

# Helping NUS law grads stay relevant

That's what the faculty's broad-based survey intends to do, says dean

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FIFTY may be seen by many as an opportune age to have a makeover, and Singapore's first law school might just be undergoing one very soon.

Having recently passed the half-century mark this year, the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Law is now conducting a brand assessment and audit to identify the strengths of its graduates and curriculum, and more importantly, if there are major flaws that need to be fixed.

The school is also zeroing in on whether its graduates have broader skills – beyond just a legal background – for which employers are increasingly on the lookout.

The rolling out of such a major review by NUS coincides with the Singapore Management University's (SMU) launch of its own law degree, with its special focus on corporate law, last month.

But in an interview with TODAY, NUS dean Professor Tan Cheng Han (picture), 42, played down the notion, saying: "Principally,

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— Prof Tan on the growing trend of firms looking out for law grads with 'a more holistic view' of the world



it is not an SMU-driven study. We do periodically have such reviews every five years or so. Certainly, every time you are faced with competition, it is also good to ask if there is more we can do and how to improve."

And with this being his third and final three-year term as dean, Prof Tan said it was his intention to bequeath the school to his successor in the best state possible.

He said there was a growing trend of companies looking out for law graduates with "a more holistic view" of the world.

"Besides legal firms, we see our students being hired as in-house counsels if the

company has a large legal department. Or, they may work for the Government, the diplomatic service or in teaching. So, you can't be strong in just the law anymore," he said. "You need to know how to deal with people, identify issues and solve problems. But what are the specific skills that employers want? That's what we hope to find out."

Unlike previous similar studies – the last one was conducted in-house in 2002 – this time round, Prof Tan outsourced the job to a local consulting firm in June. It's part of a greater effort to "get a wider sense" of how the school is perceived.

"If we were to talk to friends in the industry ourselves, they might be polite in their feedback. But with an independent body, we hope people will not sugarcoat their words. We want to hear everything they have to say, both good and bad," he said.

Questions in the study include asking companies why they hired an NUS law graduate as part of their team, what degree of importance they place on someone with a double degree, and if they preferred someone strong in Asian or foreign law, or both. The findings of the study are expected to be ready by the middle of next month.

Lawyers such as counsel Chia Boon Teck said it was a "proactive step" on the part of the NUS law school and said it would help companies and fresh graduates find the right match for each other.

"In this day and age, it is no longer enough to churn out graduates who are taught skills that do not quite meet market needs," he said, praising the school for "keeping abreast of issues" and acting on them.

The law school's study is the latest in a slew of measures to make it more attractive to students and employers. Some new programmes include a new double-degree in life sciences and a tie-up with New York University, where students will graduate with a Bachelor's and Master's degree.