



PSC CHAIRMAN'S OPEN LETTER 2018

Mr. Lee Tzu Yang

Chairman, Public Service Commission

As he approached his 100th day as Chairman of the PSC, Mr Lee Tzu Yang has written an open letter on the people the

Public Service hopes to attract, and why. Mr Lee defines meritocracy in the context of the Public Service, and identifies the embracing of our diversity as a key source of strength. He sets out his vision of how the PSC will continue to strengthen diversity in its scholarship selection process – casting the net wide for promising candidates, harnessing new tools to measure attributes beyond intellect, and encouraging recipients to pursue paths less trodden.

INTRODUCTION

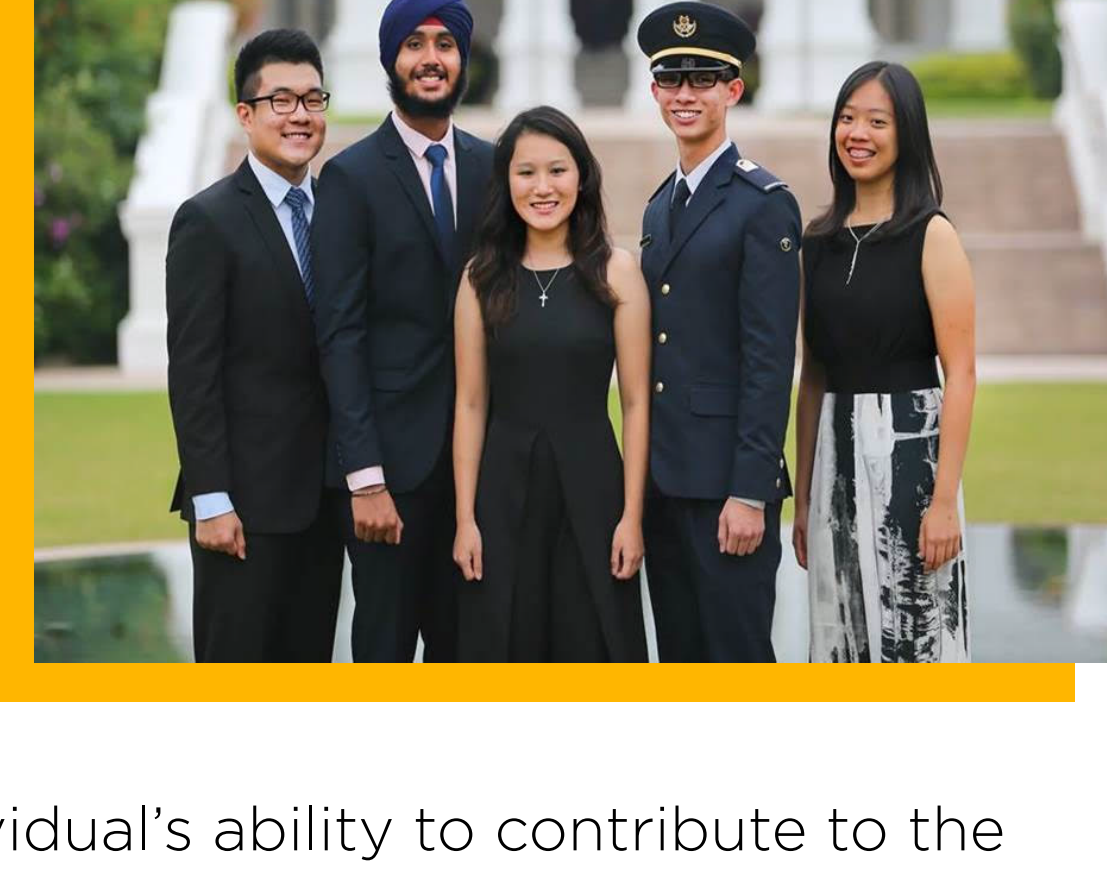
Scholarships for tertiary education, tied to serving in the Public Service, have been significant in Singapore's development. Since independence, public sector scholarships have grown in number and variety, and continue to provide access for Singaporeans to courses in some of the best institutions for formal learning. They have helped the public sector with the talent needed to develop Singapore, enabled the building of our defence capability, and contributed to our safety and security at home. They continue to draw some of our best and brightest into Public Service careers.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) awards the most prestigious of the scholarships in the public sector, and plays a role in key appointments. The considerations in our approach will be of interest to those considering a career in the Public Service. This letter sets out the wider context for what we look for in people, and why.

MERITOCRACY IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Current concerns in our society on inequality and successfully navigating future challenges, whether social, economic or political, reflect the changing environment in which we seek a better life together. The nature of the progress we seek has arguably grown more complex. I am encouraged by my interactions with colleagues from across the Public Service because they are addressing these questions about our future.

