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*Mrs Deborah Ong, corporate responsibility leader at accountancy firm PwC Singapore, with PwC audit associate Muhammad Ashiq Chu, who has done pro bono financial literacy work since joining the Singapore Qualification Programme, a professional accountancy programme.*

Lawyers and doctors are not the only professionals doing pro bono work here.

The accountancy profession is also getting serious in making sure its members give back to society.

One of the most popular professional accountancy programmes here is now making it compulsory for its candidates to do pro bono work.

Each of the about 400 aspiring accountants now have to complete 40 hours of pro bono work in finance or accounting to meet requirements under the Singapore Qualification Programme (QP).

Developed here, it is the only professional accountancy programme in the world to have a pro bono component.

It was launched in 2013 by the Singapore Accountancy Commission (SAC), a local statutory board. Its pilot batch of graduates is expected to finish early next year.

Open to graduates of all disciplines, it offers one of two ways to become a Chartered Accountant of Singapore.

There are six modules and five exams, and candidates need to work for three years at a company accredited by SAC as a training organisation.

The other route - taking a five-day course and having three years of relevant work experience - is being phased out and will not be available to students graduating from 2017.

SAC chief Uantchern Loh told The Straits Times: "It is important that candidates recognise the need for professionals to give back to society."

Mrs Deborah Ong, who sat on one of the committees that set the requirements, noted: "We wanted it to be relevant to young people. More of them want not just technical experience, but value in their work as well."

There are other professional qualifications but the Singapore QP - which does not require prior accountancy training - seems popular with students.

In a 2013 SAC study - which polled 2,000 accountants and 1,600 students in accountancy or related courses - nearly half of the students wanted to take the Singapore QP after graduating.

The choice ranked second - 63 per cent wanted to qualify for the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

Two initiatives were started last month to match accountants' skills with charities' needs.

One was launched by accountancy firm PwC Singapore for its staff here. Mrs Ong, who is its corporate responsibility leader, said the right match means "help goes where it is needed most".

SAC and CPA Australia, one of the world's largest professional accounting bodies, have a similar platform online for accountants of all firms.

Deloitte, Ernst & Young and KPMG do not have such platforms, but send some staff to audit charities pro bono.

PwC audit associate Muhammad Ashiq Chu, 25, has done four hours of pro bono financial literacy work since joining the Singapore QP in 2013.

He said: "We want to give back but might not know where to start. The pro bono requirement gives structure and a target to work towards."

Charities welcome the help.

Ms Bernadette Lau, the executive director of Catholic charity group Caritas Singapore, said the professional expertise provided helps ensure good governance and financial controls.

Said executive director Gene Lee of Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations, which helps the disabled: "They help us track financial performance and keep operating costs low. We can then focus on what we do best - directly serving beneficiaries."

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