not a one-off task but will be a continual process. It has to be an intrinsic part of our DNA.

Currently, all students and staff undergo training on matters of respect and consent. We will soon introduce refresher courses to reinforce this. We are also exploring **bystander training** to emphasise the important role and social responsibility of bystanders. This involves being vigilant in spotting sexual misconduct and taking appropriate action. We all have a responsibility in fostering a safer campus environment. There are additional plans to conduct workshops to build an inclusive and respectful culture on campus, and to strengthen training for staff who are likely to be first responders in cases where sexual misconduct has occurred.

- b. Caring for victims: The Victim Care Unit, which currently supports victims who are students, will be renamed the **NUS Care Unit (NCU)**. By the second quarter of 2021, this unit will be provided with resources to extend its care programmes to NUS staff.
- c. Speedier police reporting: Under Section 424 of the Criminal Procedure Code, NUS is required by law to report any arrestable offence listed. This includes offences such as voyeurism, outrage of modesty, and rape. For arrestable offences, we have tightened our internal processes to ensure that police reporting is completed no later than two weeks upon conclusion of the Board of Discipline (for students) or the Committee of Inquiry (for staff) deliberations. A police report may be filed earlier if circumstances warrant.
- d. Timely response and greater transparency: We acknowledge that being open and more transparent about sexual misconduct offences are critical to building trust and engendering a culture of respect on campus. For the recent cases of sexual misconduct, there was concerted effort to share pertinent information about the allegations and investigation findings with the NUS community in a proactive and timely manner. We will continue this practice, where feasible, **without compromising the privacy and well-being of victim(s)**.

- e. Periodic Reporting: The University plans to provide the NUS community with a report every six months on cases of sexual misconduct involving NUS staff and/or students. This augments our ongoing effort to raise awareness of sexual misconduct among the NUS community. **The facts of each case are redacted to prevent victim(s) from being identified.**

Many of the above measures will be progressively introduced over the next few months. This is the University's commitment to all staff and students. As NUS management – it is our duty. You have my assurance that no effort will be spared on our part to ensure a safe and conducive campus environment. Yet, we need to face the reality that we are dealing with a highly complex and multifaceted challenge. We need to work together and not against each other. Let us strive to strengthen and deepen trust so that we can act in good faith – as OneNUS.

I thank you for your understanding and support.

With best wishes,  
Professor Tan Eng Chye (Science '85)  
NUS President