Today, among the many career options open to the young, the public sector offers outstanding opportunities to those who wish to make a difference for the better of our community. For the PSC, integrity of person and purpose remain non-negotiable, and the willingness to serve others is key. The emphasis on serving the scholarship bond will not change. Character is formed from experience in following values. The Public Service can provide opportunities for meaningful contribution, for all who come willing to serve.



Thus meritocracy in the Public Service must be the allocation of opportunities to serve Singapore, on the basis of the individual's ability to contribute to the good of the country. The opportunities would include scholarships as well as responsibilities and roles. Evidence of merit will include achievement in different fields and be related to the intended path.

Conversely we must guard against an entitlement mentality. Too much has been made of rewards, and which people deserve how much, whether due to achievement, hard work or overcoming the odds. Scholarships are not rewards but opportunities for responsibility to serve. Appointments and promotions are opportunities to contribute more in service. The commitment to integrity, service and excellence is overarching and we look for people who are aligned to these values. It is the baseline on which we look to build.

DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Singapore has always had a diverse society, but today we are all more aware of changing complexity and how it is evolving into the future. More education, exposure to ideas and higher aspirations lead to discourse and debate on inequality of wealth and opportunity, the meaning of inclusivity, and the consideration of diversity beyond the Chinese-Indian-Malay-Others (CIMO) categories of ethnicity, to name some. It means that the Public Service will be successful only if its members have the empathy to look past differences to

see the humanity in people, to build bridges between competing interests and encourage trust in public policies which seek to be the best but may not always be perfect. We require the capacity for clear thinking and hard choices, together with good communication and ability to gain trust.

As we mature, we will grow less fast. All the more, Singapore continues to require a

change and growth mind-set. Disruption is the new normal so what we have today is not necessarily available tomorrow. New ideas have to be tried, ventures undertaken into the less-known, and some failure can be expected as we seek new successes. Innovation, and innovators, are needed in the Public Service – to organise the machinery of government to improve delivery of services to citizens and business, and in the formulation of policies and testing them in a world of greater uncertainty. The Public Service must have the flexibility and skills to manage disruption, and manage the regulation of new activities which have potentially positive but overall less predictable outcomes. The public sector's appetite for risk has impact on the private sector's deployment of innovation. This is not reserved for the economic agencies alone, because disruption by its very nature has social impact.

We must make our awareness of, and our ability to use Singapore's diversity, a strength, to build resilience in the Public Service. Understanding and affiliation with our society in all its complexity will enable sensitivity and sensibility. Group-think is a weakness in a highly complex and uncertain world. Specialists will be needed in some fields, and generalists to lead integration and manage public/private sector relationships. Some skills will become as necessary as language and numeracy, in the areas of technology, digital and managing the ethical dilemmas these bring. Formal education will play a part, but it will require conscious learning exposure to different environments and challenges.

IMPACT ON SCHOLARSHIP SELECTION

PSC has for some years been reaching out to students from a wider variety of schools and polytechnics, and we now have more candidates from different schools in our scholarship selection. This is a work in progress, and we will continue to do more to encourage others to apply. We seek wide variety of life experience for our Public Service, and will work with the schools to engage young people on their fit and the possibilities of a Public Service career. We can never discount intellect as a desired attribute, but we will consider other attributes, such as evidenced by self-initiated community service and leading change in new, different and difficult directions. We look for leaders for the Public Service.

PSC intends to explore new tools which will capture and measure this variety of attributes, and which can be practically applied. For example, many organisations today use game-based assessments to assess attributes such as perseverance, learning orientation and risk-avoidance. These new tools will supplement our psychometric tests and interviews, and importantly open up opportunities for even more candidates to come forward and be considered. We are working to widen and sharpen the process upstream, so that candidates who appear before us possess the diversity of qualities desired in the Public Service.

We will actively encourage diversity in course and country of study. Singapore's need for engineering and technology is growing, and background in these areas gained from study and experience will become an advantage in a Public Service career. The building of networks in different countries and understanding of different cultures and peoples is also important, and we encourage you to consider different countries as potential destinations, whether it is an undergraduate degree in France, Germany or Japan, post-graduate studies in China, or a gap year at a start-up in Indonesia. We also support those who opt to do their undergraduate studies in Singapore universities before pursuing postgraduate opportunities internationally. This is also important for diversity and growing our local networks, and exposes the student to new ideas whilst anchoring hearts in Singapore.

In our selection process, the final interview is perhaps most well-known. Each candidate is unique and we approach the interviews to discover their strengths and opportunities for improvement. We look for authenticity of views, alignment with Public Service values, clarity of thought, openness of mind, drive for achievement and willingness to lead.

We need Singaporeans from all backgrounds to step forward to serve Singapore in the Public Service. It is often said that it takes a whole village to raise a child. While Singapore strives to level the playing field, we recognise where it is not. Achievement in the face of greater odds must count. We are most encouraged when we find a candidate who fits the values and potential we seek, who may not have had the advantages of others, and is willing to try.

LEE TZU YANG

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