SMU law school reviewing intake

By Amelia Tan

MORE outstanding students are applying for places at the Singapore Management University (SMU) School of Law, and the school is reviewing its student intake.

The incoming dean of the law school, Professor Yeo Tiong Min, said it can admit up to 180 undergraduates annually in the next three to five years, up from 120 now.

He added that the school is in discussions with the Ministry of Law on the ideal student intake.

The ministry told The Straits Times that it will make decisions on enrolment at the SMU and National University of Singapore (NUS) law schools later in the year, after a review of the supply and demand of lawyers is completed.

Admission to the SMU undergraduate law programme is competitive, said current dean Michael Furmston.

Each year, about 700 applicants out of the 1,000 who apply are shortlisted for an interview and a written test, with 120 enrolling.

Last year, shortlisted applicants had A-level grades of A, A, B or better. SMU started its law school in 2007 with a pioneer batch of 116 students.

The NUS law faculty increased its undergraduate intake from 220 to about 250 in 2007 to boost the number of lawyers in the country.

Prof Yeo, who takes over as dean on July 1, joined the SMU law school as the Yong Pung How Professor of Law when the school was launched. The professorship is named after Singapore’s former chief justice and aims to advance the research and teaching of law in the university.

At a press conference yesterday, Prof Yeo outlined his plans for the school.

He said: “Quality means not just producing graduates for the legal profession but also producing well-rounded individuals who are able to serve their employers and serve the wider community.”

To achieve this, the curriculum is being reviewed so it continues to be broad-based, he added. It is now compulsory for students to take non-law subjects such as ethics and social responsibility, and business, government and society.

Prof Yeo, who is married to a lawyer and does not have children, said the law school is also looking at introducing a pro bono programme which will be compulsory for all students.

He also wants to grow partnerships with overseas universities for student exchange programmes and encourage the faculty to do more research. Engaging with the community through avenues like consulting work is also being planned.

Educated at NUS and Oxford University, Prof Yeo taught at NUS for 17 years, specialising in private law. He was named Singapore’s first Honorary Senior Counsel earlier this year.

SMU announced at the press conference that Professor David Llewelyn has been appointed deputy law dean.

Prof Furmston, who has headed the law school since its inception, said he is looking forward to going back to teaching and writing.

SMU president Arnoud De Meyer said it is apt that the school is having a change of leadership as its first batch of students graduated just last year.