

FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE

A home in the heartlands for third law school?

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SINGAPORE – Given its proposed focus on community law, Singapore’s third law school should be located in the heartlands and kept separate from existing law schools so that it can cultivate a distinct identity, members on a national committee tasked to look at the supply of lawyers told TODAY.

That said, there is also value in leveraging on existing law faculties at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU) by making the new school an extension of either or even both schools, since resources and infrastructure are already in place, said Stamford Law Corporation Director Yap Wai Ming, who co-chairs the working group on demand, in the Fourth Committee on the Supply of Lawyers.

On Tuesday, the committee led by Judge of Appeal V K Rajah recommended that a third law school be set up to address the shortage of criminal and family lawyers. The school will target at working adults looking for a

career switch, particularly those who have been working with the community, such as social workers.

Member of Parliament (Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC) Hri Kumar Nair — who is a director at law firm Drew and Napier — said SIM University (UniSIM) seems to be a “reasonable place” to host the third law school, as its location is accessible.

Mr Hri Kumar, who chairs the working group looking at local supply in the committee, stressed that the idea of a third law school was dealt with “conceptually”, and no location has been confirmed. But he added: “The focus you want is to have a (third) law school which brands itself (differently), you won’t be so successful in doing that if you merge it with one of the existing law schools.”

TSMPLaw Corporation joint Managing Director Stephanie Yuen-Thio said the third law school could be sited within the community to create an authentic learning experience.

Asked whether the school should be an extension of the NUS and SMU law schools — where many graduates pur-



UniSIM has long catered to the needs of those who are working and mid-career switchers.
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sue corporate law — she said: “Don’t put them in an environment where they feel they are not seen as the cream of the crop ... it is important to have an environment where (community law practice) is highly encouraged (too).”

The Deans of both law schools also cited capacity constraints, among other things, in the committee’s report.

When contacted yesterday, UniSIM President Cheong Hee Kiat said the location of the third law school will be decided by the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) and Ministry of Education (MOE).

However, he added that UniSIM is “very familiar with this role of catering to those who are working and mid-career switchers”, citing its existing part-time programmes in social work and counselling as examples.

UniSIM, which will be Singapore’s sixth publicly-funded university, is currently gearing up for its recruitment of faculty and working with the MOE to finalise its offerings of full-time programmes.

While the Singapore Institute of Technology and Nanyang Technological University referred media queries to the MOE, the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) ruled itself out. “As we have only admitted our second intake of undergraduates recently, we want to focus our efforts and resources on delivering a quality design and technology education,” said an SUTD spokesperson.

An MOE spokesperson said it is working with MinLaw to study the proposal for a third law school and will give more information when ready.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY EUGENE NEUBRONNER