

Students from third law school not second class: Shanmugam

By **NUR ASYIQIN MOHAMAD SALLEH**

IT IS not fair to brand future graduates of Singapore's third law school as "second class", said Law Minister K. Shanmugam yesterday.

Students from the school will be equipped with the full range of skills expected of all lawyers, and will not be restricted to practising only family and criminal law, he wrote in a Facebook post.

However, it is hoped that "a reasonable number" of them will end up practising in these areas, by targeting mature students who have gained work experience in related fields, such as social work and the police force, he added.

It was announced two weeks ago that the law school will open at SIM University, which caters to working adults, in the next few years. The part-time undergraduate degree course is expected to take in about 75 students. While it will be a general law degree,

there will be a strong focus on criminal and matrimonial law to address the shortage of lawyers in these fields.

In his blog post, Mr Shanmugam noted concerns that lawyers from the new school will be perceived as "second class" to their counterparts from the two existing law schools at the National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University. "It would not be accurate to say that graduates of the third Law School are restricted to practising community law. Nor is it fair to brand them as 'second class'," he said.

They will be "equipped with the full range of skills expected of all lawyers", and can "practise in any area of the law they wish".

Some have also questioned if the setting up of the new school can address the shortage of lawyers in community law, given that graduates may not end up practising in this field.

"This is not something that can be mandated by the Government or anyone else," Mr Shanmugam acknowledged.

But by making community law a focus of the new school, and by targeting mid-career professionals who are keen to start a career in law, "the hope is that a reasonable number will end up practising law in that area", he added.

The upcoming school will also give working adults a second chance to pursue their dreams of practising law. "Many people develop greater clarity of their interests when they are more mature," he said. "This is very much in line with our intent to ensure that Singapore remains a nation of opportunities."

The legal system as a whole will also benefit. "In other jurisdictions, mixed teams of lawyers and social workers work together on cases, and ensure best outcomes for litigants."

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