

Publication: The Business Times

Date: 31 Jan 2019

Headline: Singapore Academy of Law rolls out new initiatives under innovation programme

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SINGAPORE Academy of Law (SAL) is marking the first anniversary of its Future Law Innovation Programme (Flip) with new initiatives.

Flip, launched in January 2018 with the aim of redesigning the delivery of legal services for the future economy, is offering small and medium law firms in Singapore the services of a consultant to review their work flows and advise how they can adopt technology to operate more cost effectively and efficiently. The charges for the services are S\$1,500.

This is part of Flip's ramped-up efforts to push for the adoption of technology and innovation, by providing the spurt for the creation of new products and services, reskilling of legal professionals and tracking technology adoption in legal sectors beyond Singapore.

Besides this, there will be Asia's first accelerator to groom promising legal tech startups as well. Participants will be assessed to determine their needs and goals, after which they will be paired with a mentor or go through a curriculum tailored to their unique needs.

"The entire premise of the accelerator is for startups to gain traction and hit milestones faster than they would be able to do so by themselves," said Paul Neo, SAL's chief operating officer and executive director of SAL Ventures, which runs Flip.

The accelerator will be supported by thought leaders in the industry, among them Ash Singh, adjunct professor of entrepreneurship at Insead, and Peter Dingle, head of business model innovation, retail banking & wealth management at HSBC. The duo have developed multiple corporate accelerator programmes over the years.

Flip and Singapore Management University (SMU) have started documenting the state of innovation in Asia-Pacific (APAC) and will release an annual digest starting from this year. The report features at least eight countries and territories in the region, examining all forms of legal innovation, from new technologies and regulatory frameworks to emerging methods of legal education and training.

The digest has three objectives. It hopes to be an innovation roadmap for the legal industry and relevant stakeholders, highlighting current innovation trends as well as predicting future trends. In addition, the report aims to encourage further discussion, information exchange and collaboration between APAC countries on legal innovation. Lastly, it wants to share regional legal innovation efforts with a wider audience, especially in the United States and Europe.

Flip will work with SMU's professional training arm in a separate initiative to groom a new breed of legal professionals who can go beyond offering legal advice. From February, legal professionals can sign up for a two-part course at SMU Academy, where they will learn design thinking and corporate and entrepreneurial ideation. These skills are not taught in law school, but are critical for the development of the legal sector, SAL said.

Lim Lai Cheng, executive director of SMU Academy, said: "Legal services in Singapore will face increasing competition as discerning law firms begin utilising innovation and technologies to increase value for their clients. Through this, legal technopreneurs will begin their journey to identify opportunities to innovate, adopt and implement practical solutions that will keep them ahead of competition."

SAL's Mr Neo said that the SMU Academy's course is in line with Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon's recommendation of a need to offer programmes that will equip students with the skills to find innovative solutions to the issues that they will be confronted with in contemporary legal practice.

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Mr Neo said: "Legal technopreneurs are a rare breed in Singapore and we hope that through such programmes, we can build up a strong talent pool to steer the industry as it shifts."