

# Detailed Notes for Post-Budget 2024 Youth Conversation

Date/Time: Wednesday, 6 March 2024, 7.00pm – 9.00pm

Organisers: National Youth Council (NYC), Ministry of Finance (MOF)

Venue: Asian Civilisations Museum, River Room

Attendance: 104 participants

The session commenced with an introduction by host and moderator, Ms Attiya Ashraf Ali, NYC INSPIRIT member, #JobHacks Youth Panel Lead, Vice President at Mendaki Club and Assistant Manager at Ernst & Young LLP, followed by a context-setting presentation by Mr Jervan Khou, Round-Up Speechwriter & Senior Associate (Land and Infrastructure Programmes Directorate) at Ministry of Finance. The participants then took part in breakout group discussions and a panel dialogue.

## INTRODUCTION

1. The moderator welcomed the participants to the Post-Budget 2024 Youth Conversation and introduced the panellists:
  - i. Mr Chee Hong Tat, Minister for Transport and Second Minister for Finance; and
  - ii. Ms Lim Ee Ling, NYC Council Member, #JobHacks Youth Panel Advisor, Executive Director of Market Launch (Global Programs) at 500 Global and Co-Founder & CEO of Smarter Me.
2. The moderator invited Mr Jervan Khou to set the context for the session.

## CONTEXT SETTING

3. Mr Jervan Khou shared the key highlights of [Budget 2024](#).

## LARGE GROUP SHAREBACK AND PANEL DIALOGUE

4. Minister Chee said that the Budget should not be seen in isolation, as each Budget was built upon previous Budgets. He added that each Budget balances addressing immediate concerns, such as cost of living concerns, while still investing in long-term development through infrastructure and capabilities.
5. Minister Chee said that Singapore was fiscally disciplined and would not spend beyond its means. He acknowledged that the Government had tapped on the reserves for COVID-19 but highlighted that past reserves should only be used in times of crisis, and that the Elected President served as a check to ensure that the Government did not spend more from the reserves than necessary.
6. Ms Lim said that lifelong learning and strategic investments such as Future Energy Fund and Artificial Intelligence (AI) by the Government were crucial to boosting Singapore's competitiveness and long-term growth. She said that it was important for the Government to continue having ongoing conversations with Singaporeans as part of the policy-making process.

*The moderator asked if Minister Chee could share some of the priorities the Government had in mind when framing Budget 2024.*

7. Minister Chee said that the Budget reflected Singapore's social cohesion and unity by ensuring that benefits were tilted towards those who needed it more, as seen in the progressive tax system, and through the means-testing programmes put in place for Government schemes.

**Note: The subsequent points are categorised according to the Budget 2024 themes, and not in order of them being discussed.**

### **Theme: Support for Singaporeans**

#### **Discussion points from large group share back:**

8. Participants expressed concerns about the sustainability of Community Development Council (CDC) vouchers and highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and upskilling for career growth. They also suggested early integration of financial literacy into the education system to empower youth in managing rising living costs.

#### **Panel Dialogue Q&A:**

Issue: Ensuring sustainable solutions to address rising cost of living

*A participant asked how the Government evaluated the effectiveness of its budgetary measures to support low-income families, and what were the plans to help them become more self-sufficient and less reliant on Government payout.*

9. Minister Chee said that the Government implemented both immediate and longer-term programmes to support lower-income households. For example, CDC vouchers served as a temporary measure to address cost of living pressures, while the Government continued to remain focused on increasing real wages through upskilling (for example, SkillsFuture) and the Progressive Wage Model (PWM).

Issue: Ensuring no Singaporeans are left behind

*A participant asked why healthcare policies were age-banded, which potentially overlooked the needs of youths with chronic illnesses.*

10. Minister Chee said that healthcare subsidies were available at public healthcare institutions, regardless of age. This, however, was means-tested to ensure that more support was given to those with financial difficulties.
11. Minister Chee explained that additional support was provided to some cohorts such as the Pioneer and Merdeka generations as they were unable to grow sufficient MediSave savings. He highlighted that subsidies were available and suggested that those in further financial need could seek assistance from medical social workers.

*The moderator asked Ms Lim which budget announcement stood out to her as a youth, and how it positioned Singapore towards greater resilience.*

12. Ms Lim said that the Budget reflected Singapore's commitment to remain competitive amidst global tax reforms, with the introduction of refundable investment credits and investments in climate initiatives.
13. Ms Lim said that sustainable energy and AI were important for future developments. She also acknowledged initiatives promoting inclusivity, such as Central Provident Fund (CPF) top-ups for ITE students and increased salaries for special education teachers.

### **Theme: Investing in Singaporeans**

#### **Discussion points from large group share back:**

14. Participants were concerned about inflation, the need to attract investments, and how the public transport hikes could affect students. They questioned the effectiveness of tax hikes on higher income groups and advocated for systematic solutions over one-off rebates to better assist vulnerable groups.
15. Participants raised concerns about the increase in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates and called for strategies to mitigate its long-term impact, especially for those in need.
16. Participants highlighted the need for early access to lifelong upskilling and SkillsFuture credits, especially for youths eager to enhance their skills in their early 20s.

