

RAFFLES INSTITUTION

To Give Their Best and Reach For Excellence

The Raffles Heritage

Raffles Institution, a name that conjures up impressions of keen minds and bright kids - the crème de la crème of educational institutions. As the oldest and most prestigious school in Singapore, Raffles Institution has an illustrious history. An Independent School, it is governed by a Board of Governors, with its own constitution while abiding by the national education policies and assessment requirements set out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB). It has close to 600 academic and non-academic staff serving a 4,500 strong student population, under its 6-year integrated programme for exceptionally gifted and talented boys (aged 13 to 18) and girls (aged 17 and 18) leading to the GCE 'A' Levels.

Inspiring Staff To Give Their Best

The Rafflesian Spirit

"The Rafflesian Spirit is a feeling that stems from the mind as well as the heart..."
"It is a sense of togetherness that binds and inspires Rafflesians to give their best and reach for excellence."

The institution's mission is to nurture Rafflesians to be *"thinkers, leaders and pioneers of character who serve by leading and lead in serving."* To achieve this mission, it seeks to create a "Student-Centric, Teacher Supporting" environment so that teachers and non-academic staff can in turn nurture and produce Rafflesians who are thinkers, leaders and pioneers. The institution's fundamental belief that "everyone wants to give of their best at work" has strongly shaped its approach to HR and the policies and programmes it implements. Mr Tan Nam Seng, RI's Senior Deputy Principal for Planning and Resource, says "We create policies that benefit the majority of the staff rather than hold back for fear of potential abuse by a minority group. Our goal is to help our teachers do what they do best."

The HR policies and programmes are hence designed to attract, retain and motivate talent. Recognising that the institution is competing for the same talent pool with the Ministry of Education and other Independent Schools, RI positions itself as a premier institution and an employer of choice. It hopes that staff will not only be attracted to join RI but will remain happy, motivated and engaged in their work. It is with this same philosophy that RI implements its work-life strategy - adopting a multi-pronged approach to promote a conducive work-life environment to improve staff satisfaction and well-being.

The Raffles Work-Life Programme – Flexibility, Variety & Choices

In 2009, RI conducted an institution-wide comprehensive needs survey that led to a revamp in its work-life policies and programmes. It has now developed its programmes and policies to meet 3 broad themes – **variety**, **flexibility**, and **choices**. Policies and programmes are customised to provide **variety** so that the needs of staff who span across different life stages are met. Departmental heads are empowered and given the **flexibility** to plan and accede to staff requests, taking into account operational and staff needs. Flexibility is given to the individual staff. They have a say in the **choice** of activities to be involved in, allowing them to focus on areas where they can best perform.

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs)

RI leverages on Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) as a tool to combat burnout and support mature employees in their commitment to remain in the teaching profession. Mr Tan sees merit in formalising its FWA policies and guidelines. He believes this allows staff to legitimately tap on formalised channels and policies to meet their work-life demands, without feeling guilty. “When the school helps staff to take care of the needs of the family, our staff can be wholehearted at work and be better at what they do in school.”

Alternate work options such as partial work load, flexible working hours, compressed work weeks and flexi start time (for non-teaching staff) are made available to staff. Teaching staff are able to start work later to attend to urgent matters when prior notice is given. The institution works on the basis of wanting to meet staff needs, and aims to accommodate as long as prior notice has been given and students’ interests are not compromised. It considers the strengths and passion of the staff together with the needs of the institution when assigning classes and projects and before acceding to the staff’s FWAs requests. To date, they have been able to accede to over 90% of staff FWAs requests – made possible by the culture of open communication and mutual respect staff and management have for one another.

Appraising and Rewarding Staff on FWAs

“*Hard work does not always equate to performance*”. This is a perspective that RI adopts in its performance management system. In fact Mr Tan says that if staff are always working long hours, it is a symptom of deeper issues within the system. This is when the organisation would

Types of Flexible Work Arrangements

Partial Work-Load

- ❖ Teaching staff may apply to be either on $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ work-load schemes. They can indicate special requests such as “No CCAs” or “No admin duties” with their reasons for such requests in their applications.

Flexi Start/End Times

- ❖ Teaching staff are able to leave at 1pm if they have no other duties.
- ❖ Non-teaching staff can decide with their managers on their start and end time, choosing between 7am and 9am.

