

Mechanical Engineering Associate		Northern Territory
ASCO Code: 3125	January 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

ABS Census data show that there were 18 mechanical engineering associates employed in the NT in 2001. The value of building work done increased strongly in 2004, 2005 and into 2006, reaching the highest level (in chain volume measure terms) since the construction boom peak in 1998 and 1999 (ABS Building Activity; 8752.0; September Quarter 2006). Major engineering works (such as the Wickham Point LNG plant construction and the Alcan G3 refinery expansion) have had a large impact on the NT economy and the number of mining and resource projects underway in the NT has increased. The resource and construction lead economic boom in the NT is likely to have created increased demand for mechanical engineering associates.

Occupational supply

There are no local training courses available at the diploma level specifically in mechanical engineering. Employers do however recruit from related courses available at Charles Darwin University (such as the Diploma in Building Design and Drafting). Students are typically recruited prior to the completion of their course. This is due to the strong competition for quality students and employers can influence and train them in the mechanical engineering area.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Employers who had recently advertised for mechanical engineering associates had difficulty filling their vacancies, with a fill rate of 25 per cent. Although employers would have liked to increase the number of associates working for them (due to increased demand), just retaining existing numbers has proven difficult.

Vacancies are typically advertised widely, including national and interstate newspapers, on-line and posted with recruitment agencies to source applicants. However, very few applicants with suitable skills or experience were attracted to the vacancies. Employers would consider sponsoring overseas applicants, however the requirement for strong communication skills and an understanding of Australian regulations tended to make them unsuitable. Employers claimed it was hard to attract interstate applicants due to high demand also existing elsewhere in Australia.

Employers claim that some recruitment agencies have adopted headhunting techniques to source applicants for clients locally and this has bid up wages and increased turnover. Engineering firms have also lost employees to the mining industry with increased demand coming from this sector. Turnover is not as high for government engineering associate roles. However, when departures do occur resulting vacancies are sometimes unable to be filled and there has been a decline in public sector roles. Employers suggest that there is more demand than can be catered for and this has led them to be more selective and less aggressive when bidding for tenders.

Labour market outlook

Employers commented that the resources boom was set to continue and strong demand for mechanical engineering associates would prevail over the coming year. Attracting new supply is likely to remain difficult and the occupation is likely to remain in shortage for the coming year.