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# Turning time behind bars into a second chance at life

Through the Prison School and rehabilitation programmes, this SPS officer helps to create safer communities and brighter futures for inmates

For one teenager, a troubled start in life led to three terms behind bars for drugs and theft-related offences. His third incarceration, though, marked a turning point.

Enrolled in the Prison School, the 21-year-old began taking his studies – and future – seriously.

“He had matured and started putting in effort to study and maintain his conduct,” recalls Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Luke Leong.

“As a result, we got approval for him to be released on supervision in the community once he had served his minimum detention period.”

DAC Leong has been the Superintendent of Institution Tanah Merah since 2023.

It houses both the Prison School (for inmates of all ages) and the Reformatory Training Centre (for young offenders), and is one of 14 institutions managed by the Singapore Prison Service (SPS).

Seeing the transformation of young lives makes his work as a prison officer very rewarding, he says.

“It is always encouraging to see our ex-students and youth doing well after their release, be it pursuing further studies or finding stable jobs,” adds DAC Leong, who is also a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) scholar.

At the Prison School, DAC Leong and his team work closely with the principal (an SPS staff), educators seconded from the Ministry of Education and adjunct teachers to help inmates continue their education.

Lessons are conducted in a retrofitted block within prison grounds where former cells have been transformed into classrooms.

“It’s just like a mainstream school, except that every day after class, the inmates go back to their accommodation,” says DAC Leong.

Each year, about 300 inmates enrol in N-, O- and A-level classes, as well as tertiary programmes at the Prison School.

The curriculum also includes diploma and degree pathways co-developed with Ngee Ann Polytechnic and the Singapore University of Social Sciences – allowing inmates to earn qualifications and gain confidence to enter the workforce upon release.

The Prison School recently celebrated a significant achievement in its 25-year journey – producing its first university graduate.

“We prepare inmates for their release from the very first day they enter prison because their time here should not be wasted,” says DAC Leong. “Many have had their education disrupted, so we want to make sure those who are motivated



As a Singapore Prison Service officer, also known as “Captain of Lives”, DAC Luke Leong oversees both the Prison School and the Reformatory Training Centre for young offenders. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

“It is always encouraging to see our ex-students and youth doing well after their release, be it pursuing further studies or finding stable jobs.”

**DAC Luke Leong**  
Recipient of the Singapore Government Scholarship (Undergraduate) and the MHA Scholarship (Postgraduate)

to study have the chance to do so.” Fifteen years into his SPS career, the 39-year-old’s sense of purpose remains strong – first sparked during an internship with the organisation as a young adult where he was moved by the people he met, both officers and inmates.

That led him to apply for the MHA Uniformed Scholarship, through which he was awarded the Singapore Government Scholarship

tier and went on to study philosophy, politics and economics at the University of York in Britain.

## Diverse roles, unique mission

At SPS, DAC Leong has held various roles across policy work and ground operations.

One career highlight was helping to develop the Pre-Release Centre, where inmates who have a high risk of reoffending undergo intensive intervention in the last 10 months of incarceration, to prepare them for reintegration as well as to reduce the chances of reoffending.

The initiative earned him and his team the Home Team Achievement Award in 2015.

In 2022, DAC Leong received an MHA scholarship to pursue a master’s in criminology at the University of Pennsylvania in the US.

What he learnt there in theory has been reinforced at Institution

Tanah Merah, where DAC Leong has seen first-hand that effective rehabilitation also means strengthening the inmate’s wider support system.

This is why SPS promotes family involvement in an inmate’s rehabilitation and reintegration journey, encouraging reconciliation and helping families work through strained relationships.

“If we or the families are able to facilitate or inspire change in inmates, there will be a ripple effect to benefit their families and ultimately society,” says DAC Leong.



Scan for more on the MHA Uniformed Scholarship.



