

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**OF REPORT OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE**  
**FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNISIM LAW SCHOOL**



*New State Courts Building (artist's impression)*

*Credit: State Courts of Singapore*

## **Index**

Background.....	3
Key Recommendations of the SC.....	5
Specialist Law School.....	7
A New Approach.....	7
The ULS Law Degree Programme.....	9
Holistic Selection.....	9
Curriculum Matters.....	11
Admission to the Singapore Bar.....	14
Continuing Legal Education.....	14
ULS Applied Research.....	15
Management Structure.....	16
Location of ULS.....	16
Conclusion.....	17

## Background

1.  In May 2013, the Government accepted the recommendations of the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee on the Supply of Lawyers (the “4<sup>th</sup> Committee”) on calibrating the increase in the local supply of lawyers, ensuring the quality of overseas law graduates as well as addressing the attrition of legal professionals.
2. In particular, one of the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee’s key recommendations, to address the shortage of family and criminal lawyers, was that a third law school be established with a focus on training prospective family and criminal lawyers.
3. Following the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee’s recommendations, on 27 November 2013 the Government announced the formation of a Steering Committee (“SC”) chaired by then-Senior Minister of State of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Law, Ms Indranee Rajah<sup>1</sup>, to guide the establishment of a third law school which will be at UniSIM (“ULS”). A Curriculum Committee (“CC”) was also set up to support the SC in determining the curricular framework of ULS. The full composition of the SC and CC is laid out in the **Addenda**.
4. The SC is of the view that a third law school focusing on family and criminal law is timely, relevant and necessary for the following reasons:
  - a. These practice domains have an important impact on Singapore

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<sup>1</sup> Ms Indranee Rajah was appointed the Chairperson of the Steering Committee in her capacity as Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Law. Following the 2015 General Election, she relinquished her education portfolio, and was appointed Senior Minister of State for Finance in conjunction with her Ministry of Law portfolio on 1 October 2015.

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families, society and the community, and it is vital that we maintain a strong and vibrant group of family and criminal law practitioners;

- b. The third law school will offer more training and exposure to cross-disciplinary areas like sociology, social work, criminology and others, to prepare students for family and criminal legal work that have become increasingly specialised over time;
  - c. The new law school will also be a focal point for the broader ecosystem of practitioners, students, government bodies and non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) working in these fields, generating relevant and cross-cutting research in collaboration with similar institutes in Singapore and overseas jurisdictions.
5. The third law school will provide an opportunity for individuals to embark on law as a second career, while leveraging on their prior work experience. Providing an avenue for mature students with a predisposition for such work to study law with a special community focus is more likely to anchor them into practising in these fields. It also provides an additional path for prospective law students who may otherwise have to go overseas.
6. In the course of making its recommendations, the SC took note of the current situation of an increased number of law graduates in the market, a large number of whom are from overseas universities. However, fresh graduates have generally not chosen to enter family and criminal law, and there is a shortage of practitioners in these fields. The situation is unlikely to improve as senior practitioners retire unless redressed.

**Key Recommendations of the SC**

7.



This Executive Summary highlights the SC's key recommendations for the ULS:

- a. Specialist Law School: The ULS should be a specialist law school, focusing on producing lawyers specialising in family and criminal law;
- b. A different pedagogical approach: The ULS curriculum should be practice-oriented and multidisciplinary. A key feature will be a six-month clinical programme (Practicum) for authentic practical hands-on teaching and learning<sup>2</sup>.
- c. Flexible LL.B/J.D.: The ULS law degree programme should offer Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) for undergraduates and Juris Doctor (J.D.) for graduates. The programme should be credit based and modular, with flexibility to complete the LL.B in four to six years and the J.D. in three to six years.
- d. A different type of law student and lawyer: The ULS law programme should target mature individuals with life and work experience. Whilst baseline academic ability will be prerequisite, there should be a holistic selection of individuals of the right aptitude and attitude, with a predisposition for the practice of family and criminal law.

