SMU Law Dean turns down appointment in shock move

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IT HAS not been the best of starts for the Singapore Management University’s new law school.

After much fanfare last month when SMU unveiled the school’s first Dean, he has decided not to take up the appointment.

Former Harvard luminary David N Smith (picture, top), 70, has had to make an abrupt turn-around because of “unanticipated personal reasons”. This comes eight days after he was supposed to start work on Aug 1 and about a fortnight before classes begin.

Prof Smith, who had said that he wants the law school to teach “global thinking skills”, will still be a senior faculty member and play a mentoring role at the new school. He is taking one or two months to sort out family-related matters.

He did not take a simple leave of absence because “being dean is a major undertaking that needs detailed attention and the law school needs attention from the beginning”.

Professor Michael P Furmston (picture, below), a former law dean at Bristol University will fill his place, said SMU yesterday. The 74-year-old Briton had originally been appointed last month as a law professor at SMU and taught at the university as a visiting professor.

Despite the rocky start, SMU president Howard Hunter was confident the university would “build a law school of the highest quality”. He also gave his vote of confidence to Prof Smith’s successor.

According to SMU, Prof Furmston is best known for his book *Cheshire, Fifoot & Furmston on Contract*, “one of the leading textbooks on contract law more than 50 years after its first publication”.

The Oxford University graduate said: “I am confident that with a second law school at SMU, we will groom and nurture a generation of young lawyers with a solid foundation in legal principles, an aptitude in understanding the business world while embodying values of ethics and social consciousness.”