

CHANGING MINDSETS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE, SAYS SPD PRESIDENT

Courses on disability issues 'good start to raise awareness'

SINGAPORE – Incorporating programmes on disability issues as a core component in the tertiary curriculum for students could be a good first step in inculcating disability awareness and developing a more inclusive mindset.

This was one of the suggestions during a panel discussion on inclusive education at a conference yesterday jointly organised by the Singapore Management University (SMU) and SPD, a voluntary welfare organisation (VWO) for persons with disabilities.

SMU's Diversity Management in Asia is a good example of a core course that has been introduced as part of the university's undergraduate curriculum review, said Dr Wong Meng Ee, an assistant professor at the National Institute of Education. In the course, students visit SPD and speak to disability professionals about their work.

"I think it really starts with something like that for students who are going through higher education, that you have programmes built into the tertiary curriculum, to help these ... disability and equity issues to be brought more to the forefront," said Dr Wong, who was speaking to an audience of 300 guests from companies, VWOs and disabled individuals.



There's been a lot of (public outreach) efforts, (but) I think it has to be a lot more concerted – at the government level, at VWO social service sector, within the schools and other educational institutions. Ultimately, if we can change mindsets, we change the environment – infrastructural, psychological and social.

Ms Chia Yong Yong
SPD PRESIDENT AND NMP

SPD senior social worker Angela Chung added that exposure for students at all levels should go beyond the classroom to include experiential learning and meaningful interactions with disabled individuals.

A second panel session focusing on the workplace tackled the issue of whether implementing quotas would bring about more opportunities for persons with disabilities and greater diversity. Panellists generally agreed that the move would help prevent a situation where a homogenous group of people make decisions.

Ms Anika Grant, who is part of Accenture's global human resources management team, noted that there has been a drastic drop in diversity in organisations' senior management. However, she felt that performance was still important when everyone was measured on the same results.

The government has already taken great strides in making infrastructure more accessible and incentivising companies to hire persons with disabilities through schemes and grants. But changing mindsets remains the greatest challenge, said SPD president and Nominated Member of Parliament Chia Yong Yong. **LAURA PHILOMIN**