ADVERTORIAL

# What a prison course taught this SPF officer about humanity

Studying alongside American inmates as part of a Harvard University module showed this SPF officer that good policing sees the person beyond the crime



“Rules are important, but whether we are dealing with individuals or nations, we must begin with understanding the human realities behind every decision.”

DAC Shaun Lim  
Recipient of The SPF Scholarship

▲ In his line of work, DAC Shaun Lim strives to strike a balance between upholding the law and leading with empathy. PHOTOS: SPH MEDIA

The most unforgettable class Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Police (DAC) Shaun Lim took as an undergraduate at Harvard University was not in a grand lecture hall but inside a medium-security American prison.

Once a week for an entire semester, the Singapore Police Force (SPF) scholar sat shoulder to shoulder with inmates as part of a module that explored the historical and sociological roots of mass incarceration.

What made the class unique was its enrolment: Half were Harvard students like himself while the other half were male inmates, some serving time for serious and violent crimes.



▲ DAC Lim (right) is both an SPF and President's Scholar. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAC SHAUN LIM

“Hearing about some of the things they had gotten into prison for and why they did it, I realised they were not fundamentally different from me. Under different circumstances, I could imagine my friends, peers and community being in similar situations,” says DAC Lim, now 32. He is also a President's Scholar.

That semester “behind bars” left a lasting impression and drove home a powerful lesson – that the line between good and bad is rarely clear-cut, and even those who break the law are shaped by complex circumstances.

That was not the first time DAC Lim had found himself confronting some of life's biggest questions.

As a student at Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), while most of his peers were considering academic or corporate careers, DAC Lim was grappling with a different concern.

“I remember waking up at 5.30am one morning, feeling grumpy about going to school,” he recalls.

“It struck me that this was what life was going to be like for the next few decades – waking up early, going to work. I asked myself: What kind of work would make me actually want to get out of bed every day?”

It made him realise he wanted a career where he could end each day knowing he had made a difference in the world.

While still at ACS(I), DAC Lim was awarded the SPF Book Prize in recognition of his academic

excellence and co-curricular achievements, which led to a short attachment at a Neighbourhood Police Centre. There, he watched front-line officers in action, not just enforcing the law but also forging bonds with the community.

“The familiarity they had with the people they served and the pride they took in protecting their areas stayed with me,” he says.

“Most people interact with police officers only at low points in their lives – when they are accused of doing something bad, or something bad has been done to them.

“I felt that by interacting with people at low points in their lives, I would have made some difference – something worth waking up for.”

That decision led him to apply for The SPF Scholarship, which opened the door for him to pursue a degree in molecular and cellular biology at Harvard University, followed by a master's in criminology at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn).

## Between law and lives

More than a decade into his policing career, DAC Lim still finds himself reflecting on that prison classroom experience.

He recalls one particular case during his time as an Investigation Officer at Tanglin Division. DAC Lim was escorting a theft suspect back to his home for a raid when a woman entered.

She yelled at him to fix the Wi-Fi and make her something to eat,

▶ As Deputy Commander of SPF's Central Division, DAC Lim leads more than 850 officers and makes time to personally check-in on their growth and well-being. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAC SHAUN LIM



oblivious to the fact that he was in police custody.

Back in the lock-up, DAC Lim asked the man about the interaction. He explained that the woman was his wife and he had committed the theft to support her as her mental health had been deteriorating.

“I asked him about their future,” DAC Lim recalls. “He said all he knew was that he would stick by her side and be there for her since he had made a promise.”

DAC Lim charged the man for his offence and then referred him to social support.

“What he did was egregious, so he spent time in prison. However, there is a whole story behind it and he is not a bad person,” he adds.

That ability to weigh different perspectives also proved invaluable on a global stage. In 2021, DAC Lim was posted to New York for three months, where he joined representatives from Singapore's Ministry of Law and the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs at the Third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

There, he helped negotiate over 60 resolutions on complex international issues – from drug criminalisation to refugee rights.

The experience reaffirmed a belief he now holds close: Justice is nuanced.