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<sup>2</sup> The Practicum is distinct from the 6-month Practice Training requirement for law graduates to gain admission to the Singapore Bar. It will be a graded subject within the degree programme, with a structured learning syllabus involving close and rigorous supervisor supervision.

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- e. Encouraging life-long learning for both legal and non-legal professionals: In line with SkillsFuture, the ULS should provide continuing legal education and training programmes for practitioners. This can be in the form of a Family Law Practitioner's Course ("FLPC") and a Criminal Law Practitioner's Course ("CLPC"). The ULS should also offer standalone modules as non-degree courses that can be taken up by both legal and non-legal professionals.
  
- f. Applied research: After the LL.B./J.D. programmes are established ULS should consider setting up a centre for applied research on Family Law Practice and Criminal Justice, combined with relevant cross-disciplinary areas to increase the body of local knowledge and practice, and which can be used to inform policy making, development of social programmes and provide thought leadership in these areas.
  
- g. Location of ULS: It would be ideal if the ULS is eventually co-located with the State Courts and/or the Family Justice Courts<sup>3</sup>.

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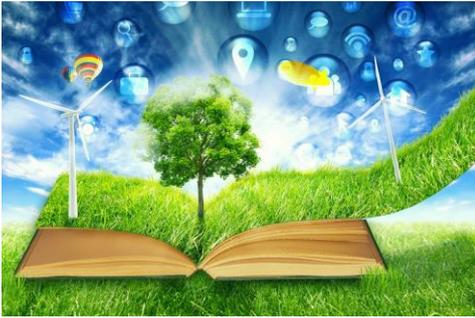
<sup>3</sup> Subject to the precise timing and details being worked out.

### Specialist Law School

8. While the ULS LL.B. and J.D. degree will allow its graduates to practise generally, its primary *raison d'être* is to be a specialist law school to produce lawyers specialising in family and criminal law. The objective is to have a steady pipeline of highly skilled family and criminal law practitioners for both the public and private sector.

### A New Approach

9.



- Feedback from practitioners is that there is high attrition among young lawyers practising family and criminal law due to the stresses and emotional demands of these practice areas. Practitioners have observed that lawyers with greater life experience and maturity would be better placed to cope with such demands.

10. Having regard to this feedback, and also recognising the specialist skills and attributes required of family and criminal law practitioners, the SC recommends that ULS should take a new approach in the way it selects and prepares law students, as well as in the way the subjects are taught:

- a. The SC recommends that at least 80% of ULS's cohort should comprise mature students seeking a mid-career switch to law (e.g. paralegals, law enforcement officers and social workers). Rather than relying solely on academic qualifications, the selection process should be holistic. In addition to baseline educational qualifications, the selection process should also seek to identify individuals with the right aptitude and passion for a long-term career in family and criminal practice. Selection should also take into account the current ability of the candidate rather than rely on their historical academic record.

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- b. To accommodate the needs of mature or working students, ULS's curriculum should be credit-based and modular. Students should have the flexibility to complete the LL.B. within four to six years, or within three to six years for the J.D. (for those with prior degrees).
- c. The Committee recommends that the ULS curriculum be practice-oriented to ensure that ULS graduates can "hit the ground running". In addition to a solid foundational content in the specialist subjects, there should also be a strong emphasis on multi-disciplinary teaching, clinical components and applied learning at all stages in the curriculum, culminating in a six-month Practicum in the final year. During the Practicum, students will provide legal services to clients under close supervision and guidance from qualified persons, allowing them to apply what they have learnt and strengthen relevant skills.
- d. Having regard to the need for practitioners to upgrade and enhance their skills, ULS should also make its courses available to practitioners in the form of a FLPC and a CLPC.
- e. Additionally, individuals not pursuing a degree could be allowed to take standalone modules offered in the ULS law programme to deepen their knowledge in family and criminal law, for their personal development or to complement their work. This will be helpful for non-lawyers who work in related fields e.g. law enforcement officers or social workers.

