

4 July 2023

Written Reply to Parliamentary Question on why the eligibility criteria for private sector candidates to qualify as President of Singapore is not included for public service candidates.

Question:

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of the eligibility criteria for private sector candidates to qualify as President of Singapore which includes a condition for profitability throughout the entire period of the candidate's service as chief executive, why is an equivalent criterion to measure successful leadership not included for public service candidates.

Written Reply by Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister of Education, for the Prime Minister:

Mr Speaker Sir, on behalf of the Prime Minister please.

2 The eligibility criteria to contest in a presidential election was amended in 2017 after considering the 2016 report of the Constitutional Commission (“the Commission”), which made recommendations on specific aspects of the Elected Presidency, including the eligibility criteria.

3 For candidates relying on the public sector service requirement track, the Commission had considered whether performance criteria should be included as an additional factor for consideration and did not recommend doing so. The Government accepted the Commission's recommendation. Let me outline three key points made by the Commission.

4 First, while the Commission had proposed a performance criterion for private sector candidates, it was of the view that there were “no measurable standards” against which the performance of public sector candidates may be assessed. This is unlike the private sector service requirement, where there are financial performance indicators, such as profitability, that can serve as an objective assessment on how the applicants have performed in the companies with them at the helm.

5 Second, although the Commission acknowledged that the performance of public sector organisations can, to a limited extent, be measured, such as by referring to how well the organisation has performed in meeting its own targets, these performance indicators were likely to be representative of only a part of the organisation's work. These indicators may not reflect the success of the policies implemented by these public sector organisations, which sometimes take a significant amount of time to bear fruit.

6 Third, the Commission's view was that the list of qualifying public sector offices was “tightly drawn” and would have provided candidates who had served in these offices with the experience of leading “substantial organisations with sizeable workforces”, dealing with “complex matters having a wide-reaching public dimension” and grappling with “the contrary pulls and pressures of government decision-making”.

7 In summary, while the private and public sector service requirement tracks are both aimed at identifying candidates with the necessary skills and experience for the office of the President, the nature of the work in the private and public sector are different. It would be inappropriate to compare or impose the same requirements for both tracks.