

Welder (First Class)		Northern Territory
ASCO Code: 4122-15	August 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment: <i>Shortage is for town based permanent roles</i>		

Occupational demand

ABS Census data show that there were 337 people employed in general fabrication trades (which includes metal fabrication and welding) in 2001. Labour Force Survey data indicate that employment in the structural steel and welding trades has grown gradually over the past five 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. DEEWR's Skilled Vacancies Index recorded a strong increase in the number of vacancies advertised for welders in 2004 and since then advertised vacancies have remained high.

Occupational supply

Apprenticeship commencements for general fabrication trades increased significantly in 2004 and have remained high in the two years since then. However, employers claimed that welding apprentices were often poor quality (in terms of education and work ethos) and unreliable. Some employers resorted to sponsoring migrant workers to cover their recruitment requirements. Employers commented that there were plenty of unqualified welders about, but a significant shortage of any welders who could pass quality tests. TIG coded and experienced aluminium welders were also particularly hard to find.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Employers contacted filled 50 per cent of advertised vacancies (a fill rate consistent with the previous year). Vacancies often did attract some applicants, however less than half (46 per cent) were considered by employers to be suitable and potentially suitable applicants commonly demanded more money than available. Many applicants were considered to be unsuitable due to poor quality welding skills and poor work ethos.

Although demand for welding work has remained high (for Darwin and remote contract work) the shortage of welders is considered to be due to a constrained supply rather than growth in jobs. Employers suggest the poor supply of welders is due to insufficient new entrants to the trade, wastage of qualified tradespeople to mining industry roles and the ageing and transience of the existing labour force. Supply is particularly constrained in Alice Springs where employers have difficulty attracting applicants for vacancies. Employers suggested that the poor supply of tradespeople led to the lowering of expectations and standards when recruiting.

Demand for welders in the NT is predominately for people able to undertake fabrication work whilst also able to complete required welds capably and employers typically aren't interested in First Class welders who only want to weld. Wages pressure is an issue for employers and high turnover rates with a shift to higher paying contract roles are common. Employers found it particularly hard to secure tradespeople for standard town based roles where the top rates weren't available. Problems also existed trying to secure contractors for short term town work as they were often busy with higher paying remote work.

Labour market outlook

The construction and commodities industries are predicted to remain strong in the coming year, keeping demand for the trade high. The difficulties in attracting additional welders is expected to remain leaving the trade in shortage.