

In partnership with the National Youth Council



Representatives from various government agencies engaged with participants of the Youth Panels, to give valuable insights on the Government's perspective and considerations. PHOTO: NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

Youth panels craft policy recommendations on issues faced by their juniors, peers and seniors

They walk the talk to unlock the future

By RACHEL CHIA

“It's not very often that we get to work together with policymakers to understand the constraints and trade-offs when they make decisions.”
 — Youth Panels participant Chan Jun Kit

Shaping the future of work

Adulthood of dream jobs, decent livelihood

Mr Chan Jun Kit, 25, reckons he has applied for close to a hundred jobs since graduating from Singapore Management University in December – but received only a handful of offers.

“It has been a painful process,” says the 25-year-old, who studied politics, law and economics.

Despite leadership and volunteering stints, he struggled to match his skills to the job requirements of roles he was keen on, such as in human resources and corporate communications.

“How do we (students) ensure that we are adequately skilled? How do we present that to employers? What are some things that we can do to give people an equal opportunity to shine?” says Mr Chan (right). “These are the questions that went through my mind.”

He eventually accepted a place in an associate programme under a government agency, which will begin in August. But his experience has raised concerns.

“After spending four years in a university, will our skills still be relevant by the time we graduate?” he says, adding that young job-seekers may feel developments, such as artificial intelligence, will hamper their chances of securing a role.

It led him to the Youth Panels, an initiative by the National Youth Council, an agency under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, that seeks to give the young a say in co-creating policies with the Government (see box).

There, he joined the #JobHacks Panel – one of four – which tackles career issues faced by youth, including the necessity of getting a degree.

A grassroots leader in Queenstown constituency, Mr Chan adds that job security is a common concern for Singaporeans today.

“That piqued my interest; what can I do to help?” he says. “Often, it's about pursuing our own careers. But for me, it's about what I can do beyond myself.”

His panel of 38 youth is working to whittle down and refine an initial brainstorm of eight ideas – on improving the match between jobs and skills – to one final recommendation

which will be presented to the Government.

Some ideas include incentivising job seekers and retirees to take up contract gigs to build skill sets, providing government funding for those who take on regional internships in South-east Asia, and redesigning internships so youth can start from a younger age.

The group will seek input from different stakeholders, including government agencies, to ensure their proposals are realistic.

This, he says, is what makes the Youth Panels unique. “Some platforms out there just list the things they wish to see, but the proposals put forth are often not grounded on facts and realities.”

He explains how the Youth Panels' three policymaking and design innovation workshops – which included engagements with stakeholders – helped their research and discussions. These were held between November and January.

They were also given access to government statistics, policy information and insight into issues that the Government is focused on.

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While cognisant of practicalities, he hopes that the panel's proposal will play a part in improving Singaporeans' career outcomes in the future.

“Can we make it such that the jobs that are available will allow us to live our dreams and still have a decent livelihood?” he says. “As youth, we like to dream and think – and we would like to input that a little into policymaking.”



Shaping the future of tech

We equate, therefore we participate

Mr Rishab Sharma, 25, feels social media platforms often fuel unhealthy doses of envy. Instagram posts of influencers holidaying in style, would grab his attention.

“Looking at how they travel makes me wonder: Is this what travelling is supposed to be? Staying in nice hotels, having a chauffeur?” says the final-year air transport management student at the Singapore Institute of Technology.

“I'm a student, so budget is definitely a constraint. But that 'ideal life' has made me envious,” adds Mr Sharma (right).

The well-documented negative impact of social media is among the digital ills faced by the young today. And Mr Sharma and his 35-member #TechHacks panel aim to solve that issue through policy.

From three broad topics of digital literacy, digital safety and digital well-being, the group has been researching potential solutions to a gamut of issues. These range from scammers on dating apps, to the impact of unfiltered Internet access for children from low-income households.

Why did he join the Youth Panels? “My interest was to see how policies are shaped and what goes on behind the scenes,” says Mr Sharma, who is currently interning at travel software company Amadeus.

The diversity of the panel has also given him a broader outlook on the concerns of the youth.

“There are people 10 years older and 10 years younger than me and, because of their different backgrounds and upbringings, we see policies differently,” he says, adding how this helps the panel to shape holistic recommendations.

His panel is now engaging with stakeholders to understand the Government's efforts and standpoint on tech-related initiatives.



Uncontrolled access to social media among the young, is a key issue that the panel seeks to address.

“We've been thinking very hard about how a policy can solve the problem without deterring big tech firms from coming to Singapore,” says Mr Sharma, alluding to the increased scrutiny of multinational social media companies.

“It's about managing the expectations and roles that different organisations play in the ecosystem, because many will be impacted by one small change.”

Mr Sharma reckons that the final outcome of the panel's efforts will likely be a guideline for tech firms – or even a public awareness campaign that produces tangible impact.

“This would allow us to recommend a policy change with more credibility, because we have proven results,” he says.

Why should the young be involved in policymaking? “How it is shaped now will directly impact our adulthood and livelihood in the future.”

“We have a part to play and should take ownership, as youth like ourselves understand the pain points we face on a day-to-day basis.”

What are the Youth Panels?

Launched last November, the Youth Panels gives young Singaporeans a stake in shaping policies on a range of issues, from jobs and skills to online harms.

They feature around 140 youth, aged 15 to 35, delving into issues most pertinent to their generation. Their research and proposals will then be refined into policy recommendations that could be tabled in Parliament for discussion, says an NYC spokesman.

Issues on financial security, careers and lifelong learning, digital well-being, and the environment and sustainability are being addressed by participants across four groups – #LifeHacks, #JobHacks, #TechHacks, and #GreenHacks respectively.

3 phases of the Youth Panels



Discover

Panelists undergo three workshops on policymaking and design innovation to prepare them for their research and discussions



Design

Panelists engage in research, learning journeys and engagement with government agencies to explore policy and potential recommendations



Deliberate

Panels present their proposals to the wider youth population at the Youth Policy Forum in August, before submitting their recommendations to the Government