“Rules are important,” he says, “but whether we are dealing with individuals or nations, we must begin with understanding the human realities behind every decision.”

## Leadership rooted in humanity

Today, as Deputy Commander of SPF's Central Division, DAC Lim is imparting these lessons to the more than 850 officers under his charge.

“We have to uphold the law because actions have consequences,” he says. “However, we must also remember that defendants and victims are all human beings.”

In his current role, DAC Lim has overseen the security operations for many of Singapore's major events, including the annual Formula One Singapore Airlines Singapore Grand Prix, National Day Parade, 2025 General Election, and cultural festivities like Thaipusam.

He also manages a wide range of day-to-day responsibilities – from audits and financial processes to procurement, training, public engagement and human resources.

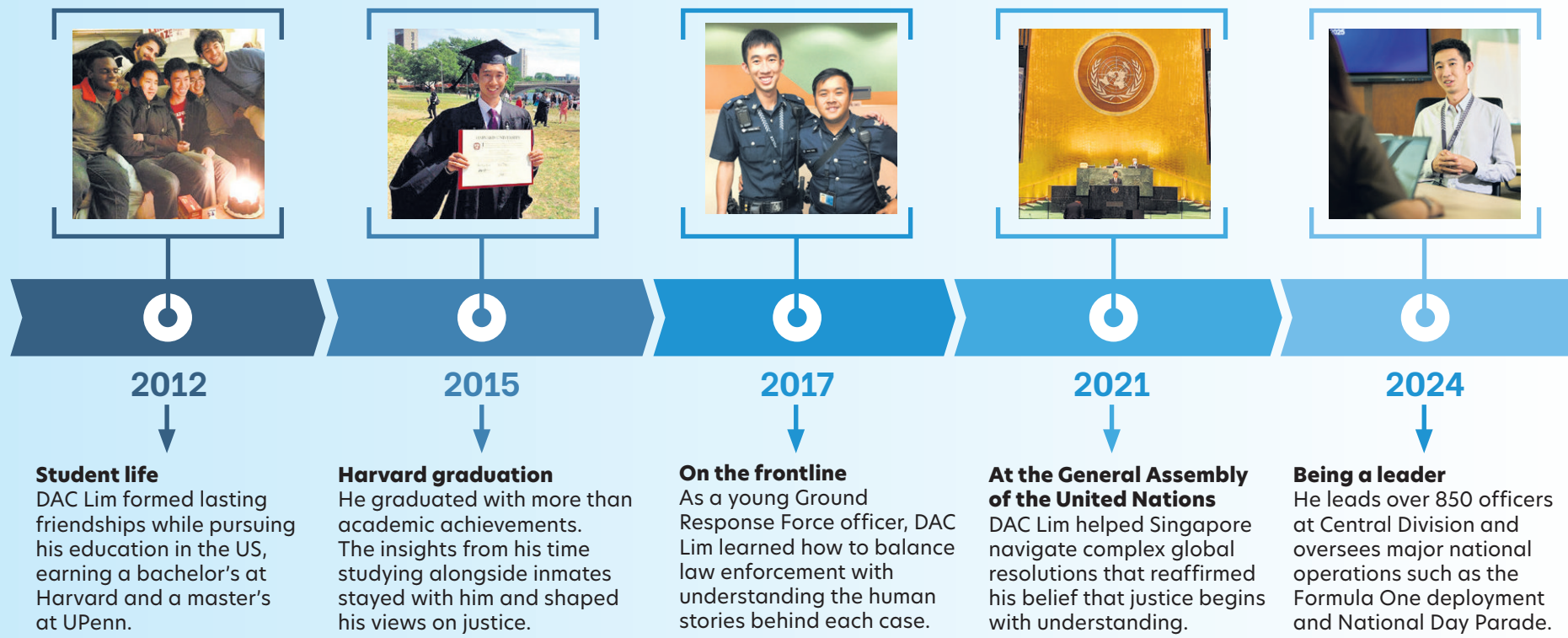
To positively shape the workplace culture, DAC Lim makes it a priority to meet his officers one-on-one to discuss their career paths or personal concerns.

