

HONG KONG WEEKEND

The Student of the Year Awards, organised by the Post and sponsored by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, with support from the Education Bureau, are among the city's most prestigious honours for local youth.

This year, 11 prizes were awarded across

nine categories plus the main award, with judges praising all the winners for their ability to cope with challenges amid the pandemic.

"I was greatly heartened by this year's awards," HKJC CEO Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges said: "At a time of great challenge for

our city, it was very encouraging to meet students of such talent and commitment to the betterment of our society."

More than 600 students from 123 secondary schools in the city took part. Here are four of the winners.

Kudos for some class acts

Dancer overcomes early missteps to fall head over heels for Latin

Performing Artist second runner-up: Raymond Chan

Raymond Chan Pak-tsun lives and breathes dance, but the second runner-up in this year's "Performing Artist" category of the awards revealed it definitely did not begin this way.

"My mother got me to sign up for a dance class when I was in Primary Three, I didn't have much of a choice," he recalled.

"She saw that my older cousin was learning Latin dance, and felt I should do the same."

Chan, now aged 16, has been dancing ever since.

However, the journey has not always been a smooth one. The student at Concordia Lutheran School said he needed to overcome the stigma of being a male dancer, especially as a younger child.

"Latin dance is uncommon in Hong Kong, and it's even more uncommon to see male dancers. You get a lot of movements, like hip twisting, that locals might not be accustomed to seeing on boys and men. I definitely got some weird looks," he said.

He also admitted there were times in his dancing career when he felt lost, and "almost became depressed" because he could not find a clear path.

The teen credited his mother for pulling him through. "She wouldn't let me quit," he said with a laugh.

As time went on, he slowly started to fall in love with dancing, he said, and found a sense of elation and achievement in the progression of his skills.

Chan said the first time he took part in a competition, he only landed seventh place.

"But my position climbed slowly and steadily with each competition ... it was just awesome."

Chan said he wanted to become a dance teacher, and hoped to train students who could surpass him.

He also hoped to help make Latin dance more popular in the city.

"I enjoy the feeling of being able to do what I love. Dancing has become an indispensable part of my being."

Chan's dance schedule has been disrupted due to the closure of studios amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's hard to practise at home because it's a partner dance. I really can't wait to go back," he said.



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Young fencer who represented the city eyes long sports career

Sportsperson: Sophia Wu

Sophia Wu started her journey in fencing when she was just six years old. The winner of the award in the "Sportsperson" category has since represented the city in a number of international competitions, and is now a full-time athlete.

"It was a very natural process," she said, while explaining how fencing had become such a big part of her life.

"When I was younger, I took on a lot of extracurricular activities – ballet, swimming, cello ... I started dropping them as I got older, but fencing stayed."

Asked about the biggest challenge she has faced so far in her fencing career, Wu said she had been lucky enough to not experience any major injuries. Her obstacles have been mental, instead of physical.

She recalled that in the 2018 Asian Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships, she was the last person to play against the Philippines in a quarter final team match.

"We'd been leading when I took the stage," she said.

"But things got disastrous soon after I started playing. I was too nervous, and it felt like I was pouring our points away like water."

The Hong Kong team lost, and Wu was overwhelmed with guilt.

"I was devastated," she said.

It took some months of self-reflection and time spent with a therapist for Wu to step out of the shadows. The next year, she met the same player under the same circumstances. But this time, she won.

Wu is a recent graduate from Heep Yunn School, and now studies marketing at Polytechnic University. She is looking forward to a long career in fencing, and wants to pursue her career in a sports-related field even after she stops playing.



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Aspiring neuroscience researcher wants to focus on Alzheimer's

Scientist and Mathematician first runner-up: Genper Wong

Genper Wong Chi-ngai's passion for neuroscience began the day he stepped into the British Museum's souvenir store. Wong, who was in Form Two at the time, was in England for a study trip when he picked up a book about the brain.

"It was fascinating," he said, adding that the experience prompted him to buy another book – this time, a university textbook – on the subject.

"I couldn't understand a word of it. At the time, I hadn't even started learning biology yet. I had no idea how a cell worked."

But Wong swore to himself that he would be able to read the book one day.

"So I guess that kind of ignited everything," he said.

Wong is now an aspiring neuroscience researcher, and also the first runner-up in the "Scientist and Mathematician" category of the awards.

Last year, he achieved the highest possible grade of level 5** across all seven subjects in his DSE exams.

Wong currently studies cell and molecular biology at Chinese University, and is thinking of pursuing a career in Alzheimer's disease research.

"Alzheimer's is quite devastating for families and patients," he said.

