SMU’s new law school dean unable to take up post

Appointed last month, he cites unforeseen personal reasons but still hopes to be adviser

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PROFESSOR David N. Smith, who was appointed the new dean of the Singapore Management University’s (SMU) law school just last month, has decided not to take up the appointment.

In a press statement yesterday, SMU said Prof Smith, the former vice-dean of Harvard Law School, was unable to take up the appointment due to “unanticipated personal reasons”.

In his place, the university has appointed Professor Michael P. Furmston, who taught law at Oxford University and served as dean of Bristol University’s law faculty.

Prof Smith, 70, was named dean of SMU’s law school after a six-month search worldwide.

When he was appointed, SMU’s president Howard Hunter noted his experience in Asian universities, in particular in Hong Kong and Macau, and said SMU’s new law school “was off to a good start”.

Contacted by The Straits Times, Prof Smith would only say that personal issues had cropped up unexpectedly in the last week to 10 days that needed his attention.

But he added that he hoped to still make a substantial contribution to SMU’s new law school as part of the faculty and adviser in legal education to the president.

Professor Hunter said the 74-year-old Prof Furmston has served with great distinction as the dean of the faculty of law at Bristol University for a number of years.

He added that Prof Furmston knows Singapore well, and had previously taught at SMU as a visiting professor and worked with younger law faculty members.

The new dean is a world-renowned expert in contract and commercial law.

A book he co-authored, Cheshire, Fifoot And Furmston On Contract, is one of the leading books on contract law.

Prof Furmston said it was a “privilege” to be appointed dean, and added that “SMU will be able to groom and nurture a new generation of young lawyers with a solid foundation in legal principles and an aptitude in understanding the business world”.

SMU’s new law school, which will start classes on Aug 20, has enrolled 118 students, with 34 of them offering double degrees.

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