Singapore - Local electronics company Akira has sponsored national high jumper Michelle Sng on a $23,000 scholarship over three years until May 2010 - believed to be the first time a private organisation in Singapore has chosen to cover a local athlete's academic needs.

Sng approached Akira with plans for the sponsorship and according to its MD, Sng Sze Hiang, who bears no relation to Michelle, was "worth sponsoring".

"Being a former athletic, I totally understand what an athlete is going through, especially when you have the talent and commitment but not the financial support. It is really a waste to the person and more so to Singapore as it aims to become a sporting nation and Akira wants to come forward to support this dream," he said.

Sng also said that he did not "expect anything from her, other than to be committed and give her best all the time".

"There are no risks involved because we are doing it out of goodwill, and we hope to encourage more companies to come forward to support our local athletes. As a business, we cannot always think of taking, we must give as well. If someone else comes to us with a plan that can convince us, we will definitely consider sponsoring them as well," he said.

The fund covers Sng's tuition fees and costs of textbooks at the Singapore Management University where she is doing a double major in marketing and corporate communication. President for the Singapore Athletic Association (SAA), Loh Lin Kok said the scholarship was "no strings attached" and that such deals were "unheard of in the private sector".

"It is laudable to note that Akira have not included any clauses or sent any conditions for Michelle to meet as part of the sponsorship deal," he said.