

Civil Engineer	Northern Territory
ANZSCO Code: 2332-11	March 2009
Labour market rating	Shortage
Comment Senior Engineering positions are particularly difficult to fill	

Occupational demand

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data show there were 156 civil engineers employed in the Northern Territory (NT) in 2006, a marginal decline on the 2001 count of 162. The value of engineering construction work done in the NT increased throughout 2008 (ABS 8762.0), after declining during 2007, to surpass 2006 levels. The NT Government spending on infrastructure programs has grown each year since 2001 and over the last two years increased by 62 per cent to \$887 million, with a further increase budgeted for 2009-10. The NT has, at least initially, been somewhat shielded from the global economic crisis and its impact on engineering demand. DEEWR's Skilled Vacancy Index shows there have been frequent advertised vacancies for civil engineers over the past four years (2005 to 2008), an indication of recruitment problems for an occupation of this size.

Occupational supply

Charles Darwin University offers a Bachelor and Master of Engineering with civil, electrical, electronic, and mechanical engineering streams. Enrolments have historically been low; however, the number of enrolments has increased significantly since 2004 and in 2008 there were 130 engineers in training. Increased enrolments have yet to translate into increased completions which have remained below 10 per year. Some employers reported the lack of graduates has caused them to decrease graduate intake numbers although others have cut back graduate recruitment in response to the current economic conditions.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

The majority of employers contacted had difficulty filling civil engineering positions with only 46 per cent of vacancies filled. However, this was an improvement over the 2008 fill rate of 27 per cent. Typically, there were multiple applicants per vacancy but few (7 per cent) were considered suitable. Mostly, unsuitable applicants lacked the specific work experience required for particular roles. Many international candidates were also considered unsuitable because they lacked knowledge of Australian standards and regulations.

Employers commonly said demand for civil engineers had either slowed down (but not to the level of their interstate offices) or remained the same, with a shift from mining and minerals to government, education and main roads work. The effect of government economic stimulus measures on demand for engineers may be limited as projects often need to avoid detailed design stages to meet strict time deadlines. Most of the positions advertised were for existing roles to replace turnover of staff.

Employers consistently said supply issues were a major problem, particularly for senior civil engineering roles. Most said they had trouble attracting candidates to the NT which is commonly considered a less desirable location because of its small size and remoteness. Wage pressures did remain a significant issue for some employers. However, others were offering reduced rates of pay due to the current economic conditions. A high staff turnover was not considered a problem with employers commenting that current engineering employees tended to be stable in their roles.

Labour market outlook

The global economic crisis has affected demand for civil engineering roles across Australia, particularly in the mining and construction sectors, freeing extra supply for vacancies that do arise. Less demand interstate for these roles creates more potential to attract suitable people to the NT. Demand for civil engineers in the NT is expected to hold, and attracting people to relocate to the NT remain difficult, however, while the global economic conditions remain weak, shortages of civil engineers in the NT are expected to ease.