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Headline: New online service to help engage mediation services

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Dominic Low

A new online service will make it easier for the public to engage professional mediators to settle disputes. It was set up by the Singapore International Mediation Institute (Simi), an independent standards body for professional mediation, it announced yesterday.

Known as Simi Look and Hire (Similah), the service makes the process of engaging professional mediation services more efficient.

Traditionally, parties in a dispute approach individual mediation centres or independent mediators when looking for mediation services. Similah allows them to send a free request to mediation centres and professionals accredited by Simi, a process that will save time and money.

The request will be made as an online form guided by a series of curated questions which will be submitted through Similah. The questions aim to help the parties frame their dispute so mediators can quickly assess their own suitability in taking on the case.

Similah protects user confidentiality. And since responses are from mediation service providers accredited by Simi, there is an assurance of quality, it said. It will vet all requests made through the platform before they are released, so only legitimate queries will reach accredited mediators.

Similah's launch follows Singapore's signing of the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation in August 2019. Also known as the Singapore Convention on Mediation, the treaty was signed by 51 countries. It promotes using mediation in settling cross-border disputes.

Simi also announced the National SMU-Simi Collaborative Dispute Resolution Award yesterday. Law students from Singapore Management University (SMU), National University of Singapore and Singapore University of Social Sciences are eligible for the award. It seeks to recognise students who have excelled in international collaborative dispute resolution competitions or contributed significantly to the growth of mediation and negotiation in Singapore.

Simi chief executive Marcus Lim said: "It is critical that we recognise and incentivise talented students in this field. We... hope this award will encourage them to pursue this profession with passion and ambition to be the collaborative dispute ambassadors of tomorrow."

Assistant Professor Dorcas Quek Anderson from SMU agreed: "Lawyers in today's legal landscape need to effectively advance their client's interests in a range of settings, including litigation in court and mediation."

domlow@sph.com.sg

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