### The ULS Law Degree Programme

11.



ULS will offer a law degree programme that will lead to the conferral of a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) when read as a first degree, or a Juris Doctor (J.D.) when read as a second degree.

### Holistic Selection

12.



Admissions. ULS should have a holistic admissions process aimed at identifying candidates who not only meet baseline academic criteria and but who also have the following qualities: an aptitude for legal studies and practice, a genuine desire to work in family and criminal law, a predisposition towards community service, as well as the maturity and resilience to handle the psychological and emotional demands of legal practice in these fields.

13. Student Profile. At least 80% of ULS's intake should be set aside for mature candidates (with no upper age limit) who have at least two years of work experience, while up to 20% of the intake may comprise junior college or polytechnic graduates without work experience if they are able to demonstrate talent and commitment to the ideals and objectives of ULS.

14. Admission Process. The SC recommends a two-stage admissions process to ensure baseline substantive ability and overall suitability:

#### Stage One

- a. Candidates should first meet baseline educational qualifications and demonstrate ability for the practice of law through one of two possible eligibility routes:
  - i. Route 1, by attaining satisfactory scores on a standardised

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law aptitude test such as the Law National Aptitude Test (“LNAT”) which will also assess English language proficiency; or

- ii. Route 2, by taking the Introduction to Basic Family and Criminal Law course<sup>4</sup> which will be offered by ULS and obtaining a minimum grade therein.

### Stage Two

- b. Applicants who clear the eligibility test via Route 1 or Route 2 will then proceed to Stage Two, at which ULS will apply holistic selection criteria to identify the most suitable candidates from the pool of eligible applicants, e.g. in the form of Admissions Interviews and a Personal Statement from the student on their aspirations and motivations for wishing to study law. Factors such as the candidate’s involvement in community work may be taken into account at this stage, although ULS will have discretion as to how much weight to give to the candidate’s historical academic track record.
15. The Selection Panel should include ULS academics, law practitioners and other relevant representatives from the legal community. The ULS Dean should have the final say in admissions.
  16. Student Intake. The SC recommends that the initial intake of ULS should be 50 - 60 students (the size of two typical UniSIM classes) and, in keeping with the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee’s proposal, progressively increase to an annual intake of 75 students as ULS develops its capabilities.

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<sup>4</sup> If UniSIM requires some time to develop this course, the Preparatory Course (which is a compulsory course for all candidates of the LL.B. and J.D. programme) can be used in its place.

## Curriculum Matters

17.



The Steering Committee accepts the CC's proposals for the ULS law degree's curriculum, which aims to provide students with a general foundation for the practice of law, but with a specific focus on family and criminal law practice.

18. The curriculum will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach in order to sensitise students to non-legal dimensions of legal practice and alternative dispute resolution possibilities, and feature a strong applied focus component to allow students to apply theoretical concepts to real-life situations they will encounter in practice.
19. As with UniSIM's other four year-equivalent undergraduate degree programmes, ULS students will be required to complete 180 Credit Units ("CU") to graduate from the LL.B. programme. Those with a prior degree will read the law degree programme towards a J.D. instead and will only need to complete 150 CU. They will not be required to take the Elective component.
20. The ULS LL.B. curriculum will be structured into 4 components:
- a. A Preparatory Course consisting of three components designed to equip students for law school, to be undertaken by all students before commencing the law degree programme: "**Legal Writing**", "**Critical Thinking and Research**" and "**IT Essentials**";

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- b. Compulsory Courses in both law and non-law subjects considered critical for a good foundation in legal practice, especially in family and criminal law;
- c. Law and Non-Law Electives that allow deeper study into a particular aspect of criminal, family or personal law, or are complementary to the focus areas of ULS, e.g. Introduction to Counselling; and
- d. Practical Coursework consisting of a progressive series of five compulsory professional skills courses, culminating in a mandatory six-month Practicum which should involve hands-on exposure to dealing with clients, assisting with research and drafting legal arguments and taking briefs, under the close supervision of senior legal officers or practitioners.

