

Building Associate	Western Australia
ASCO Code: 3121-11	November 2006
Labour market rating:	Shortage
Comment: <i>The most difficult positions to fill are those in the Mandurah region.</i>	

Occupational demand

Demand for building associates has continued to increase due to the buoyant WA economy. Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that there was an increase of 22.7 per cent in the value of all building construction work done in WA in the 12 months to June 2006, compared with the same period to June 2005. Of this, there was a 26.7 per cent increase in residential building work and an increase in non-residential building work of 16.5 per cent. The value of all building construction work remaining to be done at September 2006 was 0.2 per cent lower than the previous quarter; however, the value of approvals for residential building work was 10.1 per cent higher.

This occupation is too small for quarterly Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Force Survey figures to be reliable, however the number of building associates recorded in WA increased by 20.2 per cent to 2269 over the five years to the 2001 Census. Given the strong demand from the building industry since then, the number is likely to have increased significantly. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Skilled Vacancy Count shows that newspaper vacancies for building associates from January to November 2006 increased significantly, by 70.2 per cent, over the number for the same period last year.

Occupational supply

Building associates generally work as estimators or building site supervisors. They generally complete a Certificate IV in building or Diploma in building. Supply from such courses has declined in recent years from a peak of 43 in 2001 to 24 in 2005. Many employers are prepared to recruit people who have no formal qualifications but have gained a number of years' relevant experience. Typically, former tradespersons are ideal once they have undergone a short period of training. It is not possible to obtain separate migration statistics for building associates, but the numbers are likely to be low.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Seventy per cent of the surveyed vacancies were filled, whilst the number of suitable applicants per vacancy was 1.6. Less than a quarter (22 per cent) of the applicants were considered suitable. The main reasons applicants were unsuitable was they were had little or no experience, were not familiar with Australian building codes, or wanted higher wages than employers are prepared to pay. Employers indicated that they received a number of applications from people with a totally unrelated employment background wishing to enter the area. Responses to employer advertising was thought to be at least as difficult as it was 12 months ago. The shortage of suitable applicants was considered to be worse in the Mandurah area, which is experiencing very high building activity levels. Fifty per cent of the vacancies surveyed were for new positions, reflecting new business growth. Turnover is fairly high in the industry, with poaching common, due to the shortage of experienced estimators and site supervisors.

Virtually all employers contacted employ at least one trainee and there is no shortage of applicants for trainee positions.

Labour market outlook

Demand for building associates is likely to be maintained for at least the next six months. Although supply from course completions is probably adequate, this will not immediately alleviate the shortage of experienced estimators and site supervisors. Shortages are likely to persist over the short term.