

Grants for UPM Olympian students

WIDER KNOWLEDGE: The incentives allow trio up to two semesters' study at any university abroad

ZULITA MUSTAFA
zulita@nst.com.my

HAVING to juggle between studies and sports has paid off for three Olympian athletes who are students of Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Silver medallist Cheong Jun Hoong, sprinter Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli and shooter Johnathan Wong Guanjie received a mobility grant as well as cash prizes under the UPM Sport incentive scheme for their achievement during the Rio Olympics last month from UPM vice-chancellor Professor Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris.

The mobility grant allows the trio to study for a minimum of two weeks up to two semesters at their chosen university abroad.

Jun Hoong received RM4,000 in cash while Zaidatul Husniah and Wong received RM1,000 each.

Aini said the incentive schemes were in recognition of the hard work put in by Jun Hoong, Zaidatul Husniah and Wong to attain success in the Olympic Games as well as to bring glory for the country and the university.

"The mobility grant is a unique opportunity for students to combine an overseas travel and cultural experience, with studies focusing on various aspects of a region or area of study.

"Besides meeting various people and learning their cultures, students also will acquire new experience and exchange knowledge of each others' expertise.

"Take Jun Hoong, for example, she can choose a university that has a sports science course so that she can pick up one or two things to improve on her diving skills," said Aini.

She added that a flexible learning system provided by UPM in close collaboration with the National Sports Council provide better opportunities to the student athletes to excel in academics and their areas of expertise.



Professor Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris (centre) presenting the UPM incentives schemes to Olympic medallist Cheong Jun Hoong (left) and sprinter Zaidatul Husniah Zulkifli at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

"As a university which has about 177 students and athletes who are studying in various disciplines, it is desirable for the university to establish a scheme that benefits all athletes," said Aini.

"The incentive will bring a positive impact on the athletes so that they become more motivated, especially in realising their goal of becoming champion. Each year, UPM athletes are often involved in many major competitions organised at the international level, and these athletes are major contributors to the country's medals.

"These three students and hopefully many more in the future will be idols to other (student) athletes in UPM. If Jun Hoong, Zaidatul Husniah and Wong can do it, they also can achieve victory at world level," she said during the presentation ceremony at Bangunan Canselori Putra in Serdang recently. Present were UPM deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs and alumni) Professor Datuk Dr Mohammad Shatar Sabran and UPM Sports Centre director Dr Hanafiah Ayub.

Jun Hoong paired up with Pandelega Rinong to win the country's first medal in the synchronised 10m platform diving event at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Currently pursuing her second year as Bachelor of Communication undergraduate, she was excited with the incentive schemes and thankful to the university for appreciating her Olympic efforts.

"I did not expect it and am very touched

by the gift. It would certainly be a great motivation to me to give my best to sports and studies in future.

"I am thankful that UPM has always been understanding and has a flexible programme for national athletes. We are given exemptions to take one or two subjects each semester depending on our schedule. So, it's quite hard to tell when I'm completing my degree."

The 26-year-old is looking forward to returning to full-time training in China next week. Although she's now an Olympic medallist, Jun Hoong knows that she still has so much to aim for.

"The world championships (in Budapest) next year and the Commonwealth Games (in Gold Coast) and Asian Games (Jakarta) in 2018 are my next goals."

Even though Zaidatul Husniah and Wong didn't bring home any medals, their participation in the women's 100 metres and 10m and 50m Air Pistol Men, respectively, were commendable.

The sprinter is pursuing her Bachelor in Physical Education while Wong is studying Aerospace Engineering.

"For me, qualifying for the Olympics was already a dream came true. Getting through till the second round was an achievement but I will keep training to achieve my personal best.

"This incentive scheme will motivate me to do better not only in my studies but in sports as well," said Zaidatul Husniah.