Legal education scheme to start next year

Mandatory for lawyers practising here to participate

BY EMILY YAP

A mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme for the legal profession could be in place from June next year.

The Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) released more details of the proposed scheme yesterday, and will launch a public consultation in October to gather feedback.

The proposal for a compulsion legal education scheme for all advocates and solicitors first came about in 2007, from a report by the Committee to Develop the Singapore Legal Sector chaired by Judge of Appeal VK Rajah. The aim was to broaden practitioners’ legal knowledge and provide training for those thinking of switching to a different area of practice.

The government accepted the recommendation and an SAL subsidiary, the Singapore Institute of Legal Education (SILE), is now developing the CPD framework. The SILE board was appointed in May and is chaired by Justice Ralph.

The proposed CPD scheme looks like this: all lawyers who have been called to the Singapore bar and hold practising certificates will need to clock a minimum of 90 hours in professional development a year.

Currently, some 3,600 lawyers have held practising certificates. They can choose to attend courses, write and publish articles or give lectures to fulfill CPD requirements.

Law academicians, paragons, in-house counsel, academics, legal counsel in government ministries and foreign lawyers will be exempted from the CPD scheme initially. Academics will be encouraged to participate as speakers in various CPD programmes.

The CPD scheme will be introduced in phases. The trial period would begin from June 2011, and full implementation could take place by April 2012.

SILE will administer the scheme, acting as an umbrella institution overseeing training programmes.

Accredited providers such as SILE, SAL, the Law Society, National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University will run the programmes, Law Firm and other organisations that wish to run CPD seminars can seek accreditation.

"For the CPD scheme to be effective, it must be seen as providing real value to both the individual practitioner as well as the wider legal community," said Chief Justice Cheong Siak Keong in the SAL release.

"Lawyers must be attracted to attend such courses as they would be brought up to speed on the latest developments in the law without having to invest large amounts of time, effort and resources.