

Chemical Plant Operator		Queensland
ASCO Code: 4987-11	September 2006	
Labour market rating	No shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

Chemical plant operators observe and control the operation of continuous or batch processing chemical plants to produce a wide range of products. Demand for workers comes from the pharmaceutical, petrochemical, plastics, paint, explosives, industrial gases, fertiliser, pesticide, cosmetics, waste treatment, construction materials and mineral processing industries. The level of demand depends on the levels of activity and profit within these sectors, the volume of similar products imported from other countries, and government controls on chemical manufacturing. Demand for chemical plant operators has grown in recent years due to strong interest and investment in the mining and mineral processing industries, and to solid capital investment across most of the manufacturing sector.

Occupational supply

Historically, most Queensland employers required little more than a Year 10 education when recruiting new chemical plant operators, but in recent years some employers have been seeking applicants with experience and/or tertiary qualifications. There is an established three year traineeship for this occupation in Queensland, based on a Certificate III in Process Plant Operations. This traineeship has been offered since 2001 and its formal training component is currently available through two registered training organisations located in Brisbane and Rockhampton. Data from the Queensland Department of Employment and Training show new commencements in the first four years of the traineeship totalled 18 while the number of completions during that time totalled five. In 2005, commencements increased significantly, especially in Central Queensland where well over 90 per cent of the State's registered trainees are located.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

In this year's survey of advertised vacancies for chemical plant operators in Queensland, 70 per cent were filled within four weeks of advertising. Those employers seeking skilled and experienced applicants received a large number of responses and had a 95 per cent filling rate. In all these cases applicants were already employed. Most of these employers were from the mineral resources sector, which frequently offers much higher remuneration than other areas of general chemical manufacturing, and it is likely that this accounts for their easy recruitment experiences. The majority of employers and vacancies, though, were calling for applicants with no more than a dependable work ethic and the potential to become a competent operator. These employers wanted to provide successful applicants with 'on the job' training specific to company standards. These vacancies attracted low numbers of applicants or, in some cases, no applicants, and overall one in four applicants was considered to be suitable.

Labour market outlook

Demand for chemical plant operators in Queensland is expected to increase in line with future investment and growth in the State's manufacturing sector, and with ongoing activity in the mineral resources sector. Accredited training for this occupation has not traditionally been in demand by Queensland employers but in recent years formal qualifications have been increasingly sought in some industries. The labour market for skilled and experienced chemical plant operators may tighten as more employers seek qualified applicants but, at this time, chemical plant operators are not considered to be in shortage and are unlikely to move into shortage over the next year.