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21. In particular, to anchor students in family and criminal law practice through early exposure to these areas, the Practicum could be offered through the establishment of a "Student Law Office" ("SLO"), where students would have practice exposure to real life assigned legal aid or criminal legal aid cases under the supervision of practitioner professors or other qualified persons. The SLO would need to work closely with the Legal Aid Bureau ("LAB") and Law Society's Criminal Legal Aid Scheme ("CLAS") on case assignments.
22. Alternatively, if tapping on existing legal institutions were preferred, a "Legal Clerkship Programme" ("LCP") could be established to place ULS students in institutions that deal with family and criminal law, such as LAB, the Attorney General's Chambers ("AGC"), the Law Society's Pro Bono Services Office ("PBSO") and/or CLAS. The LCP could also identify and partner with law firms with strong practices in family and criminal law which have the capacity to take on ULS students. ULS should carefully study these possible models to decide on the Practicum model that best suits its needs.
23. In addition, students should be provided with opportunities to undertake internships and participate in international mootings and advocacy competitions in the areas of family and criminal law. While family and criminal law are primarily domestic in nature there are also international elements e.g. child abduction across national boundaries and transnational crime. It is important therefore for the students to have international exposure, so that they are attuned to international standards, trends and developments.

### Admission to the Singapore Bar

24.



As with the criteria applicable to law graduates from the National University of Singapore (“NUS”) and Singapore Management University (“SMU”), the SC recommends that ULS law graduates must achieve at least a lower second-class degree in order to qualify for admission to the Singapore Bar. They should also be required to take the Part B course and examination and undergo six months of Practice Training.

### Continuing Legal Education

25.



In order to build life-long competencies and create fresh pathways to life-long learning, the SC recommends that ULS should offer post-graduate opportunities for legal education in the form of two courses: a Family Law Practitioner’s Course (“FLPC”) and a Criminal Law Practitioner’s Course (“CLPC”).

26. Both these courses should strengthen the legal practitioner’s knowledge and skills in these areas of specialisation, and should be implemented as early as possible to complement other existing initiatives to transform the landscape of family and criminal law practice. The modules for these courses should be drawn from the compulsory and elective subjects of the ULS LL.B. curriculum. ULS could also allow non-legal practitioners, e.g. social workers or police officers, to take standalone modules for interest or to deepen their knowledge.

ULS Applied Research

27.



In the longer term, ULS should consider conducting Applied Research with a focus on Family Law Practice and Criminal Justice, drawing linkages to research in other relevant areas such as sociology and psychology where

applicable, with a view to providing thought leadership and a platform for the fellowship and engagement of field experts internationally in these fields. It should also aim to seed relevant research projects with practical outcomes that will lead to sound, ethical and compassionate practice, and which can also inform policy-making.

28. To benefit from the synergies that come from data collation and the sharing of research findings, ULS should also collaborate closely with other institutions and agencies in its Applied Research, such as the Courts, the Ministry of Home Affairs (“MHA”) and the Ministry of Social and Family Development (“MSF”), tapping on research grants where available.

29. However, ULS should also endeavour to develop its own revenue streams to fund research, such as through executive or continuing education programmes, international seminars and conferences featuring distinguished speakers in its fields of expertise, as well as innovative platforms for outreach to prospective students overseas who may wish to participate in its range of programmes.

### Management Structure

30.  As a new school within UniSIM, ULS will be integrated into the university's existing organisational and management structure.



31. The SC recommends that ULS should appoint a Dean and at least one Vice-Dean to oversee administrative and curriculum matters. ULS should also appoint a Curriculum Advisory Board (“CAB”) to oversee curriculum matters, such as reviewing the content periodically and aligning it with international best practices, and to serve as a bridge between the law school and the legal industry.
32. The ULS CAB should include representatives from the State Courts, the Family Justice Courts, the Law Society, AGC, the Ministry of Law, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs or law enforcement services, the Family Bar and the Criminal Bar.

