

Welder	Tasmania
ASCO Code: 4122-15	September 2007
Labour market rating	Shortage
Comment <i>In Tasmania this trade is generally known as boilermaker/welder or metal fabricator. The term welder is generally used to refer to an unqualified person who has learnt on the job. It also may be used to refer to aluminium welders employed in the expanding shipbuilding industry in the State.</i>	

Occupational demand

At the 2001 Census there were 447 welders counted, which was marginally lower than the number recorded in 1996. However there were also 802 metal fabricators, so there are likely to be definitional issues in counting this trade as there is often little distinction made between boilermakers and welders in Tasmania. Since 2001 there has been considerable growth in metal trades generally, reflecting increases in demand, and as at May 2007 ABS estimated that there were 2700 people in the structural steel and welding trades. Demand for metal trades is associated with growth in a range of industries that require parts and services produced by metal trades people, including the mining industry, forestry, construction, manufacturing, and increasingly in Tasmania, shipbuilding. In Tasmania most metal fabrication and engineering trades are employed in the manufacturing industry, at about 64 per cent, with construction the next largest at 7 per cent. Total employment in this industry has been declining over a long period of time, but industry sources suggest that demand for higher skilled people at the trade and above level remains strong. There is also an increasing trend of tradespeople generally, working for labour hire companies, who are classified as working in the property and business services sector, even though they may be hired out to work in the manufacturing or construction industries.

Occupational supply

The number of apprentice metal fabricators commencing in 2006-07 was at its highest level since the current statistical series began in 1995. The numbers in training are also at their highest level since then and are nearly 70 per cent above what they were 10 years ago. Apprentice sheetmetal workers have been included in these figures since 2003, but they are a relatively small proportion of the total and are not responsible for the significant increases in the overall numbers. Census data shows that around 80 metal fabrication trades people arrived in Tasmania from interstate, and another five from overseas, between 1996 and 2001. However, a number of industry sources indicated that they are increasingly looking overseas for welders in the light of current recruitment difficulties.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

The only employer able to fill their vacancy in the lead up to this report advised that the successful applicant was not qualified, but had several years experience. The expansion of the shipbuilding industry and the resulting increased competition is one of the main reasons provided for why shortages exist, particularly in southern Tasmania. The main demand in the shipbuilding industry is for aluminium welders, rather than steel welders and industry sources advise it is easier to train a steel welder in aluminium welding than the other way round.

Labour market outlook

Despite significant increases in the numbers of apprentices in training, the very low percentage of vacancies filled combined with other industry comments support a rating of shortage. If the proposed pulp mill in northern Tasmania goes ahead it is expected to exacerbate current recruitment difficulties.