

Unfettered by a bond

As a recipient of the bond-free NUS Merit Scholarship, former Normal (Academic) student Edward Ho can keep his options open

LYNN SEAH

WHEN Mr Edward Ho was applying for universities after completing his polytechnic studies in 2014, he considered only bond-free scholarships.

"Bond-free scholarships give me the freedom to explore," explains the 23-year-old, now a National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduate. Though he is fairly sure he wants a career in finance — which was why he applied to the business schools of three local universities — he still wanted to keep his options open.

He explains: "In the course of your studies, you might come across a module that you find really interesting. You want to explore more but you can't if you are bonded to a company and the module is unrelated to what the company does.

"At the end of the day, it's a double whammy for both the scholar and the company. The scholar longs for a career in another sector, and the company is not tapping the full potential of the scholar."

Challenging process

Mr Ho is a recipient of an NUS Merit Scholarship, which gives him the freedom he covets, as it is bond free. He was selected for the scholarship after submitting an essay, taking a multiple-choice general knowledge test, and going through a role-play with about a dozen other scholarship applicants, watched by a panel of three faculty members.

For the role-play, he was as-



Mr Ho chose to study at NUS as he liked the Asian focus of its business school. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

signed the role of technology head of a fictitious company. The company was expanding its operations but its budget was limited.

Mr Ho had to convince others in the "company" that his division deserved a larger share of the budget as technology was important for expansion. The other scholarship applicants played heads in charge of other functions who were also competing for big-

ger-sized chunks of the budget.

"It was challenging on a lot of fronts," he recalls of the experience. "Not only did you have to make your pitch, you have to fight for the chance to speak. The others were also competing for the scholarship. They would try to put down your proposal and you have to be on your toes to bring up points to convince the group. I feel that the whole process shows a lot about a person."

The scholarship that he clinched covers tuition fees and provides a \$6,000 annual living allowance and a \$2,000 one-time computer allowance. Other benefits include a guaranteed place in a one-semester student exchange programme with one of NUS' overseas partner universities. Also, he was eligible for the NUS Scholar Enrichment Grant, which co-funds 50 per cent of the scholar's participation in short

local or overseas enrichment programmes.

Apart from these scholarship perks, being in NUS also offers opportunities to do internships in start-ups abroad while taking courses at NUS Overseas Colleges, something Mr Ho hopes to do.

Mr Ho picked NUS after being accepted at all three local universities. It is not too far from his home in the Tiong Bahru/Telok Blangah

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MR EDWARD HO
undergraduate
National University of Singapore

area. NUS is the highest-ranked among the three universities and he likes the Asian focus of its business school. "A lot of growth in the world is coming from Asian economies," he says.

He also likes the fact that the Bachelor of Business Administration programme is spread over four years; some other universities offer three-year courses. "You have more time to understand each module as there are not too many modules crammed in each semester," he says.

So far, he has found the seminar-style classes at NUS "stimulating" in the one semester he has been there. "We learn not only from the lecturers but from our classmates. The viewpoints of the international students are especially eye opening."

The former Normal (Academic) stream student could not have imagined being where he is today when he was in secondary school. "Getting into a local university seemed so unattainable then," he says.

But he took things one step at a time. In polytechnic, he tried his best and emerged as the top graduate of his cohort. A place in university seemed within reach then, but the possibility of a scholarship was uncertain. Still, he applied for two scholarships. "It doesn't cost anything to try," he says.

"Don't be afraid to dream," he wants to tell other Normal (Academic) students. "Through hard work and faith, I was able to achieve something."