

HIGHER EDUCATION

VARITIES DEVELOP FUTURE LEADERS

ARE leaders born or made? This is an age-old question that has been researched and argued time and again. I believe there are leadership skills and qualities that can be cultivated through the higher education experience. It is a time for youngsters to explore new ideas, meet people of different backgrounds and negotiate their wants and needs.

The most priceless lesson is learning how to think, not what to think. It is the higher education experience in its entirety that teaches this, a nuanced process that develops and refines leadership characteristics and skills.

The Higher Education Ministry has always been supportive of cultivating towering personalities. To facilitate this, the ministry has been organising meetings for the National Student Representative Council since 1999.

That's a platform for student leaders to table ideas for the country's development agenda, allowing direct involvement in the legislative function of our democracy, connecting student leaders from various universities and the nation's leaders.

The council consists of student leaders from 20 public universities, 19 private higher education institutions, one polytechnic, one community college and one teacher training



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ing institute. Since its inception, 97 proposals have been written and presented by student leaders from higher education institutions.

On June 30 last year, 11 agendas and proposals were presented to the prime minister and accepted for implementation based on their appropriateness and the needs of the

current times. Four out of the 11 have been executed by ministry, including the establishment of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) special committee with students, allowing them to discuss outstanding issues regarding the PTPTN application and payment with the higher management of the ministry

and higher education institutions.

Second, the improvement in Internet access to facilitate implementation of online teaching and learning activities.

Third is the Penjana Career Development Programme, which facilitates graduate employability through upskilling and reskilling programmes with collaborations with the industry.

Finally, the housing rental for students programme that includes the establishment of an off-campus student management unit, a guideline for off-campus student management and the development of a student housing portal to ensure the sustainability of off-campus student management.

The remaining seven initiatives that will be launched in the near future are the Prihatin Siswa Card, Student Welfare Foundation, MyBrain Empowerment, National Student Leadership Training programme, campus elections, student parliament and student empowerment initiatives.

We are entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where smart technology, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, has impacted our lives.

With this in mind, the 21st National Student Representative Council meeting on March 16 will witness

three agenda and proposal presentations relating to the application of modern technology — the House Rental Scheme, future-proofing of the Malaysian agricultural industry and technology integration for the improvement of health management of Malaysians.

With two workshops conducted to coach students on the best practices of proposal writing and effective presentation skills, the meeting will showcase fresh ideas from our younger generation.

The success of previous National Student Representative Council meetings are proof that when we teach the future generation how to think, they become capable of developing substantial opinions and skills to analyse a wide range of issues. It is through this exercise that innovative ideas are born.

The Higher Education Ministry is committed to shaping the minds of our future leaders to embody the issues they care about and work towards addressing them by making the changes they want to see in society. The ministry is invested in not merely cultivating future leaders, but also in developing the type of leaders that our world wants and needs.

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