

<b>Chemical Plant Operator</b>		<b>New South Wales (NSW)</b>
ASCO Code: 4987-11	September 2006	
Labour market rating	No shortage	
<b>Comment</b>		

### **Occupational demand**

Employment in the chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in NSW has been in decline over the last decade due to strong competition from imports and the movement of some production facilities to lower-cost centres interstate and overseas. The consensus of employer and industry representatives contacted for this report was that demand for chemical plant operators is currently subdued.

### **Occupational supply**

While an Australian Apprenticeship exists in process plant operation, most workers who undertake this training are existing workers rather than new entrants to the industry. Employers surveyed for this report stated that entry to the occupation is usually through on-the-job training and new entrants are recruited as they are needed. The consensus of employers was that due to declining demand and low wastage from the occupation, entry-level recruitment had been limited in recent years. Immigration is also a minor source of supply to the occupation. Data from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship show that net overseas immigration of chemical, petroleum and gas plant operators to NSW averaged only three persons a year over the past five years.

The consensus of employers was that wastage and turnover from the occupation is very low as wages and working conditions are above the average for occupations requiring a similar skill level. Several employers, however, suggested the age profile of the occupation is older than average and that wastage is likely to increase significantly over the medium term.

### **Employer and industry comments/current labour market**

All surveyed employers who had recently advertised vacancies for this occupation were successful in filling them. The majority of employers filled their vacancies with ease, in some cases receiving applications from chemists, chemical engineers and pharmacists with Australian or overseas qualifications who were wishing to break into the industry. Applicants at this level, however, were generally considered to be overqualified for plant operator positions. In most cases employers were not necessarily seeking persons with relevant formal qualifications or experience as chemical plant operators but rather applicants with an aptitude for the work and experience in a similar field, such as tradespeople or production workers from other industries. A minority of employers stated that they filled their vacancies with some difficulty, eventually recruiting workers from allied industries who required further on-the-job training. Other employers, however, reported they frequently received unsolicited applications from experienced chemical plant operators canvassing for work.

### **Labour market outlook**

The consensus of employers was that demand for this occupation would continue to be constrained by import competition and the trend towards increasing productivity in the industry. A number of medium-to-large employers surveyed were actively engaged in workforce planning to deal with the expected increase in retirements from this occupation over the medium term. No significant shortage of chemical plant operators is expected in 2007.