

UUCA And Act 605 Allow, Not Restrict, Academic Freedom With Responsibility MOA

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KUALA LUMPUR—The Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) 1971 and the Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act 2000, or Act 605, do not restrict academic freedom of expression. Rather, they function as regulatory guidelines to ensure that views are expressed responsibly. Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) chief executive officer Prof Datuk Dr Mohammad Shatar Sabran said the perception that both Acts hinder academic freedom is inaccurate, as academics still have ample space to raise feedback, ideas and opinions to strengthen the nation's higher education system.

He said every organisation requires clear policies and guidelines to ensure responsibilities are carried out in an orderly manner and in line with its establishment goals. "UUCA and Act 605 were not created to suppress freedom of speech, but to ensure that views are expressed prudently, through appropriate channels, and in a manner that benefits institutional development." However, every view must be conveyed professionally, ethically, and constructively, so that improvements can be carried out without compromising institutional interests and the nation's reputation," he said in a statement today. He was commenting on a recent BH article titled "Rombak sistem sekatan kebebasan bersuara ahli akademik" (Overhaul the system that stifles academic freedom). Mohammad Shatar said both Acts, introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education, also ensure that the operations of higher education institutions run smoothly without compromising the space for academics to express ideas, views and suggestions. "Freedom of speech does not mean freedom without limits. Every freedom comes with responsibility, and that principle applies equally to the management of higher education institutions," he said. Meanwhile, Mohammad Shatar said Malaysia is strengthening its position as an international higher education hub by attracting more international students. As such, he said the academic community must play its role as higher education ambassadors by showcasing the strengths, achievements and uniqueness of local institutions to the global community. He added that while the country's higher education system still has room for improvement, various achievements by local institutions should be highlighted to boost global confidence in the quality of Malaysia's higher education. "Academics should take a leaf from the bee, which constantly seeks out sweetness to produce beneficial honey, rather than the fly, which fixates on rot even when surrounded by other beneficial things." Criticism is always welcome, but let it be constructive and responsible, ultimately elevating the dignity of our higher education, rather than diminishing it," he said.