“Work takes up most of our waking hours,” he says. “I consider it a success if my officers can go home and tell their friends and family that they got to do what they wanted to do or that they had made a difference somewhere.

“It is quite a unique opportunity to be entrusted with, to ensure that officers are able to do their duty to help people and make sure justice is done.”

## From scholar to commander: A call of duty

Follow some of the defining milestones in DAC Shaun Lim's career – where law, leadership and compassion meet



## About The SPF Scholarship

>> The Singapore Police Force Scholarship is one of the most prestigious scholarships offered by the Public Service Commission to candidates who demonstrate strong leadership qualities and have a strong interest in policing work. Scholars will continue their learning journeys in world-renowned

universities which provide intellectually, socially and personally enriching programmes. Upon graduation, scholars will be involved in shaping policies that address issues on public law and order as well as play an integral role in protecting the country and its communities.



Scan for more on  
The SPF Scholarship.

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ADVERTORIAL

# More than a first responder

This Singapore Government scholar is part of a new generation of SCDF paramedics bringing help wherever it is needed



“You might not save a life every single day, but you have the chance to help someone when they need it the most.”

**LTA Max Han**  
Recipient of the Singapore Government Scholarship under the MHA Uniformed Scholarship

**B**eing a good paramedic means having strong detective skills. Lieutenant (LTA) Max Han can attest to that.

He and his crew once responded to a call from an anxious woman whose friend had not shown up for their regular mahjong game.

When LTA Han and his ambulance crew from the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) arrived at her friend's flat, they found the door and gate locked. Through a side window, they spotted an elderly man collapsed on the floor. Firefighters were called in to conduct forcible entry into the unit.

Once inside, the team quickly assessed that the man was in a diabetic coma but had no other injuries. After administering intravenous dextrose, the patient regained consciousness.

Further investigation revealed that the man, who was also suspected to be suffering from mild dementia, had forgotten to eat after his insulin injection, triggering a dangerous drop in blood glucose.

As the patient, who was living alone, declined to be conveyed to the hospital, LTA Han contacted the patient's social worker. He provided an update to the social worker and recommended a reassessment of the elderly man's ability to live by himself given his cognitive impairments. He also encouraged the man to see his neighbourhood general practitioner for a review of his health status.

A sharp eye for detail is just one of the many overlooked aspects of being a paramedic, says LTA Han.

“It is a very dynamic job that forces you to be on your toes and be well versed in all your skill sets.

“You need to be competent. For example, even though we do not

attend to obstetric cases frequently, we will still need to be well prepared to deliver babies.”

Case in point: The 27-year-old has had to help deliver two babies in the past six months – both stressful experiences but also extremely rewarding ones.

“We do go into situations where a life is taken and a patient does not make it, even after trying our best,” he says. “So it is a real privilege to be there when a new life is brought into the world.”

## Becoming a paramedic

LTA Han is the inaugural recipient of the Singapore Government Scholarship (SCDF – Paramedic Scholarship), offered under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Uniformed Scholarship.

He first became interested in paramedicine during his national service in 2017, where he spent four months attached to an ambulance as part of his combat medic training.

During that time, he attended to five cases of cardiac arrest, among others. The experience gave LTA Han greater insights into the demands of the job.

“I did consider becoming a doctor, but I was more drawn to the pre-hospital emergency setting – it's more dynamic and exciting,” he says.

While the fast-paced nature of the work appealed to him, what left a lasting impression was the

professionalism and kindness of the paramedics he had shadowed.

No matter how critical the situation, they kept their emotions in check and calmly supported everyone around them – from patients and colleagues to bystanders alike.

One paramedic's words have stayed with LTA Han: “Your job is to be there for them when they need help.”

