

HEARING

**DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS**

REASONS FOR DECISION

In the matter of: Miss Yiqi Zhu

Heard on: Tuesday, 15 April 2025

Location: Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Committee: Ms Wendy Yeadon (Chair)
Ms Joanne Royden- Turner (Accountant)
Mr Nigel Pilkington (Lay)

Legal Advisor: Mr David Marshall

Persons present

And capacity: Ms Emily Mitchell (ACCA Case Presenter)
Miss Sofia Tumburi (Hearings Officer)

Summary: Excluded from membership with immediate effect.

Costs: £1,000

1. The Committee heard an allegation of misconduct against Miss Zhu. Ms Mitchell appeared for ACCA. Miss Zhu was not present and not represented, although she had made some written submissions.
2. The Committee had a Main Bundle of papers containing 248 pages, a Separate

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Bundle of Performance Objectives containing 59 pages, an Additional Bundle containing 21 pages and a service bundle containing 19 pages.

PROCEEDING IN ABSENCE

3. The Committee was satisfied that Miss Zhu had been served with the documents required by regulation 10(7) of The Chartered Certified Accountants' Complaints and Disciplinary Regulations 2014 in accordance with regulation 22. The required documents were contained in the papers before the Committee. There was evidence that they were sent by email on 17 March 2025 to an email address notified by Miss Zhu to ACCA as an address for all correspondence. That was 29 days ago.
4. There had been some engagement with Miss Zhu throughout the investigation. She had completed a Case Management Form and she had said, both in that form and in recent correspondence, that she would not be attending this hearing. She said that she was content for it to proceed in her absence. The Committee was satisfied that she had chosen not to take part. It was in her interest and the public interest for this hearing to take place without further delay.
5. The Committee determined to proceed in Miss Zhu's absence.

ALLEGATION(S)/BRIEF BACKGROUND

6. By 15 July 2019 Miss Zhu had become an ACCA Affiliate, i.e. a student who had passed her ACCA exams but has not yet acquired sufficient practical experience to qualify for membership. An Affiliate is entitled to work as an accountant to gain practical experience with a view to ultimately gaining full membership of ACCA. Such a person is commonly referred to as an ACCA trainee. A trainee is required to obtain at least 36 months' practical experience in a relevant role before applying for membership.
7. An ACCA trainee's practical experience is recorded in that trainee's Practical Experience Requirement (PER) training record which is completed using an online tool called 'MyExperience' which is accessed via the student's MyACCA portal. As part of their practical experience, each trainee is required to complete

nine performance objectives (PO's) under the supervision of a qualified accountant. An accountant is recognised by ACCA as a qualified accountant if they are a qualified accountant recognised by law in the trainee's country and/or a member of an IFAC body (International Federation of Accountants). Once a trainee believes they have completed a PO, they are required to provide a statement in their PER training record describing the experience they have gained in order to meet the objective. Given that this is a description of their own experience, the statement should be unique to them. Through the online tool, the trainee then requests that their practical experience supervisor approves that PO.

8. In addition to approval of their PO's, the trainee must ensure their employment where they have gained relevant practical experience (being a minimum of 36 months) has been confirmed by the trainee's line manager who is usually also the trainee's qualified practical experience supervisor. This means the same person can and often does approve both the trainee's time and achievement of PO's. If the trainee's line manager is not qualified, the trainee can nominate a supervisor who is external to the firm to supervise their work and approve their PO's. This external supervisor must have some connection with the trainee's firm, for example as an external accountant or auditor.
9. Once all nine PO's have been approved by the trainee's practical experience supervisor (whether internal or external) and their minimum 36 months of practical experience has been approved, the trainee is eligible to apply for membership - assuming they have also passed all their ACCA exams and successfully completed ACCA's Ethics module.
10. During 2023 it came to the attention of ACCA's Professional Development Team that the practical experience supervisors registered to 91 ACCA trainees, shared one of three email addresses despite the names of such supervisors being different. It would not be expected for a supervisor to share an email address with any other supervisor or person. The three email addresses were as follows:
 - Email Address A
 - Email Address B
 - Email Address C

11. On or about 20 November 2021 an application was made for Miss Zhu to be granted membership. Membership was granted on 25 November 2021. The person Miss Zhu named as her supervisor was Person A and the email given was one of the three set out above. Her case was investigated as part of the group of 91 applicants.
12. Following the conclusion of the investigation, Miss Zhu faced the following allegations:

SCHEDULE OF ALLEGATIONS

Miss Yiqi Zhu ('Miss Zhu'), at all material times an ACCA trainee:

