

SPEECH BY GUEST OF HONOUR MR DESMOND LEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE LAUNCH OF PROJECT BUILD EXHIBITION 2016, HELD ON 25 NOV 2016, AT 11.00 AM, THE PLAZA @ NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD

Dr John Keung, CEO, BCA

Panel of judges

Students

Ladies and gentlemen,

1 A very good morning. As you all know, BCA started this Project BUILD competition last year to raise awareness about Universal Design or “UD”. So it is heartening to see a good turnout at this 2nd edition of Project BUILD. It is particularly encouraging to see so many young people and young faces in the crowd. In fact, you are crucial to this whole initiative and drive to promote universal design.

Importance of UD

2 What is Universal Design? At its core, it is about inclusiveness. Simply put, UD is design that considers the needs of people of different ages and different abilities. It allows us to create an inclusive built environment where everyone can lead active and independent lives.

3 The need for UD is real. By 2030, one in every four Singaporeans will be 65 years and older. For some, mobility will become a larger issue as time passes. 2030 is 14 years away, so we need to start work now to make our built environment more accessible. This takes time and effort, and it has to be thought through. It will not happen by chance; it has to be implemented intentionally. UD is not just about our elderly, but also persons with disabilities, families with young children, and nursing mothers. The idea is to make our built environment accessible to everyone.

4 A lot of us take accessibility for granted. You walk around and do not think very much about it – i.e opening and closing doors, and climbing up steps. Most of us here have no issues about it at all. But when you have family members, close friends, or parents who may be facing challenges on a wheelchair or other difficulties, you can see that even a couple of steps can pose tremendous, sometimes even insurmountable, challenge to them. It just makes certain places completely off limits to them. It is really the sense of empathy and experience before you know how important these things can be.

5 The Government has taken the lead. For example, BCA’s regulations require UD provisions like senior-friendly toilets and nursing rooms for mothers. But this should not just be driven by legislation. It cannot be the case where by law, we require it and therefore you do it. It cannot be perfunctory. It cannot be compelled because if you know you require it by regulations, or sometimes if people do not quite internalise the rationale for doing so and do not understand the need for doing so, they will just comply. Compliance can be just on paper and you see that the design, although it looks like a ramp, it may not be of the right gradient. It just fulfils the regulatory requirements without serving the true spirit and intention behind those rules.

6 Ultimately, what we need is a paradigm shift in perception and behaviour. What we need is a mind-set that looks at inclusivity and accessibility from the start.

7 All of you here play an important and critical role in this journey. For instance, developers and architects, or those who are aspiring to be so, need to appreciate UD's inherent value to society. This empathy will then translate into design sensitivity when developing buildings and spaces.

8 But there is also a business element because the elderly and people with different needs are equally customers.

9 In tandem, users like ourselves need to exercise social graciousness to accommodate the diverse needs within our society. Inclusivity is beginning to be a very important social consciousness, especially among young Singaporeans.

Project BUILD 2016

10 It is good to see that the Project Build Competition has continued to receive very strong interest. About 300 students aged between 13 to 25 years, along with their teachers, have participated in learning journeys, competitions and workshops held in the spirit of Project BUILD.

11 Last year, we asked participants to use LEGO blocks to create exciting models of their vision of the future of our built environment. This year, we have embraced chaos and completely loosened the reins! Participants were allowed to adopt any medium or any form to create their models. This seems to have led to even more creativity. I understand that besides LEGO, this year we have cardboard, straws, and even dishwashing sponges! I look forward to seeing their design interpretations.

12 The innovation and creativity on display is truly impressive, especially given the young age of some of the participants. There are many ideas that we have, and the policy makers need to consider all your ideas as we design accessible public spaces.

Meaningful careers in BE sector

13 Given the obvious talent on display, allow me to make a pitch for the built environment sector. Look at your ideas. They are refreshing and exciting. But would it not be even more exciting to have your imagination of today become the reality of tomorrow?

14 The built environment sector offers you this opportunity. You can be part of the planning, design, and building of future Singapore. Some of you are students. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, we met young leaders in the built environment – young architects, people working in consultancy firms, young engineers – who came together in a room and network. In fact, their dreams and aspirations when they were students are now at the cusp of being realised as they join the sector, and seek to energise and excite their colleagues and fellow counterparts in the sector to turn their dreams into reality.

15 Exciting times lie ahead with major plans in the pipeline such as the development of the Jurong Lake District and the Greater Southern Waterfront. These are projects that will be in your time, and will be at the time when you will join the sector. These projects are equivalent to 4 Marina Bays in size. Just imagine the possibilities that will be before you!

16 I encourage all of you to continue to dream big about innovative solutions to make Singapore an inclusive home for all.

17 Before I end, I congratulate the 13 winning teams of the Project BUILD Competition. I look forward to touring the exhibition later. As students present these ideas to us, I hope that when you graduate and join the sector, you will bring the inclusivity, thoughtfulness, sensitivity and that championing of this cause into all that you do in the built environment.

18 Thank you all.

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