It is a lesson he carries as an emergency medical services rota commander at Central Fire Station, where he helps lead a team of over 90 paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

## Beyond the call

Life-or-death situations do not happen every day, and LTA Han is grateful for that.

SCDF receives about 250,000 ambulance calls a year, he notes, though not all are medical emergencies. Some patients may be better served at community healthcare facilities instead of the hospital's emergency department.

That is why paramedics must be ready for anything – from critical cases to calls that require only observation, reassurance or psychosocial support.

Education is part of this care. Reflecting on the diabetic coma case, he shares a moment that is both humorous and sobering: As they were leaving, the patient offered the team two bottles of soft drinks from a supply at home.

“That is another aspect of patient care we are trying to work on – to be educators for patient health,” says LTA Han. “Many patients do not know what some of their medications are for.”

During his paramedic training at Monash University in Australia, where he earned a bachelor's in paramedicine with first class honours under the scholarship, LTA Han did various attachments with ambulance stations across Victoria, including remote towns like Wangaratta and Yarrowonga. Some cases required hours of travel – or even helicopter evacuation.

While Singapore faces a different set of challenges, they are no less demanding. Paramedics are trained to navigate the tight spaces and narrow corridors of flats, manage language barriers and cope with a high number of cases.

To support these efforts, SCDF leverages technology to boost operational effectiveness – including digital tools like the Operational Medical Networks Informatics Integrator (OMNI) tablet, which allows for real-time sharing of patient information to help hospitals prepare before patients arrive.

To LTA Han, being a paramedic is not just about responding quickly – it is about staying calm under pressure, making sound clinical decisions and showing empathy while caring for both the patients and the crew.

“You might not save a life every single day, but you have the chance to help someone when they need it the most,” says LTA Han.

It is a sentiment that reflects SCDF's mission – life-saving work that often has a life-changing impact, even in the smallest moments.



▲ The EMS crew in a training drill simulating an industrial fire rescue, with an emergency medical technician and a paramedic. PHOTO: SCDF