- 1) On or about 20 November 2021 in relation to her ACCA Practical Experience Training Record caused or permitted a third party
 - a) To register Person A as her practical experience supervisor and further,
 - b) To approve in Person A's name 39 months of qualifying experience and further,
 - c) To approve in Person A's name her performance objectives.
- 2) Whether by herself or through a third party applied for membership to ACCA on or about 20 November 2021 and in doing so purported to confirm in relation to her ACCA Practical Experience Training Record she had achieved all or any of the following Performance Objectives:
 - Performance Objective 2: Stakeholder relationship management
 - Performance Objective 5: Leadership and management
 - Performance Objective 7: Prepare external financial reports
- 3) Miss Zhu's conduct in respect of the matters described above was:
 - a) In relation to Allegation 1 a), dishonest in that Miss Zhu knew her supervisor, Person A, had been falsely registered as her practical

experience supervisor.

- b) In relation to Allegation 1 b), dishonest in that Miss Zhu knew her supervisor, Person A, had not approved her qualifying experience.
 - c) In relation to Allegation 1 c), dishonest in that Miss Zhu knew Person A had not approved her nine performance objectives.
 - d) In relation to Allegation 2, dishonest in that Miss Zhu knew she had not achieved all or any of the performance objectives as described in the corresponding performance objective statements or at all.
 - e) In the alternative, any or all of the conduct referred to in Allegations 1 and 2 above demonstrates a failure to act with Integrity.
- 4) In the further alternative any or all of the conduct referred to in Allegations 1 and 2 above was reckless in that:
- a) Miss Zhu failed to ensure that her Practical Experience training Record was approved in all material respects by her practical experience supervisor.
 - b) Miss Zhu paid no or insufficient regard to ACCA's requirements to ensure that the statements corresponding with the performance objectives referred to in Allegation 2 accurately set out how each objective had been met.
- 5) By reason of her conduct, Miss Zhu is guilty of misconduct pursuant to ACCA bye-law 8(a)(i) in respect of any or all the matters set out at 1 to 4 above.

DECISION ON FACTS/ALLEGATION(S) AND REASONS

13. At the start of the hearing, the Committee considered the Case Management Form submitted by Miss Zhu on 20 November 2024. In that form she admitted Allegation 2. The Committee found Allegation 2 proved.

14. Ms Mitchell did not call any witnesses to give oral evidence and relied on the witness statements and documents in the bundle. The evidence included witness statements from:
 - (a) A Senior Administrator in ACCA's Member Support Team who explained the application process;
 - (b) The Professional Development Manager with the Professional Development team, part of the Quality and Recognition department.
15. Ms Mitchell identified the resources available to ACCA trainees in China to help them to understand exactly what was required to gain ACCA membership. These included written instructions and also interactive resources. The information was mainly in English. Trainees always take their ACCA exams in English so would be expected to have sufficient fluency to understand the English language instructions.

ALLEGATION 1

16. The documents proved that Miss Zhu's application had been made on the basis that her entire practical experience had been obtained in one firm and that her practical experience supervisor was Person A, who was said to be an 'IFAC qualified line manager'. The email address listed for this person was one of the ones identified above and used in many others of the 91 cases. The evidence included the fact that although there were 91 applications over a period of about a year and a half, only three different email addresses had been used for the purported supervisors. As part of Miss Zhu's application a purported copy of a membership card from the Chinese Institute of Certified Public Accountants (CICPA), an IFAC body, had been uploaded. The application claimed that this was the membership card of her supervisor but the name and photograph had been obscured, the membership number was the same as shown in many other cards produced by the group of 91 and did not match the membership number given for the supervisor in her application.
17. Allegation 1 was formulated on the basis that the application process had, in effect, been delegated to another person, referred to as 'the third party'. The Committee was satisfied by the evidence that this was the case. Although Miss

Zhu did not formally admit the allegation in her Case Management Form she said:

I authorised a third party to help me deal with this issue and I have my own supervisor [person A]. I have no idea who the third party registered as my practical experience supervisor. ...

18. In other submissions she confirmed that she had paid this third party and submitted what she said was evidence of payment.
19. The Committee found Allegation 1 proved in its entirety.

ALLEGATION 2

20. Found proved by admission as stated above.

ALLEGATION 3(A), (B), (C)

21. As already stated, the evidence showed that if a person called Person A existed, that person could not have genuinely been her line manager and PER supervisor for her as well as the others in the group of 91 who made the same claim. In her submission quoted above she recognised that the person who submitted the form and therefore confirmed her compliance with the PER requirements had not supervised her work.
22. The Committee was satisfied that Miss Zhu knew that the form as submitted was false. The Committee found Allegation 3(a), (b), (c) proved.