Current research on the pathology of Alzheimer's suggests the disease is related to the accumulation and misfolding of certain proteins in the brain.

"So, maybe we can figure out why these proteins act in such a mischievous way, and invent some kind of therapeutic agents to tackle this problem."

The student also stressed the importance of broadening one's horizons in order to find the right career path.

"I don't really care much about money because my lifestyle isn't that [lavish]. I don't need to earn a whole lot," he said.

"Many students force themselves to be lawyers or doctors, but later on, they find themselves frustrated or uninterested in their fields. But they hardly ever take interest in other careers."

Wong said the problem was exacerbated by the lack of encouragement from parents and teachers for students to develop a wider set of hobbies.

In 2019, Wong, who was a student at St Paul's Co-educational College at the time, also represented Hong Kong in the International Biology Olympiad held in Szeged, Hungary.

The aspiring researcher called the experience "life changing".

"In the past, I was really quite arrogant. I thought I was special in many ways," he said.

"But when I moved into the training phase of this Olympiad, everything changed. I met people who knew so much more than me."

He described his experience on the international arena akin to discovering he was "a speck of dust on a small potato".

"Never be arrogant, and always have an open mind," he said.



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Keen eye and kind heart help teen tackle a world of design challenges

Visual Artist: Samuel Scroggie

Despite being only 17 years old, Samuel Scroggie displays the intelligence and visionary leadership traits of someone twice his age. The student at West Island School is the winner of the award in the "Visual Artist" category, and wants to become a designer.

"My aspiration is not just to become a designer, but to lead with designs," he said.

"Design by itself is useless. In a sense, it is like the glue that pairs lots of different disciplines – such as business, engineering and economics – together. It's about fostering multidisciplinary collaboration to tackle the world's challenges."

Scroggie manifests these beliefs by constantly observing various social issues, and thinking of new designs, or reimagining existing forms, to solve them.

The city's ageing population, for example, is one such issue he is concerned about.

According to Census and Statistics Department projections released in 2017, Hong Kong's elderly population, meaning those aged 65 and above, will reach 2.59 million – or about 37 per cent of the population – by 2066.

Scroggie said in such a scenario, more people would struggle to use goods and services. One aspect the teenager had previously studied was staircases, especially public ones.

The teenager said staircases were an interesting case study because their "lack of optimisation" for the physically challenged elderly "impaired their use by able-bodied people as well".

"A grandma has to slowly walk up a staircase, and in turn, able-bodied individuals behind her also have to slow down," he said.

"And that also introduces some psychological challenges for the elderly, because the hindrance they are causing on others when they use these facilities are made prominent."

He said this could become a source of pain, depression and anxiety in elderly people.

"Moving forward, we need to start being inclusive, especially when we're designing goods that are going to be used in public spaces."

Another thing Scroggie is concerned about is planned obsolescence, where products are designed to have a limited lifespan through a number of ways.

"For example, they might become technologically outdated. They can also become obsolete due to their lack of reparability, and that leads to a throwaway culture where designs aren't cherished, and the consumer is constantly purchasing new products that are only incrementally better than the previous ones."

He said designers were able to tackle the huge amounts of waste produced in planned obsolescence by thoughtfully ensuring all components of a product were either reusable or biodegradable.

The secondary school student has already had some success with meaningful designs and entrepreneurship.

Scroggie said during his first year at high school, he noticed a classmate sitting opposite him would put her hands around her head and shield herself whenever the lights flickered. The classmate suffered from a condition exacerbated by sensory overload.

"I felt kind of frustrated with how helpless she was, and with people mocking her for it. I thought: what are some ways I can help with this?"

He said while he could have asked his schoolmates not to make fun of the student, "but it didn't solve the



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fundamental issue" of her overstimulation, and Scroggie saw this as an opportunity to design a meaningful product.

"Essentially, it was this fiddly device that you could use to allay that sensory stimuli," he said.

"But when I gave it to her, a lot of other classmates also picked it up and they wanted one too. So it sort of started this fad, and I thought this was going to be a great opportunity for me to develop my entrepreneurial skills."

Scroggie purchased a 3D printer through a loan from his father, and used the machine to produce more devices. The business became so successful, he was able to pay off the loan.

"I had friends from a lot of other schools who would come by my house and I'd hand them a batch of my devices, and they would sell them at their schools too."

The teen credits his parents' support, especially his architect father, for the way he has turned out.

"He imparted in me, from a very young age, a habit of asking questions. Why do things work in the way that they do and what are the consequences of that?"

"It's funny because he always kept telling me 'don't become an architect'. He was always telling me about how difficult it would be. But he did have a natural and insatiable curiosity about the world, and that rubbed off on me."