

FAQs - SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORT WORKERS PAY INVESTIGATION

Who are Special Education Support Workers?

- Three occupational classes employed by the Ministry of Education as part of its special education field teams:
 - Education support workers (ESW) working in early childhood centres providing additional assistance to ensure children with the most significant need are fully included in all aspects of an early childhood education.
 - Behaviour support workers (BSW) working in schools as part of a specialist team supporting students with severe behaviour problems.
 - Communication support workers (CSW) working in schools as part of a specialist team working with students who have severe communication needs.
- Around 800 staff in total all working part time – around 28% of the total Ministry of Education headcount.
- ESW are the largest group – around 85%; BSW – around 5%; CSW – around 10%
- Normally work during the school year which is usually between 38 and 40 weeks. They do not get paid during school term breaks.
- Average hours for all support workers is 15 hours per week, but this ranges from 0.5 hours and 38 hours.
- Starting rate is \$13.09 per hour. After 7 years this moves to \$17.60.

What did the pay investigation find?

- Support worker roles are of a similar size to those of corrections officers. But support workers get substantially less pay – just over \$8 less when they start work and just over \$5 less at the top of the scale. It takes support workers 7 years to get to the top of the scale and less than 2 years for corrections officers to get to the top of theirs.
- Support workers have been historically undervalued in terms of the actual skills, responsibilities, demands and working conditions required in the role.
- The fixed term and tenuous nature of the majority of SESW jobs impacts on their pay negatively. Average hourly rate for those on a fixed term contract (the majority of SESW) was \$14.61. Less than 15% were employed permanently.

Why isn't the Government acting on the investigation?

- In February this year Cabinet decided to discontinue any further work on future or completed pay investigations.
- Support worker pay negotiations resume on Monday September 21st. Their pay claim is based on the findings of the pay investigation report and recommends pay equity increases over three years.
- The Ministry of Education has said it will not negotiate any issues raised in the pay investigation report.

Where does this leave support workers?

- Ask State Services Minister Tony Ryall who has never given a clear reason for his decision to halt all work on pay equity investigations and to close down the Department of Labour's Pay and Employment Equity unit.