Compressed Work Week

- ❖ Teaching staff may request for their work week to be compressed from 5 to 4 working days and have classes only on these 4 days.

need to take a step back to determine if staff are truly doing what they do best. Hence regardless of the type of work arrangements a staff is on, the individual is appraised and rewarded based on performance outcomes. Managers are also appraised beyond technical targets and people measures are included in their performance targets.

Enhanced Leave Schemes

The institution places great emphasis on staff well-being, and this is well reflected in its enhanced leave schemes. It goes beyond the statutory leave benefits, offering leave benefits that cater to various life-stage needs. For example, parents can claim childcare leave for children under the age of 12 years old above the national standard of 7 years old. Annually, staff are also given 2 days of parental care leave and 1 day of family leave. The institution hopes that the first day of school leave will take care of staff who are parents and they need not be torn between work and family commitments. Additionally, staff who are pursuing further studies can take up to 12 days of study leave annually.

Academic staff are assured of at least two weeks of break during the school holidays through its “protected leave” policy while non-academic staff have the liberty to bring forward and utilise their leave entitlement by one year if more leave is required for extended holidays.

Employee Support Schemes

Thoughtful support schemes are also put in place to support the staff needs. Married staff and their dependents are covered in the institution’s Medical Outpatient and Group Hospitalisation policy with flexibility given to change the coverage terms whenever necessary. 3 lactation rooms are provided on-site for nursing mothers and parenting courses are organised to benefit the growing number of young parents in the institution. Recognising the role that single staff have in supporting their elderly parents, single staff can claim up to \$250 per year to pay for their elderly parents’ medical or health screening bills. Annually, every staff are also given a generous sum of money to spend on anything that helps to better personal well-being or promote work-life integration.

Engaging the Managers

The institution has adopted a pragmatic approach when it comes to gaining buy-in from the middle managers on its work-life programmes and policies. By enabling managers to personally enjoy and benefit from the work-life policies, they, in turn, become strong advocates of RI’s work-life strategy. By engaging managers and having meaningful conversations with them, helping them to juggle organisational and individual work-life demands and experience work-life integration, they can then have similar conversations with their staff and be effective in managing their staff work-life needs. While this process might be long, it has worked for the institution.

The greatest challenge the institution faced in the implementation of work-life policies is in helping middle managers understand the core intent of HR and the spirit behind the policies. Mr Tan believes that when it comes to policy implementation, the manager needs to think with the head, but implement with the heart. “We want our managers to know that it is not about the rules, but the intent behind the rules.”

- ❖ A formally retired highly experienced Mathematics teacher was rehired at 59 years old on a ¾ workload scheme.
- ❖ It has on board 7 staff who are beyond 62 years old, with the oldest being 72 years old.
- ❖ 2 retired staff were rehired to join the Estate Management team.

Honouring Mature Employees

Raffles Institution has a high percentage of mature employees, with over 90 of its 600 staff (16%) over 50 years old. It honours its mature staff by placing them in roles that best fit their experience and competency, arranging for partial work-load where required and engaging them to continue to work for RI beyond the retirement age with no pay adjustment if the staff continues in the same job scope.

Mdm Shih Chi Fong is a Mathematics teacher with 33 years of teaching experience. She left the profession that she deeply loved at a point when she found that she could not find a balance between her personal and working life. RI managed to bring her back from retirement, offered her a ¾ workload scheme, while tapping on her experience and passion to engage the hearts and minds of her young charges. This has indeed proven to be a win-win arrangement for all. A fulfilled Mdm Shih says, "The partial workload scheme allows me to strike a healthy balance between my personal and working life. It gives me time to pursue my hobbies like painting, music, gardening and golfing all of which keeps me optimally engaged and fit – both physically and mentally and possibly in other ways too. I also have time now to spend with three bundles of joy, namely my grandchildren."

Conclusion

What distinguishes Raffles Institution from many organisations is its willingness to believe in the best of its staff. It is willing to implement policies for the greater good of its staff and not allow the fear of potential abuse by a minority group to detract the institution from living out its core belief. Long known for its ability to produce students of outstanding calibre and character, it is heartening that the same passion it has for educating generations of students is the same dedication it shows in caring for its staff. This truly epitomises the Rafflesian Spirit, *"...a sense of togetherness that binds and inspires Rafflesians to give their best and reach for excellence."*