Grads must be creative thinkers: New NUS law dean

He wants students to engage in deep debates, and have soft skills to work with various people.

By Amelia Tan

Professor Simon Chesterman has been named the new dean of the National University of Singapore (NUS) law school after more than 50 candidates were considered for the job.

His appointment takes effect on Jan 1 next year.

The 39-year-old Australian, currently the law school’s vice-dean of graduate studies, joined NUS in 2007 as director of the New York University (NYU) School of Law Singapore Programme.

At a press conference yesterday, he outlined what he wanted to achieve. He said NUS needs to ensure that its graduates are not just good technical lawyers, but also creative thinkers with the soft skills to work with people from different backgrounds.

“If you just lecture to our students here, they are all very bright, they will understand what you say and they work out how to be examined. But if you want them to challenge you, you need to draw them out.”

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

“Professor Simon Chesterman will bring fresh ideas and new energy to the school and has the confidence and support of my colleagues and the student community,” Professor Tan Cheng Han, 46, who has headed the NUS law school for 10 years and is the longest-serving dean, said.

“The reasons not to run had disappeared. Then I started thinking about why I might want to do this. And I suppose the first thing is that I’ve enjoyed building institutions.”

He added: “It’s got the reputation of being the best law school in Asia.”

He is not the first foreigner to head the NUS law school. For example, British professor Geoffrey W. Bartholomew headed it from 1966 to 1968.

NUS provost Tan Eng Chye said a search committee identified about 60 possible candidates from countries such as the United States, Britain and Australia. Internally, Professor Chesterman was chosen from three potential nominees.

Professor Tan said: “Given his international credentials and his keenness in research, especially in the area of intelligence and international law, Professor Chesterman has the necessary experience and drive to make one of the top law schools in Asia even better.”

NUS law school takes in about 250 undergraduates a year. The Singapore Management University also offers law programmes.

amellan@spk.com.sg