#### **Panel Dialogue Q&A:**

Issue: Supporting every worker to stay relevant and secure good jobs in the future economy

*The moderator asked Ms Lim to share possible ways the Government could consider moving away schemes with age-based categories when providing budget support, such as for lower-income seniors, youth with chronic illnesses and National Service (NS) men.*

17. Ms Lim said that support should be based on immediate needs and suggested that individuals with less relevant skills be prioritised when formulating Budget policies to enable individuals to upgrade themselves for better employability.
18. Minister Chee explained that the SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme (SFLP) aimed to assist mid-career Singaporeans in gaining new skills and remaining relevant in a fast-changing economy, as the skills they had learned in school might be outdated. He also shared that younger Singaporeans in their 20s entering the workforce were less likely to face this issue, as the skills learned in school should still be relevant for their careers.
19. Minister Chee added that the SkillsFuture benefits were not limited to the SFLP credits. He highlighted that Singaporeans also benefited from SkillsFuture if their employers sent them for courses which the Government co-paid, which included courses that helped lower-wage workers progress upwards on the PWM.

*A participant asked how SkillsFuture courses impacted an individual's job prospects and whether it encouraged job hopping.*

20. Ms Lim said that pursuing education or SkillsFuture courses did not guarantee a job promotion or pay raise. She said that it was more important for individuals to learn out of curiosity and interest, and not just to acquire a certificate for job advancement.
21. Ms Lim said that remaining curious and improving one's skill sets could create more career opportunities, as potential employers would look for individuals who consistently sought self-improvement.
22. Minister Chee highlighted the importance of workers having a growth mindset and continuously improving their skills. He added that the Government supported lifelong learning through offering SkillsFuture subsidies, heavily subsidised training costs, and covering absentee payroll for employees attending training.

*A participant asked about the possibility of setting an expiry date for SkillsFuture credits and redistributing them based on income and age to better support individuals who required upskilling.*

23. Minister Chee said that SkillsFuture credits were already available to individuals from 25 years old. The newly introduced SFLP provided additional support for mid-career workers to gain new skills and remain relevant in the fast-changing economy. He acknowledged the suggestions raised and said that the additional subsidy programme was still in its early stages and would be monitored and adjusted accordingly.

### **Theme: Building a Resilient Future**

#### **Discussion points from large group share back:**

24. Participants acknowledged the additional support for the Arts and Sports scene in the Budget. They also raised concerns about ongoing challenges in housing, and called for increased support, particularly for first-time buyers and single individuals.
25. Participants said that more support was needed for workers to address mental wellness issues in high-pressure environments. They suggested more inclusive youth and Government partnerships beyond advisory panels, such as establishing routine feedback channels at community hubs to capture a wider array of voices and opinions.
26. Participants said that addressing Singapore's declining fertility rate required more than monetary measures. They suggested societal norm changes and the implementation of more family-friendly workplace policies.

#### **Panel Dialogue Q&A:**

Issue: Planning ahead and allowing for feedback to drive future policies

*Participants asked (via Slido) why Budget 2024 did not address environment and sustainability issues such as climate change.*

27. Minister Chee said that the absence of new environmental initiatives in Budget 2024 did not imply a lack of focus on sustainability. He emphasised that the Government

had made significant moves such as introducing the Carbon Tax, and the Singapore Green Plan 2030, which was a multi-year plan. He added that the different Ministries also provided updates on their sustainability efforts such as cleaner aviation and maritime fuels, electric vehicles, and local food production during the Committee of Supply (COS) debates.

***A participant asked about the need for a second Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal, citing potential negative impacts.***

28. Minister Chee said that the LNG terminal was a crucial part of ensuring Singapore's energy security, while transitioning towards carbon-neutrality by 2050. He said the second LNG terminal was necessary to secure Singapore's natural gas supply and thereby reduce external reliance on foreign partners.

***A participant asked how the Government evaluated the effectiveness of future energy research, such as geothermal or nuclear fission.***

29. Minister Chee said that there were challenges in implementing renewable energy sources in Singapore due to space constraints. He added that the Government would continue to explore alternative energy importation methods, hence the introduction of the Future Energy Fund in Budget 2024.

***A participant asked how the Government ensured financial sustainability for businesses and lower-income families while transitioning to a greener future and managing the associated costs.***

30. Minister Chee acknowledged that the transition to a greener economy would increase the cost of energy and other services in the immediate term. He said that Government initiatives such as U-Save and Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC) rebates were implemented to help alleviate cost pressures, especially for lower-income families.

31. Ms Lim shared that large<sup>1</sup> non-listed Singapore companies were required to adopt Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) reporting by 2027, which would enable the Government to support them in transitioning to a low-carbon economy through providing 70% subsidies for upskilling in carbon management and related areas.

***The moderator asked panellists to share one key insight that participants could take away from the engagement.***

32. Ms Lim encouraged participants to continue raising and discussing issues they were concerned about to increase collective empathy.

33. Minister Chee said that budgeting and policy formulation were ongoing processes. He shared that Singaporeans had a responsibility to remain united and cohesive, building on past foundations, to ensure that Singapore would be better equipped to tackle challenges and prosper.

## **CLOSING**

34. The moderator thanked everyone for their time.

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<sup>1</sup> Large Companies defined as those with an annual revenue of at least S\$1 billion and total assets of at least S\$500 million.

35. The moderator invited participants to take part in NYC's platforms such as the Youth Action Challenge Season 6 and apply for the Young ChangeMakers grant. She also encouraged participants to attend future events to engage in national conversations.

Notes recorded by the National Youth Council Youth Engagement Department