Firms take students to next level

Nguyen Hanh

Vu Nguyen Tien Dung, a 23-year-old student in Hung Yen province, dreams of working in modern mechatronic production lines after graduating from university.

“That’s my career dream,” said Dung, the eldest son of a farmer family. “Mechatronics is now a fledgling industry in Vietnam, but it will develop strongly in future like developed countries.”

However, Dung is aware that local university education is, more often than not, theory-biased. And sadly for Dung, this method of learning is not in vogue with potential employers.

Thus, joining a technical industrial apprenticeship programme, under which theoretical education at school and practical training at companies are combined for students, is the ticket for Dung.

“I think if we are selected for a dual education programme we will not have to be retrained as with many new graduates,” Dung told VIR, as he witnessed the signing of a cooperation deal between German companies B.Braun and Messer and Hung Yen University of Technology and Education last week in Hung Yen province.

The target of the deal is to train high-qualified mechatronics engineers to operate technical machines.

The three-year programme will commence in September this year. Initially, 15 Hung Yen University students will be selected for training at B.Braun and Messer factories. The apprentices will have salaries and be later employed as mechatronics engineers by the two firms.

I think there are some mismatches in the education system here.

- Jonathan Catahan
  General director of B.Braun Vietnam

B.Braun and Messer are determined to build up a core of highly skilled mechatronic workforce in Vietnam.

“B.Braun and Messer will be pioneers, while looking for other companies foreign and Vietnamese, to join this programme. We want to see at least 30-60 students enjoying dual training every year,” said Frank Hopfenbach, country manager of Messer Group in Vietnam, an industrial gas production and solution supplier.

Messer has a filling plant for cylinder gases in Haiphong and an air separation unit in Hai Duong province, two filling plants in Binh Duong and Vung Tau provinces and a CO2-recovery plant in Binh Phuoc province.

Hopfenbach said Messer would invite local steel-maker Hoa Phat to join the programme. Hoa Phat, a key customer of Messer, is one of the biggest employers in Vietnam.

The German Business Association in Vietnam (GBA) has also been doing its bit to get more buy-in from other firms, with Mercedes-Benz, Pepperl+Fuchs, Puma and Metro Cash & Carry receptive so far.

A dire shortage of skilled engineers, technicians and workers is a headache to many foreign manufacturing companies in Vietnam, with US technology giant Intel’s chip assembly plant in Ho Chi Minh City a typical case.

B.Braun Vietnam, a leading manufacturer of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment in Hanoi, has the same concerns, as it aims to double the capacity of its existing plant by 2015 which requires an additional 100 engineers and technicians.

B.Braun plans to take 12 Hung Yen University students per year to train who will be “part of the company’s growth”.

“I think there are some mismatches in the education system here. A lot of developing countries including Vietnam face the issue of students flocking to areas like finance. But in a growing country where industry plays a bigger and bigger part we’ll need more engineers, more technicians and also people in business sciences. And this is where we see the lack of workers,” Jonathan Catahan, general director of B.Braun Vietnam, told VIR.

“Naturally companies like us will pick students coming from faculties of engineering or chemistry or sciences, it’s our conclusion that they have very few skills when they come to work,” he said.

German-invested B.Braun Vietnam, which produces push belts for continuous variable transmission (CVT) in automobiles at a southern Dong Nai province plant, signed a similar deal with Dong Nai-based LILAM Technical and Technol College. This project will commence in October, 2013, with a minimum of 30 apprentices.