### Location of ULS

33.  The SC recommends that, if feasible, ULS should be co-located with the State Courts and/or the Family Justice Courts. This will immerse the students in the right environment at the outset, while promoting collaboration with these Courts and enabling the students to see the law in action.



It will also facilitate having judicial officers and practitioners as adjunct faculty.

Conclusion

34.



The SC hopes that through its recommendations, ULS will be a law school that will produce family and criminal lawyers of a high calibre and aptitude who are prepared and well-equipped for the rigours and demands of modern practice,

while providing an accessible avenue for suitable mature persons seeking a mid-career switch to legal practice, particularly in the areas of family and criminal law. It is hoped that the enhanced legal services that ULS will introduce to the community will be a significant step forward for the legal sector and its role within Singapore's society.

35.

ULS will be a law school with a difference, to make a positive difference in the lives of Singaporeans. Given the nature of family and criminal practice and their impact on the lives of individuals, ULS's mission should be to produce lawyers who embrace the core values of "Justice, Excellence and Compassion"—lawyers with a sound grasp of the law who have a strong sense of justice and a heart for their fellow man and who will be at the forefront of promoting access to justice in Singapore.

**Composition of the Steering Committee for the Establishment of ULS**

**Chairperson**

Ms Indranee Rajah, S.C.<sup>5</sup> Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Finance and  
Ministry of Law

**Members (Names listed in alphabetical order)**

Mr Subhas Anandan<sup>6</sup> Senior Partner, RHTLaw Taylor Wessing  
Prof Cheong Hee Kiat President, UniSIM  
Ms Foo Siew Fong Partner, Harry Elias Partnership LLP  
Mr Raja Kumar<sup>7</sup> Deputy Secretary (International), MHA  
Mr Lam Yi Young Deputy Secretary (Policy), MOE  
Mr Noor Mohamed Marican Marican and Associates; President, Association of  
Muslim Lawyers (Singapore)  
Mr Poon Hong Yuen<sup>8</sup> Chief Executive, SPRING Singapore  
Mr See Kee Oon<sup>9</sup> Presiding Judge, State Courts  
Mr Amarjeet Singh SC Senior Consultant, KhattarWong and Partners  
Mr Narayanan Sreenivasan SC Managing Director, Straits Law Practice LLC  
Mr Tai Wei Shyong<sup>10</sup> Director, MHA

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<sup>5</sup> Ms Indranee Rajah was appointed the Chairperson of the Steering Committee in her capacity as Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Law. Following the 2015 General Election, she relinquished her education portfolio, and was appointed Senior Minister of State for Finance in conjunction with her Ministry of Law portfolio on 1 October 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Mr Subhas Anandan passed away on 7 January 2015. During his time on the ULS Steering Committee, Mr Subhas contributed valuable insights informed by his extensive work at the Criminal Bar., and the Steering Committee wishes to recognise the special effort he made to attend and contribute despite his ill-health at the time. His untiring lifelong promotion of pro bono services and belief in fair representation for the accused embodied the core values of ULS.

<sup>7</sup> Mr Raja Kumar was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in his capacity as Deputy Commissioner (Policy), Singapore Police Force. Mr Kumar was appointed Deputy Secretary (International), Ministry of Home Affairs, on 1 January 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Mr Poon Hong Yuen was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in his capacity as Deputy Secretary (Law). Mr Poon was appointed Chief Executive of SPRING Singapore on 1 November 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Mr See Kee Oon was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in his capacity as Chief District Judge. Mr See was appointed Presiding Judge, State Courts on 14 April 2014.

