Earth Science Technical Officer	South Australia
ASCO Code: 3112-13	January 2007
Labour market rating	No Shortage
Comment	

Occupational demand

Earth science technical officers are mainly employed in the business services industry, while the water industry and the government sector are also reasonably sized employers. Occupational demand may be influenced by a variety of factors, including the level of mineral exploration and engineering construction activity, along with other activities such as monitoring water treatment and quality issues. Investment in mineral exploration is currently at a record level, while SA engineering construction activity increased 10 per cent in the September quarter 2006. Anecdotal evidence indicates that demand from the mining and engineering sectors, both locally and interstate, remains firm. In addition, prevailing drought conditions have placed added importance on water testing and quality as a result of reduced water flows. Despite these positive indicators, DEEWR vacancy data show that newspaper vacancies for the broader category of science technical officers declined sharply in 2006.

Occupational supply

Entry into the occupation may be achieved via higher education, vocational education/training, or relevant work experience. Just over half of those working in the occupation have AQF Certificate III level qualifications or higher, while 35 per cent have no applicable qualification. In many cases, formal training is not mandatory. Technical officers working in the field of geoscience may undertake relevant Certificate III or Diploma level courses through TAFE. Training statistics show total completions (from both courses) numbered 13 in 2004, 8 in 2005 and 11 in 2006. However, given the variety of mechanisms available for entry into the occupation, overall supply trends are difficult to quantify.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

The majority of employers contacted for this report were cold canvassed due to the small number of recently advertised vacancies. Two employers had undertaken recruitment action in the previous six months, with one position filled and one unfilled. The latter result was due to a lack of applicants with experience compatible with the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) standards. Most of the employers contacted had no specific preference with regard to formal qualifications, indicating that basic skills could be obtained in a short period of on-the-job training, augmented with specific training modules if required. (In contrast, technical officers working in NATA accredited laboratories generally require higher level skills and training, and there is a greater likelihood that these workers will have a Certificate III level qualification or higher. Skill and experience requirements may also vary depending on the ratio of field work versus more technical laboratory testing duties.) Activity levels were described as reasonably busy, although overall staffing levels were adequate to meet current demand. Some firms indicated that they recruited additional casual staff during periods of higher than usual workload, and were generally able to do so without difficulty. There were virtually no reports of unfilled vacancies amongst the firms contacted for this report, who between them employ around 50-60 earth science technical officers. Given this situation, the labour market rating for this occupation is ‘no shortage’.

Labour market outlook

Demand for earth science technical officers may increase as a result of anticipated new mining and engineering work in South Australia over the medium term. The supply of experienced workers is unlikely to expand significantly during this period and therefore recruitment difficulties could potentially emerge.