

## UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGES ACT 2018

# Amendments to create democratic leaders

Changes to acts signal students that they are 'released from their shackles'

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**T**HE Dewan Rakyat has unanimously passed an amendment to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) 1971 after its second and third readings by Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik in Parliament on Monday.

Maszlee said the amendment, which led to the abolition of Section 15(2)(c) of the Act, would give freedom to students to get involved in campus politics and voice out their stand.

Also approved at the same sitting were two other amendments — one to the Educational Institutions (Discipline) Act (EIDA) 1976 and the other to the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act (PHEIA) 1996.

Speaking on the amendments yesterday, Maszlee said the ministry was committed to abolishing the provisions that prevented political activities within campuses.

The amendments, mainly to abolish Section 15(2)(c) of UUCA 1971, which banned students from being involved in politics, were well received by the majority at Parliament after its second and third reading.

Maszlee said they were a starting point rather than an end to the abolition of the act, which was expected to be implemented in 2020.

"These amendments were made to build future generations and leaders who are democratic, as well as to manifest the implementation of greater change.

"Although they involve only a section, they eliminate the culture that held students back (from participating in politics) and gives a clear signal to them that they are released from their shackles," said Maszlee, who is Simpang Renggam member of parliament.

He said the abolition Section 15(2)(c) of UUCA was in line with the political transformation undertaken by the government in strengthening the institutions of democracy,



Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik says his ministry is committed to abolishing any provision under the law that bars students from participating in politics in campus.

especially in giving room for university students to speak and engage in political activities.

Section 15(2)(c) of UUCA refers to barriers for university students to engage in political activities within campus. It was passed by Parliament following a unanimous vote by members of the lower house of Parliament.

"Apart from it, two other acts that were amended to allow students to take part in political activities campus are the removal of subsection (c) of Section 47 (2) of PHEIA and subsection (c) of Section 10 (2) of EIDA."

On Monday, Maszlee said the amendments were just the beginning, as the ministry hoped to repeal the acts by 2020, adding that a committee was looking into the matter.

"This unanimous move is the ministry's first step towards promoting political freedom, democracy and good leadership, while reassuring students of their rights."

He said any ongoing disciplinary action against students for participating in on-campus political activities under the acts would be discontinued with immediate effect, adding that the amendments were the culmination of the promise made by the government.

Maszlee tabled the three bills for first reading on Dec 4.

Before the passing of the bills, he said the amendments were the start of a widening of the democratic

space for students of higher learning institutions to create future democratic leaders.

He said the amendments created a history, especially to students who were finally given the freedom to take part in political activities on campus.

He said he hoped that students took advantage of this opportunity with utmost responsibility.

"The government is committed to eliminating UUCA to raise the standards of universities and students.

"This is in line with the ministry's intention to produce balanced graduates, who can express their opinions on current issues.

"Political transformation brought by the government reinforces democratic institutions, especially in giving students the freedom to engage in political activities within the campus."

Prior to this, UUCA had its last amendment in 2012. It was tightened to curtail student activism following the Baling Protests in December 1974.

In the protest, thousands of university students had demonstrated in Baling, Kedah, to show their support for rubber tappers, who were struggling to earn a living after the collapse of global rubber prices.

After 1975, amendments were not only made to UUCA, but also to other laws to widen the restrictions to students at public and private institutes of higher learning.

## WHAT UNIVERSITIES SAY:



Students will get an early exposure to politics while they are still studying. They can differentiate between what is good from bad in a political situation. I think abolishing UUCA Section 15 (2) (c) is good.

Professor Dr Ir Noor Azuan Abu Osman  
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Abolishing these provisions are important if we want to associate with top foreign universities, because we find that students at these institutions are free to voice their views and actively participate in campus politics. It broadens up the students' horizons. Political exposure at campuses can be used as a platform that provides young people a positive input, and ultimately contribute to the nation's leadership.

Professor Dr Durrishah Idrus  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (student affairs)



I support the amendments on UUCA Section 15 (2) (c) because they provide students with opportunities, as well as sharpen their thinking skills. By participating in campus politics, this gives students good exposure within and outside other universities and daily activities.

Professor Dr Mohd Roslan Sulaiman  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

## FACTBOX

The three amendments passed by the Dewan Rakyat involving students participation in politics are:

- 1) UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGES ACT (UUCA) 1971,
- 2) PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ACT (PHEIA) 1996,
- 3) EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (DISCIPLINE) ACT (EIDA) 1976.

The first amendment is to remove subsection (c) of Section 15 (2) of UUCA, which previously banned students from taking part in political party activities within the grounds of universities and colleges.

The second amendment is to remove subsection (c) Section 47 (2) of PHEIA, which previously banned students from partaking in political activities on private higher educational institutions campus.

The third amendment is to remove subsection (c) of Section 10 (2) of EIDA, to give students the right to get involved in political activities on campus.

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