I refer to "SMU’s edge: Lawyers trained to be humane and balanced" (March 31), which quoted Professor Michael Philip Furmston, dean of the Singapore Management University’s (SMU) School of Law, as saying: "What we are hoping to do here is not just produce people who know the rules, but also to turn out students who are intelligent, humane and honest."

Such comments are pertinent in view of recent reports about rogue lawyers. Prof Furmston is best known for his magnum opus *Law of Contract* by Cheshire, Fifoot and Furmston, first published in 1991 and which has since been popular with law students both here and abroad. The noble and learned professor once said: "...We will groom 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."

I hope Prof Furmston will be an epitome of the late Prof Geoffrey Wilson Bartholomew who was dean of the Law faculty at the then-University of Singapore from 1966 to 1968.

Prof Bartholomew was a great academic and contributed much to what the law school is today. In 1959, while en route from Tasmania to Khartoum, he gave a guest lecture here and met Mr Benjamin Sheares – the future President of Singapore, then a professor of gynaecology.

This was occasioned by the former’s interest in sex changes – which was the subject of his guest lecture – and he had previously published an article in the *Malaya Law Review* entitled *Hermaephrdites and the Law*. Both professors shared a mutual interest in the subject.

Law, medicine, teaching and religion are professions that enshrine a meaningfulness to their calling. Professionals who enter these fields take a solemn vow of personal dedication to their social responsibility. They are bestowed with the rights of power over their clients' lives.

In return for this privilege, they promise to abide by, and keep sacrosanct, certain practices, norms and ideals of the profession.

All occupations have clear codes of ethics establishing standards of proper behaviour. Professional adherence to these standards is upheld by the various licensing agencies, such as the Law Society and the Medical Council. Civil and criminal laws exist to deter professional misconduct or malpractice which causes harm to the clients.

It is interesting to note that George-town University, a Jesuit university in America founded in 1789 by John Carroll, has been teaching a course in legal ethics (also called professional responsibility) for the last 200 years.

This course is mandatory for graduation. This basic course is offered as a perspective elective to first-year undergrads or may be taken in the upper class years.

Advanced courses in legal ethics are also available. The graduate programme