ALLEGATION 3(D)

23. The reason that only three of the nine performance objectives were listed in Allegation 2 was that these were either identical or strikingly similar to those of other applicants in the group of 91 submitted earlier. That was demonstrated by the documents in relation to Miss Zhu and other applicants. It followed that, for at least those three, the PER statements cannot have been genuine statements of Miss Zhu's personal experience. She could not have achieved the experience as described and she must have known that. The Committee

was satisfied that this was dishonest conduct and found Allegation 3(d) proved.

ALLEGATION 3(E)

24. This was in the alternative so did not need to be decided.

ALLEGATION 4

25. This was also in the alternative so did not need to be decided.

ALLEGATION 5: MISCONDUCT

26. The Committee considered that Miss Zhu's dishonesty in relation to her application for membership was a very serious breach of her obligations as a member of ACCA. Her conduct fell far below the standards expected. The Committee was satisfied that her actions amounted to misconduct.

SANCTION(S) AND REASONS

27. The Committee considered what sanction, if any, to impose light of its findings, having regard to ACCA's Guidance for Disciplinary Sanctions. It first sought to identify aggravating and mitigating factors.
28. Aggravating factors were planning, premeditation, and the considerable potential harm to the public in obtaining membership without demonstrating the experience necessary for safe practice. Miss Zhu had showed no insight and little genuine remorse.
29. In mitigation she had engaged with ACCA's process and had made a limited admission. There were no previous disciplinary findings against her.
30. The Committee was quite satisfied that a sanction was required in this case. It considered the available sanctions in order of seriousness.
31. The Committee first considered the sanctions of admonishment and then reprimand but the guidance made it clear that these were not sufficient. For reprimand, the guidance states 'This sanction would usually be applied in

situations where the conduct is of a minor nature and there appears to be no continuing risk to the public'. Falsifying a practical experience record and membership application to obtain membership cannot be described as a minor matter.

32. The Committee next considered the sanction of severe reprimand. The guidance states that this sanction would usually be applied in situations where the conduct is of a serious nature but there are particular circumstances of the case or mitigation advanced which satisfy the Committee that there is no continuing risk to the public, and there is evidence of the individual's understanding and appreciation of the conduct found proved. Those elements were not present in this case. The Committee went through the list of suggested factors in the guidance. Apart from previous good character, hardly any of the factors supporting a severe reprimand were present. Even if combined with a fine, a severe reprimand would not be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the misconduct in this case.
33. The Committee considered that Miss Zhu's dishonest conduct was fundamentally incompatible with remaining as an ACCA member and that the minimum sanction it could impose was exclusion from membership.
34. A member who has been excluded can normally apply to be re-admitted after one year. The Committee considered whether to extend this period but decided that it was not necessary. If Miss Zhu does apply for readmission her application will be scrutinised by the Admissions and Licensing Committee.

COSTS AND REASONS

35. Ms Mitchell applied for costs totalling £6,268. ACCA had supplied a Detailed Costs Schedule and a Simple Costs Schedule. Miss Mitchell accepted that the hearing today had taken less time than estimated so some reduction might be appropriate.
36. The Committee was satisfied that the proceedings had been properly brought and that ACCA was entitled in principle to its costs. The Committee considered that the time spent and the sums claimed were reasonable, subject to a reduction for the length of hearing time today.

37. The Committee considered Miss Zhu's ability to make a contribution to costs of that magnitude. She had submitted a statement of financial position which stated that her income was [PRIVATE] per month and her expenses were [PRIVATE] per month. It stated that she had no savings. The Committee was prepared to accept that her means were limited compared with UK costs. However, it would have expected some explanation of how she was able to live when her income was only half her outgoings. Taking a broad brush approach the Committee decided to award costs of £1,000.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF ORDER

38. Miss Zhu was currently a full member of ACCA, but the Committee had found that she had not demonstrated that she met the requirements for membership. The Committee considered that in these circumstances she would represent a risk to the public during the period before which this order came into effect. That would put her in a privileged position and enable her to obtain positions of trust to which she was not entitled. The Committee determined to order immediate removal.

ORDER

39. The Committee ordered as follows:
- (a) Miss Zhu shall be excluded from membership of ACCA.
 - (b) Miss Zhu shall pay a contribution to ACCA's costs assessed at £1,000.
 - (c) This order shall have immediate effect.

Wendy Yeadon
Chair
15 April 2025