

bTW

ON BEING BONDED

How to make bonds palatable



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A WHINY brat. That's what I dread sounding like each time I complain about being indentured by my six-year scholarship bond.

A free (not to mention expensive and elite) education, coupled with job security in an established corporation that would pay me for the next six years?

To my American university friends who were camping out beside their telephones for calls from prospective employers last year, it sounded like a god-sent scheme and I, an ungrateful recipient.

(There's even an application on Facebook which tracks the number of days one has left to serve out.)

But I saw it the other way: while they sought roles in multinational companies, apartment-hunted in exciting cities or planned gap years backpacking across third world countries, I could only wonder how differently things could have turned out for me.

Almost a year later though, I now question if it is the idea of being bonded that burdens more than the bond itself.

As the recent talk of Singapore's braindrain recasts the spotlight on scholarships, and as a cohort of fresh junior college graduates ponder the choice to sign away 10 years of their lives in the upcoming weeks, I wonder if more tweaks should be introduced to make scholarships more palatable.

I cheered Nominated MP Loo Choon Yong's suggestion in Parliament last week to cut the

length of scholarship bonds to three years and allow government scholars to serve in the private sector.

Dr Loo also suggested tax rebates for the overseas university fees paid by parents whose children return to Singapore after studying abroad – a well-intentioned suggestion, though I foresee many would be upset over giving money to those who hardly need it.

The alternative, perhaps, could be to increase the prestige of scholarships to entice the rich – and more importantly, the willing among them – to sign up. On top of that, returning scholars could be channelled to positions where they would have more global opportunities to use the cross-cultural skills and foreign languages they have picked up in their time abroad.

I understand, though, that some employers may have their hands tied.

Fast-track scholarship-holders and employees not on schol-

arships may turn envious or lose the motivation to work hard.

Perhaps companies should then consider upping the number of mid-career postgraduate scholarships given out. This way, companies can dangle it as an extra incentive for current employees, and still nurture an Ivy League-educated workforce while avoiding the error of investing in people who are exam-smart but flops on the job.

Alternatively, allow scholars to take longer gap periods before returning home to work.

The Media Development Authority has a Media Education Scheme under which recipients must work in media-related companies for two years, though they can do so any time over a five-year period after graduation. More of such flexible schemes should be introduced.

After all, most of my friends who have been based overseas for two years or more are now looking forward to returning home and settling down.

The impulse to live outside your comfort zone is perhaps for most a youth-driven one that will diminish with age.

And we all know, the more you clamp down on youth, the more they will want to rebel.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

↗ Whiny:

发牢骚 fā láo sāo

↗ Scholarship:

奖学金 jiǎng xué jīn

↗ Ungrateful: 忘恩负义

wàng ēn fù yì

↗ Entice: 引诱 yǐn yòu

↗ Flexible: 灵活 líng huó

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Missed out
on the