IT grads don't meet industry expectations

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia may lose out in the information technology sector if it does not address a shortage of skilled workers.

The widening gap between the demand for such workers and their availability was an immediate problem that should be tackled to allow Malaysia to maintain leadership in the field.

A recent study found Malaysia experiencing a significant skilled worker shortfall of 4,200 this year, with the figure expected to increase to 8,100 by 2009.

The worst-hit areas would be wireless networking, voice over internet protocol and network security.

The study, commissioned by Cisco Systems, had 55 per cent of respondents finding it difficult to find networking engineers in Malaysia with the right skills for their organisations.

Ironically, Malaysia churns out thousands of graduates each year, out of which a huge number are unemployed as they do not measure up to industry expectations.

A positive finding in the study entitled "Staffing Asia Pacific's Growing Networking Infrastructure: Are Organisations in for a Challenge?" was that 73 per cent of respondents felt that vendor certifications will become increasingly valuable in the future.

The study identified a widening gap between the demand for skilled networking professionals and the number available throughout the Asia-Pacific region (excluding Japan).

Cisco Systems (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd managing director Kumaran Singaram said a training programme could be adopted by institutions of higher learning to ensure graduates were well-equipped with the proper IT skills.

He said Cisco had developed a Networking Academy Programme which could be incorporated into the curriculum of local universities.

"The programme has been established in Malaysia since 2001 and it prepares students for several professional qualifications such as Cisco Certified Networking Associate (CCNA), IT Essentials, and soon Network Security.

"We have been in dialogue with the Higher Education Ministry and the Human Resource Ministry to see how the programme can be further used here," he said.

The programme is already being used in 60 education academies, including Universiti Teknologi Mara, Multimedia University, Politeknik Shah Alam, Universiti Kuala Lumpur and Universiti Malaya.

Kumaran said the latest technologies were being constantly introduced especially in the IT industry, but higher education institutions moved at a much slower pace when incorporating the new findings in their curriculum.