

S'pore laws will soon be easier to understand

AGC project hopes to draft laws in more accessible language, style

By IAN POH

MAKING laws easier to understand – that is what a new initiative by the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) hopes to achieve with the help of the public.

Through the "Plain Laws Understandable by Singaporeans" project, which was announced yesterday, phrases such as "pursuant to" could be replaced with the more straightforward "under", for instance.

Terms which carry specific definitions, such as "Authority", could be italicised for easier reference, while pronouns such as "he" could make way for gender-neutral words like "the person".

These are examples of possible linguistic and design changes that may be implemented to simplify the language and presentation of Singapore's laws.

The project's first phase involves a month-long online survey, starting next Tuesday.

The survey, accessible at <https://research.com.sg/agc/login.php> from Nov 12, aims to gather views on the proposals.

Several survey questions will involve placing examples of current and proposed versions of legal provisions next to each other, and asking respondents to indicate their preference.

Everyone, from members of the public to the judiciary, is welcome to take part. Depending on the survey's findings, focus group discussions may be held to gather more feedback.

"Our mission is to make sure the laws we draft to implement government policies are readable, understandable and accessible... to the people they apply to," said Mrs Owi Beng Ki, chief legislative counsel of the

AGC's legislation and law reform division.

The AGC hopes to implement some of the proposals it receives support for in new laws from the middle of next year. And existing legislation – including almost 6,000 Acts of Parliament and pieces of subsidiary legislation – will be revised in stages to incorporate the changes in drafting style and presentation.

Over the 12 months to the end of September, Singapore Statutes Online, the country's official legislation website, was accessed nearly 2.7 million times by local users as well as those from the United States, Hong Kong, Britain and Japan, among others.

Surveys on legislative drafting have been conducted in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, said the AGC yesterday.

Mr Liu Xuanyi, 23, a second-year law student at the Singapore Management University, said: "Hopefully, the project will address some of the problems the man in the street faces when dealing with the

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law and its unique language.

"Even as a law student, it took me some time to adapt when I first started."

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