

Metal Fabricator		Tasmania
ASCO Code: 4122-11	September 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment <i>In Tasmania this trade is generally known as boilermaker/welder or metal fabricator.</i>		

Occupational demand

At the 2001 Census there were 802 metal fabricators counted, which was 12.5 per cent lower than the number recorded in 1996. However there were also 447 welders, so there are likely to be definitional issues in counting this trade as there is often little distinction 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 2700 people worked 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, 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 the level recorded 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 metal fabrication trades people in the light of current recruitment difficulties.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Only 36 per cent of vacancies for boilermakers were filled in the lead up to this report, while other employers reported that the occupation was in shortage. 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. Most employers indicated that they required qualified tradespeople for their works, although some indicated they had employed unqualified but experienced welders/fabricators in the past at a lower rate of pay.

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.