



Proposal to subsidise wages of the elderly clinches top prize

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by Dylan Loh

SINGAPORE - A team of students who came up with a proposal for an Elderly Credits Scheme, to subsidise senior citizens' wages for firms who hire them, won the top prize in an annual policy-making competition yesterday.

Organised by the civil service, the Public Policy Challenge lets Singapore's tertiary students play the role of national decision-makers for a day.

But the finalists did not find the going easy, especially when they were called to provide solutions to issues arising from the rapidly ageing population in Singapore.

A new element of the competition this year - "learning journeys" - involved participants visiting two elder-care centres. This was to enable them to better grasp the real-life issues that senior citizens face.

Mr Victor Sim, the leader of the winning team, Team Uni, which comprised members from National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU), said: "We realised that the elderly want to be independent, and the way to do so is for them to work. And that's why we came up with this scheme to encourage them to work as well as incentivise the public sector to take them in."

A point to consider, perhaps, for Singapore's real policy-makers.

Chief judge, Ms Lim Soo Hoon, who is Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Division, said: "What's useful in an exercise like this is that you get people who perhaps want to give you a different perspective. And it's also interesting and useful for us to hear the perspectives of the young people - not just talk but talk based on something that they had some time to look into."

More than 320 students from NTU, NUS, SMU and SIM Global Education took part in this year's challenge.

The winning team received a \$3,000 cash prize. First runner-up Cadenza, made up of NUS and NTU students, and second runner-up Curveballs, made up of SMU and NUS students, received cash prizes of \$2,000 and \$1,500 respectively.

The top three teams will also be awarded internship opportunities with the civil service and invited to a lunch and dialogue session with Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

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