

Metal Fabricator		Northern Territory
ASCO Code: 4122-11	August 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

ABS Census data show that there were 337 people employed in general fabrication trades (which include metal fabrication and welding) in 2001. Labour Force Survey data indicate that employment in the general fabrication trades has grown gradually over the past six years after a low in 2001. Engineering construction activity in the NT was dramatically influenced by the Wickham Point LNG plant construction and Alcan's G3 alumina refinery expansion and although the peak employing construction phases for these projects are complete, the construction and commodities industries remain strong. There have been brief periods over the past year when the labour market for metal fabricators has been less constrained in between larger projects finishing and new ones starting up, however the underlying demand has remained high.

Occupational supply

Apprenticeship commencements increased significantly in 2004 and again in 2005 for general fabrication trades and many employers contacted commented that they had or were planning to take on extra apprentices. The school based apprenticeship programmes were heralded by some employers as a great initiative and some employers noted that there seemed to be more interest in people taking up apprenticeships in the trade. This year, unlike the previous year, the majority of applicants for vacancies were local tradespeople and so there was less reliance on sourcing people from interstate. There remain a considerable number of migrant metal fabricators working in the NT and some employers are looking to sponsor more overseas tradespeople to alleviate their recruitment problems, but would prefer to be able to source local people.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Employers contacted had variable success recruiting metal fabricators with 63 per cent of vacancies being filled, a similar fill rate to the previous two years. Some employers attracted a good field of applicants, while others had difficulty generating any interest in their vacancies. Employers for higher paying mining or contractor business roles tended to fare better, compared to those looking to fill standard workshop roles.

Employers consistently commented that there were wage pressures, with locals taking advantage of the shortage and shopping around seeking better wages and conditions. It was also considered difficult to retain tradespeople in the NT due to competition coming from interstate roles. Poaching was also considered to be an issue by some employers with third or fourth year apprentices often targeted. There was also a tendency for tradespeople to switch to contractor roles.

Employers commonly commented that demand remained very strong and that further growth was restricted by the ability to take on additional skilled workers. The vacancies advertised were commonly due to a combination of staff turnover and the creation of new positions.

Labour market outlook

There is currently a greater demand for metal fabrication work than supply of tradespeople. With the construction and commodities industries set to continue strongly at least for the coming year, the trade is expected to remain in shortage. For the longer term outlook, the increase in the take up of apprenticeships should help alleviate the shortage.