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Global immersion

Mr Neil Bowyer gets to travel to top business schools in three countries during the EMBA programme at SMU

MEREDITH WOO

IN JUST a year, Mr Neil Bowyer, 46, would have immersed himself in the business, political, social and legal issues of four countries — the United States, India, China and Singapore.

The part-time Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) student at the Singapore Management University (SMU) is studying the problems, challenges and issues unique to each of those business environments, as part of the course.

Always learning

Since embarking on the EMBA course in April last year, Mr Bowyer has visited The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania in the US, to gain knowledge in corporate strategy in the global environment, as well as operations and supply chain management.

And at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, India, he analysed topics such as network and alliance building.

Next month, he will be visiting the Guanghua School of Management at the Peking University in Beijing, China, to glean insights on agile and disruptive strategy, as well as contemporary issues in Asian business.

Hailing from the United Kingdom, Mr Bowyer started out as a financial adviser in 1992 and worked his way up the corporate ladder.

In October 2009, he moved to Singapore and is now the chief bancassurance officer at Manulife Singapore.

He says: "I wanted to do an EMBA to formalise some of the learning I've gathered through experience, gather new insights and learn new techniques."

There is a great mix of gender, nationalities and industry experience, which means that there is always something new and different to talk about whenever we meet.

MR NEIL BOWYER
chief bancassurance officer
Manulife Singapore

"I was drawn to SMU's programme structure as it gives me the opportunity to travel to three countries and study at some of the best business schools."

"With lecturers dedicated to each module, I will develop a good, deep insight into these countries and modules."

Fruitful returns

Mr Bowyer feels that he learnt something relevant from every module that he took.

He particularly enjoyed the US segment and learnt a great framework for developing strategy, which he applied to his work.

He says: "The economics segment in Singapore set the scene for how Brexit negotiations would play out, and gave good insights into why President Trump would pursue certain policies."

"While this isn't directly relevant to my role, it has helped me become more informed about key political issues and to look 'beyond the headline'."

Mr Bowyer shares insights and ideas gathered from his pre-course readings with his team during one-on-one coaching sessions. This practice not only benefits his team's development, but also reinforces his understanding of the content.

Initially worried that the course would be highly academic, Mr Bowyer has been pleasantly surprised. The faculty was able to build on its students' knowledge and experience to add structure, insights and different perspectives.

He says: "SMU has done a good job in building a group of experienced and diverse students in this EMBA programme."

"There is a great mix of gender, nationalities and industry experience, which means that there is always something new and

different to talk about whenever we meet." His cohort comprises 31 students.

Mr Bowyer adds that his course-mates are always ready to help one another.

Work-wise, he says it is tough to juggle his full-time job — that often stretches into the evening — and his studies which can take up over 10 hours a week. Fortunately, he has understanding and supportive colleagues and business partners.

He says: "The knowledge I'm acquiring is already having a positive impact on my performance. For instance, I am taking a wider view of issues."

"I'm confident that this will put me in a prime position to be considered for larger roles in the future."



Mr Bowyer was drawn to SMU's EMBA programme structure as he could study at some of the best business schools in the world. PHOTO: DAVID JARVA/AP