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Ms Valerie Thean J.C.<sup>11</sup> Presiding Judge, Family Justice Courts

**Secretariat (Ministry of Law)**

Ms Gloria Lim Director, Legal Industry Division  
Ms Wong Li Tein<sup>12</sup> Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division  
Ms Eunice Tan<sup>13</sup> Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division  
Dr Ellis See<sup>14</sup> Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division  
Ms Lum Pooi-Fun Senior Assistant Director, Legal industry Division  
Ms Melissa Gay Assistant Director, Community Legal Services  
Division  
Ms Grace Soh<sup>15</sup> Assistant Director, Legal industry Division  
Ms Elaine Chew<sup>16</sup> Assistant Director, Policy Advisory Division

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<sup>10</sup> Mr Tai Wei Shyong was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in his capacity as Chief Prosecutor, State Prosecution, AGC. Mr Tai was appointed Director, Ministry of Home Affairs, on 1 April 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Ms Valerie Thean was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in her capacity as Deputy Secretary (Law). Ms Thean was appointed Judicial Commissioner on 1 October 2014 and Presiding Judge, Family Justice Courts on 1 November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Until 30 September 2014.

<sup>13</sup> From 2 September 2014 to 30 June 2015.

<sup>14</sup> From 1 July 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Until 11 March 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Until 13 November 2014.

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### Composition of the Curriculum Committee

#### Chairperson

Ms Valerie Thean J.C.<sup>17</sup> Presiding Judge, Family Justice Courts

#### Members (Names listed in alphabetical order)

Mr Mathavan Devadas <sup>18</sup>	Consultant, Tito Isaac & Co. LLP
Ms Joan Janssen	2Director-General, MinLaw
Prof Leong Wai Kum	Professor, Law Faculty, NUS
Ms Lim Hui Min <sup>19</sup>	Director, Legal Aid Bureau
Dr Sudha Nair	Executive Director, Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVE)
Ms Debbie Ong, J.C. <sup>20</sup>	Judicial Commissioner, Supreme Court of Singapore
Mr David Quark	Executive Director, SILE
Mr Tai Wei Shyong <sup>21</sup>	Director, MHA
Prof Tsui Kai Chong	Provost, UniSIM
Mr Gregory Vijayendran	Partner, Rajah and Tann Singapore LLP

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<sup>17</sup> Ms Valerie Thean was first appointed Chairperson of the ULS Curriculum Committee in her capacity as DS(Law). Ms Thean was appointed Judicial Commissioner on 1 October 2014 and Presiding Judge, Family Justice Courts on 1 November 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Mr Mathavan Devadas was first appointed a ULS Curriculum Committee member in his capacity as Head, Law Programme Section (currently known as the Diploma in Law & Management), Temasek Polytechnic.

<sup>19</sup> Ms Lim Hui Min was first appointed a ULS Curriculum Committee member in her capacity as Director, Legal Services Unit, MSF. Ms Lim was appointed Director, Legal Aid Bureau on 13 April 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Ms Debbie Ong was first appointed a ULS Curriculum Committee member in her capacity as Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore. Ms Ong was appointed Judicial Commissioner on 1 October 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Mr Tai Wei Shyong was first appointed a ULS Steering Committee member in his capacity as Chief Prosecutor, State Prosecution, AGC. Mr Tai was appointed Director, Ministry of Home Affairs, on 1 April 2015.

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**Secretariat (Ministry of Law)**

Ms Gloria Lim	Director, Legal industry Division
Ms Wong Li Tein <sup>22</sup>	Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division
Ms Eunice Tan <sup>23</sup>	Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division
Dr Ellis See <sup>24</sup>	Deputy Director, Legal Industry Division
Ms Lum Pooi-Fun	Senior Assistant Director, Legal industry Division
Ms Melissa Gay	Assistant Director, Community Legal Services Division
Ms Grace Soh <sup>25</sup>	Assistant Director, Legal industry Division
Ms Elaine Chew <sup>26</sup>	Assistant Director, Policy Advisory Division

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<sup>22</sup> Until 30 September 2014.

<sup>23</sup> From 2 September 2014 to 30 June 2015.

<sup>24</sup> From 1 July 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Until 11 March 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Until 13 November 2014.