SINGAPORE: A second law school will be set up in Singapore.

To be located at the Singapore Management University, it will likely be set up by next year to produce about 90 graduates every year.

This move was prompted by suggestions from the Third Committee on the Supply of Lawyers.

The committee, chaired by Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong, conducts regular reviews to increase the supply of practicing lawyers here.

Other recommendations include increasing the National University of Singapore's Law Faculty intake to a maximum of 250 students every year from 2007.

The current annual intake is 220 students.

The committee has also proposed allowing graduates with Second Class Lower Division Honours degrees from approved foreign universities to practise law in Singapore, if they fulfill requirements like having three years of relevant work experience.

Currently they can work as in-house counsels, paralegals or practise only foreign law.

The government has accepted the committee's recommendations.

It has also appointed Justice V K Rajah to chair a new committee to review the entire legal services sector in Singapore.

The nine-member team will study areas like improving Singapore's legal education and how to promote the country as a key provider of legal services in Asia.

Deputy Prime Minister and Law Minister, Professor S Jayakumar, said: "The establishment of the second law school, other than providing additional supply, will add diversity to the legal education in Singapore and I think if we have a different model, different approach to legal education, that'll also be good and I hope it won't be an exact replica of the NUS law school."

By next year, local firms would also be allowed to hire foreign lawyers, under stringent conditions, to practise Singapore law in prescribed areas like banking and finance.

These conditions include having excellent academic qualifications and not practising Singapore law in the first year.

Professor Jayakumar said: "So this scheme is not a backdoor entry to foreign lawyers to practise a whole range of Singapore law. It's a very special, tailor-made scheme which the committee said will be market driven, in other words, they're not coming in as full-fledged advocates and solicitors and they'll not have rights to appear in front of the court, for example. They come in for a specified period of employment by the Singapore law firm."

But this is one recommendation the Law Society has reservations about, questioning if it'll work in practice.

It also singled out a Qualifying Exam for such foreign lawyers to get admitted, saying they should go through the existing Board of Legal Education instead.

But Professor Jayakumar assured that maintaining the quality of lawyers practising here is paramount. - CNA/ct/fr