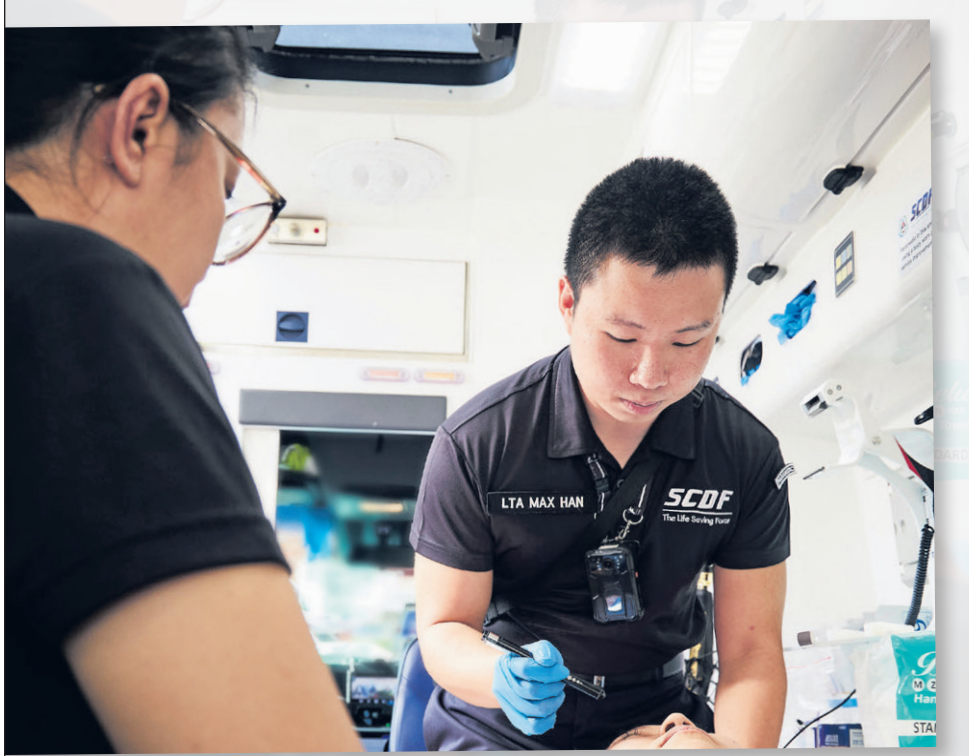
## Trained to tackle any situation

Becoming an SCDF paramedic requires rigorous training that prepares officers to handle a wide range of urgent situations – from medical emergencies to rescue missions.

■ Training begins with a comprehensive programme covering medical theory, hands-on skills and emergency response techniques. Paramedics learn to manage a range of cases, including cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, obstetric emergencies and hazardous environments.

■ Apart from managing challenges unique to an urban landscape, paramedic training is tailored to geriatric-centred care, aligning with Singapore's ageing population.

■ Paramedics stay up to date through regular refresher courses and continue their professional development with advanced training and simulations to remain prepared for evolving emergencies. Some have the opportunity to be attached to hospitals and emergency services abroad.



▲ For LTA Han, being a paramedic is about staying calm, making clear decisions and caring for both his team and patients with empathy. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA



▲ A paramedic performing airway, breathing and circulation checks during a training exercise. PHOTO: SCDF

## About MHA Uniformed Scholarship

➤ Depending on your interests and aspirations, this scholarship will allow you to kick-start your leadership journey as a uniformed officer in one of five Home Team departments:

Singapore Police Force (SPF), Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), Singapore Prison Service (SPS) and Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB).



Scan for more on the MHA Uniformed Scholarship.

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SCHOLARS' CHOICE 2025

# How a love for adventure prepared her for a career in public finance

Be it paragliding off a mountain or tackling complex fiscal policy, this PSC scholar embraces each challenge with gusto

**H**urling herself off a cliff to paraglide was never on Audrey Tung's radar, but the breathtaking Swiss Alps unfolding beneath her made the terrifying jump worthwhile. "It was very liberating and mind-blowing," she recalls of her university graduation trip to Switzerland in 2022.

That adrenaline-filled adventure ignited something within her. "You never know what you like or dislike until you try it," she says.

Today, the 25-year-old Public Service Commission (PSC) scholar is looking forward to yet another challenge – being a part of the team managing Singapore's reserves in her new posting at the Ministry of Finance under the Reserves and Investment Directorate.

As an associate in the Investment Policy team, Audrey works closely with key partners like Temasek and GIC, as well as develops policies that support sustainable, long-term returns on the reserves.

"I am very intrigued by the work," enthuses Audrey, who joined the directorate in July this year. "The reserves are a uniquely Singaporean asset which has helped tide us through so

many crises – like the 2008 global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic – without racking up a huge debt.

"It is an intergenerational asset that will have a lasting impact on future generations," she says, adding that her new responsibilities will contribute to safeguarding this asset.

When she was a teenager, Audrey's interest in numbers led her to dabble with stock market simulations online, where one could create a mock portfolio based on real-world stock prices.

"I just bought stocks of what I liked: Disney and Apple. It is fascinating to see how stocks fluctuate and react to news and politics," says the Methodist Girls' School and St Joseph's Institution alumnus.

Audrey's father also holds a fulfilling job in public service, which shaped her own vision of a meaningful career.

This led her to apply for the PSC (Public Finance) Scholarship, which took her to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where she studied accounting and finance, and later to

In her new job at Singapore's Ministry of Finance, Audrey Tung works with the team managing Singapore's reserves. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

**“The reserves are a uniquely Singaporean asset... that will have a lasting impact on future generations.”**

**→ Audrey Tung**  
Recipient of the PSC (Public Finance) Scholarship



Paragliding ignited Audrey's (front) adventurous spirit. PHOTO: COURTESY OF AUDREY TUNG



Stanford University in the United States, where she pursued a master's degree in management science and engineering.

