

PSD to see if proposals applicable to civil service

Current ministerial benchmark also used for Administrative Service, statutory, judicial office holders

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Civil servants should not have to make the same sacrifice in salaries that politicians are expected to, the ministerial salaries review committee said yesterday.

Even so, the Public Service Division (PSD) has decided to embark on a study of the report's 'principles and proposals' to determine if any are relevant and applicable to the way in which senior civil servants' salaries are structured.

PSD said last night that 'a careful study will be made before any changes are made'.

While these salaries do not fall under the purview of the Review Committee, the current benchmark used to derive salaries for the president, political appointment holders and MPs is the same one used for senior officers of the Administrative Service and statutory and judicial appointment holders.

The committee says in its report that it is 'of the view that the element of significant discount or sacrifice expected of politicians should not be applied to civil servants, statutory appointment holders and judicial appointment holders'.

While politicians are elected, the rest are 'pursuing professional careers, albeit in the public sector', the committee said.

'Competition for talent in these groups is very keen, not just in Singapore, but overseas as well,' it added, calling for civil servants, statutory appointment holders and judicial appointment holders to 'be paid salaries that are competitive with the market'.

It is also not sufficient for Singapore to have competent political leaders, as these 'need to be supported by capable leaders in the public service, organs of state and the judiciary', the committee said.

Committee chairman Gerard Ee also made it clear at yesterday's press conference that the panel 'did not even bother to look at' administrative officers' salaries in designing the new political salary framework, as it falls outside the committee's terms of references and would 'complicate our own deliberations'.

Andrew How, managing director of Hay Group Singapore, thinks that 'there is no link between civil servants' pay and the outcome of the pay review'. 'The civil servant's pay takes into consideration the career and employment life cycle of a civil servant, and the pay philosophy should reflect this. Civil servants play a critical role in ensuring that key policies are implemented to achieve its optimal outcomes and are independent from the government.'

Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, also thinks that salaries for civil servants can be treated differently from politicians'. 'The civil service must comprise a professional, permanent and expert force. It is a career, and there has to be a career track to retain such a professional force.'

But there are others, such as SMU assistant professor of law Eugene Tan, who are of the view that the recommendations 'suggest that top civil servants' pay will be significantly adjusted as well'.