

Mine Deputy	New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 3129-15	March 2007
Labour market rating	Recruitment difficulty
Comment: <i>Recruitment difficulties are prevalent in the Western Coalfield and Gunnedah Basin</i>	

Occupational demand

For the purposes of this report, mine deputies include those holding the statutory positions of mine deputy in underground coal mines, examiner in open-cut mines and those holding equivalent non-statutory positions in metalliferous and other mines. Demand for mine deputies in 2006 benefited from high commodity prices, increased mining production and the opening of a number of new mines in NSW. Employment across all occupations in coal mines increased by 13 per cent in the year. Coal production increased by two per cent in 2006 following growth of four per cent in 2005. The NSW Department of Primary Industries estimates that production of gold and copper also rose.

Occupational supply

The statutory position of mine deputy requires three years of mining experience and the completion of additional certificates and examinations. The statutory position of open-cut examiner requires an appropriate formal qualification (or equivalent experience), an additional one-to-three years of experience depending on the qualification held, and the completion of further certificates and examinations. Some employers seek to develop an internal labour market for this occupation by identifying mine workers who have appropriate experience and leadership skills and encouraging them to complete the necessary certificates and examinations. The number of persons gaining the relevant certificates of competence increased to 111 in 2006, which compares with an average of 34 a year over the previous three years. The increase in persons sitting for the exams in 2006 was due to the introduction of new State laws to improve mine safety, the wider availability of preparatory courses, and the strong growth in mining employment. However, not all persons who gain a certificate of competence work in the relevant statutory position.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently attempted to recruit mine deputies found that 89 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of starting recruitment action. On average there were 2.5 applicants per vacancy and 1.5 suitable applicants per vacancy. Most employers used a combination of recruitment methods including recruitment agencies, the local and metropolitan press, and informal industry networks. Several employers ran internal training programs for interested mine workers and then chose the best performers for the available positions. While a large majority of employers were able to fill their vacancies, several expressed concern over the number and quality of applicants. The consensus of employers was that the main difficulties in filling these positions were finding experienced workers with the necessary communication and leadership skills and then encouraging them to take on the additional responsibility, as many miners perceive that the differential in pay is not adequate compensation. Nevertheless, all the surveyed employers operating in the Hunter and Southern Coalfields filled their vacancies within the survey period. Recruitment difficulties were more evident in the Western Coalfield and Gunnedah Basin which are often perceived as less attractive than mines located close to larger urban centres.

Labour market outlook

With a favourable outlook for key commodity prices and mining production over the short term, demand for mine deputies is likely to remain strong in 2007. Although the supply of persons completing the necessary certificates of competence for statutory positions continues to increase, difficulties in encouraging qualified workers to take up positions in the less popular regions of NSW are likely to persist in the short term.