At LSE, she gained a deeper understanding of how to analyse financial statements and audit reports.

Audrey put those skills to good use during her time at the Auditor-General's Office (AGO) from 2023 to early 2025. She was involved in the thematic audit on parenthood support measures. "There was never a dull moment," recalls Audrey of her time at AGO, where each irregularity felt like a puzzle to solve.

#### Lessons from the ground up

Recently, Audrey completed a six-week foundation course designed for new entrants to the Public Service Leadership Programme General Phase, which provided insights into the roles of different government agencies.

As part of the course, Audrey was attached to the Agency for Integrated Care, where she engaged with elderly residents to

raise awareness about national schemes like Age Well SG and Healthier SG.

The experience brought policymaking into real life.

"Policymaking affects all the different levels of society. The visits gave me a first-hand experience of how people may fall through the cracks. I became more aware of that risk and how I can do my best to cover the gaps," she says.

Despite her fast-paced job and rotations through Singapore's government agencies, Audrey maintains a simple mantra for managing stress – to go with the flow and approach every challenge with the same adventurous spirit sparked by her first paragliding experience.

"You will never know unless you try," she adds.



Scan for more on the Public Service Commission Scholarship.

## FACT CHECK

Thinking of applying for a scholarship? Don't let these myths hold you back



**✗ Say goodbye to your social life.**

**✓ Not really.**  
Scholars have fun too – it's all about balance and many manage it just fine.



**✗ You need to come from a top school.**

**✓ No, it's about you**  
Your drive, values and story matter more than your school's ranking.



**✗ Long bond terms.**

**✓ Think again**  
Most bonds are three to five years long, with mentorship and room to grow along the way.



**✗ Students with straight As stand the best chance.**

**✓ Not true.**  
Passion, potential and leadership count just as much, sometimes more.



**Only students in popular or 'safe' courses get scholarships.**



**Not the case.**

Scholarships are offered across many fields – and plenty of scholars end up exploring different roles along the way.



**You need to ace the interview with textbook answers.**



**Relax.**

Interviewers want to know you. Curiosity, honesty and self-awareness go a long way.



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SCHOLARS' CHOICE 2025

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

# WHY BEING A SCHOLAR IS SERIOUSLY COOL

1

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2



## You level up fast

Soft skills, hard skills, life skills. You'll pick them up quickly.

3



## You work on real stuff

Scholars help shape what matters.

4



## You have options to explore

Switch it up and try new roles. Discover what lights you up.

5



## You grow into your best self

From nervous newbie to confident changemaker, the glow-up is real.

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As a PSC scholar at MOF, every decision you make ripples through the lives of Singaporeans and beyond. From policies that uplift lives to budgets that build futures, your work will make an impact that goes far beyond spreadsheets. And you won't be going at it alone — you'll thrive in a culture that's supportive, empowering, and deeply invested in your growth. Because here, you're not just crunching numbers. You're investing in capabilities, safeguarding what matters, and shaping change that lasts across generations.

I believe in the quiet, steady work that builds resilience. When crises strike, it's the planning, prudence, and hard calls made years ago that carry us through. That's the impact I aim for.

AUDREY TUNG  
Associate (Reserves & Investment)  
at the Ministry of Finance

I work with integrity and curiosity, digging deeper for insights that matter. By being clear and open, I help build stronger systems for Singapore — and show how local action, lifelong learning, and care can spark global change.

GOH CHOON GUAN  
Associate (Economic Programmes)  
at the Ministry of Finance

VERA LIM  
Associate (Treasury) at  
the Accountant-General's Department

Making a difference starts with purpose, people, and seeing the big picture. I've learned that careful choices bring lasting value. It's not just numbers — it's lives. Good policies can shape a better, kinder future for all.



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