

PRESIDENT'S SCHOLARS 2011

(from left)

NIGEL FONG

The Raffles Institution (RI) alumnus is the only child of operations manager Fong Weng Heng, 57, and Madam Lam Ee Lin, 54, an assistant manager.

He received a gold medal in the International Chemistry Olympiad and was chairman of RI's debate team, which won several championships. He volunteers at Meet-the-People sessions.

YOONG REN YAN

The Raffles Institution alumnus is the second child of lawyer Yoong Nim Chor, 53, and secondary school vice-principal, Mrs Yoong Jin Ing, 53. His sister, 22, recently graduated from a university in Canada.

He was a debater, vice-president of the economics and current affairs society and chairman of the Chinese orchestra. He and some friends also produced a documentary on helping the needy.



XIAO YIFEI

The Raffles Girls' School and Raffles Institution alumna came to Singapore from Wuhan in China at the age of four, when her father came here to work. She received her Singapore citizenship in 2005.

Her father, Mr Xiao Fan, 49, is a marine engineer, and her mother, Madam Tian Xiao Nong, 49, an electrical engineer. She has an 11-year-old brother.

She was a basketball player, directed and acted in plays, was president of the Boon Lay Youth Club and volunteered in Meet-the-People sessions in Boon Lay.

AARON KOH

The Hwa Chong Institution alumnus is the second of three boys aged between 14 and 20. His father, Mr Koh Lai Nguan, 50, is an engineer, and his mother, Madam Kang Siow Buay, 49, a housewife.

He was the high jump captain in school and won medals in national and regional competitions. He also chaired the student council's social and relations committee and was involved in a project to help needy residents in the MacPherson area.

ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

See, he's a President's Scholar

No straight As, but Hwa Chong student still wins top scholarship

BY AMELIA TAN

HWA Chong Institution (HCI) student Aaron Koh's heart sank when he received his A-level results earlier this year.

He was expecting a perfect score for all the seven subjects he took, as that was what he got during the preliminary exams. Instead, he got a B in English literature and a C in economics, in addition to 4 As and a merit in his other subjects.

For the teenager who had been among the top in his cohort since primary school, the results were very disappointing and "one of the lowest points in my life".

But in the eyes of the Public Service Commission (PSC), a body which over-

sees the appointment, promotion and discipline of civil servants, as well as gives out scholarships to promising students, his grades were good enough. Besides, he had leadership qualities and an outstanding co-curricular record.

Last night, the 19-year-old joined three others - Ms Xiao Yifei, Mr Nigel Fong and Mr Yoong Ren Yan, all 19 this year - in being awarded the President's Scholarship, the country's most prestigious.

Mr Koh, who also has a Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship, will study international relations at the University of Pennsylvania in the US.

He said: "I am thankful that the PSC had faith in me. I've learnt a lot of lessons from falling down, such as not giving up when faced with challenges."

Responding to queries, the PSC told *The Straits Times* that not all President's Scholarship holders have straight As.

This is because PSC "recognises that grades alone are not necessarily an indica-

tor of a student's calibre, leadership potential and commitment to the Singapore public service".

Previous President's Scholars had Bs in their results. For example, one last year had two Bs.

Cs, though, are rare. Checks with Raffles Institution (RI) and HCI, where most President's Scholars studied, show that Mr Koh is the first President's Scholar, in the last five years at least, to have a C.

The PSC added that Mr Koh had all-rounded achievements, topped his midshipman course at Officer Cadet School and also did very well at the President's Scholarship Assessment Centre, where candidates go through exercises to test their responses to challenges and scenarios related to public service work.

MP Lim Biow Chuan, chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, said: "It is good that the PSC does not look just at academic performance when choosing (scholarship holders) but at the overall development of

a student. Academic performance is an important measure but it is not the only measure."

The four received their awards from President S R Nathan at a ceremony at the Istana last night attended by ministers, the recipients' parents, teachers and principals.

Besides Mr Koh, Ms Xiao, who was from RI, will study international relations at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States.

Mr Yoong, who was also from RI, will read philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University in Britain, while Mr Fong, also from RI, will do medicine at the National University of Singapore.

All the recipients have been involved in community service, which they said convinced them to pursue a career in public service.

Mr Fong, for example, turned down a full and bond-free undergraduate scholarship from Harvard University in the US.

"My parents asked if I was sure that I

wanted to give up a chance to study overseas," he said. "But I am clear that by taking up the President's Scholarship, I am choosing my career. I want to practise medicine and eventually shape medical policies in Singapore in areas such as palliative care."

Ms Xiao said that community work has taught her that it is difficult to help everyone in need, but "nonetheless I find great satisfaction in helping others".

Mr Yoong said: "I come from a good family and have good parents - I didn't do anything to deserve them. But there are many others less fortunate than I am and I'm certain that I want to pursue a career in public service to help others."

In his speech, Mr Nathan noted how he had witnessed more than 40 students receive the President's Scholarship in his 12 years as president. He urged this year's recipients to always bear in mind the public service values of service, integrity and excellence.

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