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Edited by Pete Spurrier

# Experiments in success

Two candidates in the Student of the Year – Science and Mathematician category tell **Wong Tsui-kai** about the strategies they used to win over the judges

**F**aced with the coronavirus pandemic, this year's Student of the Year interviews were held remotely, and the Science and Mathematician category was no exception.

Twelve of Hong Kong's best and brightest students who excel at maths, physics, chemistry, biology and computer science spoke about their motivations, experiences and plans for the future to the four-member judging panel.

Vanessa Yu Sze-wai of St Paul's Convent School says the process of being grilled by the judges helped her understand herself better.

"It made me reflect on my personal pursuit of science and what role science plays in society," she says. "I just answered their questions directly and gave my opinion."

The questions were related to the judges' experiences and areas of interest. One that left a strong impression on Vanessa was about girls in Stem (science, technology, engineering and maths).

"I didn't expect it at all. I come from an all-girls school so I never

thought it was an issue," says the HKDSE candidate, who was one of only two girls in the final 12.

"The idea of girls not being interested in science or not wanting to do maths is a social stereotype."

Her answer was appreciated by the judges, who were also curious about the extracurricular activities she does, many of which help to spread scientific knowledge.

Her advice for

those who might think about entering the competition next year is simple: give honest answers. "The nomination shows them what you've done already. There's no need to show off."

For Miko Leung Ka-yan, from

Diocesan Girls' School, the judges' questions about what she has learned in maths, and from the competitions she has taken part in, brought back fond memories of workshops she had organised earlier this year for her schoolmates. She had hoped these workshops would encourage a greater interest in maths; they were unfortunately cancelled due to the coronavirus.

The disease was the subject of the most challenging question she was asked in the interview. She felt she

wasn't able to give a full enough explanation of how she could use her maths skills to help with the pandemic.

"I discussed how to deal with the virus using artificial intelligence, but I couldn't give a full answer. I tried to calm down, but I was still nervous," Miko says, recalling what she learned from the experience. "I learned how I can do better."

**The nomination shows what you've done. There's no need to show off**

She adds that it also made it clear that candidates in all categories should be aware of social issues connected to their field, and think about how to use their skills to impact society.

The four judges were Paulina Chan Shuk-man, director of the Hong Kong Science Museum; Albert Wong Hak-keung, chief executive officer of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation; Daniel Lai from The Hong Kong Jockey Club and programme director of Coolthink; and Zuraidah Ibrahim, the *South China Morning Post's* deputy executive editor.

**The Student of the Year Awards competition is organised by South China Morning Post and Young Post and sponsored by The Hong Kong Jockey Club**

