

LABOUR

Shortage of engineers 'to draw expats'

DUMRONGKIAT MALA

Thailand's chronic shortage of skilled engineers could result in an increasing number of professionals coming from overseas to plug the gap, an academic says.

Panavy Pookaiyaudom, dean of the Faculty of Engineering at Mahanakorn University of Technology (MUT), said that Thailand was now facing an acute shortage of engineering graduates as universities and colleges can only produce 33,000 engineers a year, while the national workforce requires at least 50,000 a year.

"The shortage can be seen across all broad engineering disciplines — electrical, mechanical, civil and chemical," he said.

Mr Panavy said domestic demand for engineers is expected to rise in the coming years due to the government's massive infrastructure plans and the Thailand 4.0 policy to turn the nation into a high-income country.

"Now that Thailand has unveiled its 4.0

economic model to develop the country into a valued-based economy, the need for skilled labour, especially engineering skills, will become critical," he said.

If the number of engineering graduates can't meet market needs, more foreign experts may need to be brought in to ease the shortage.

For a long-term solution, Mr Panavy suggested boosting children's interest in engineering. He also urged the private sector to get more involved in developing curricula and providing work experience for university students to raise Thai workers' potential to meet the challenges ahead.

Mr Panavy said engineers also need to develop soft skills such as being able to communicate effectively in a variety of situations, and showing initiative and creativity, not just technical skills.

"We need to change the way we prepare our students. Universities cannot just focus on lectures and exams, leaving students under-prepared to enter today's workforce because we are in a world that is changing faster than ever before," he said.

Mr Panavy said low proficiency among Thais in foreign languages, especially English, will be another challenge for competing on the international stage.

"So, educational institutions need to equip their students with language skills as well," he said.

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