

Electrical Engineering Associate Professionals		Northern Territory
ASCO Code: 3123	January 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

ABS Census data show that there were 87 electrical 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 led economic boom in the NT is likely to have created increased demand for electrical engineering associates.

Occupational supply

There are no local training courses available at the diploma level specifically in electrical 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 electrical engineering area.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Employers who had recently advertised for electrical engineering associates struggled to fill their vacancies, with a fill rate of just 25 percent being achieved. Employers were often able to attract a suitable applicant, however few were able to secure them in a role due to the applicant receiving a better offer elsewhere (often from their existing employer). Although employers would have liked to be able to increase the number of associates working for them (due to increased demand), just retaining existing numbers has proven difficult.

Vacancies are typically advertised on-line and posted with agencies to source applicants. The majority of applicants tend to be from non-English speaking background countries (for example India or Pakistan) and were not considered suitable. Employers would consider sponsoring overseas applicants, however the requirement for strong English and communication skills and an understanding of Australian regulations tended to make them unsuitable. Employers claimed it was hard to attract any interstate applicants due to high demand also existing elsewhere in Australia.

A high turnover of associates is an issue for employers. Retaining interstate recruits is difficult and employers do not expect to retain employees for more than two years before they return interstate. Employers claim that recruitment agencies have adopted headhunting techniques to source applicants for clients locally and this has increased wage pressures and created some churn in positions. Construction industry and government employers have lost associates to the mining industry with increased demand coming from this sector. 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 strong demand for electrical engineering associates would remain next year due to the amount of infrastructure work still to be undertaken. Attracting new supply is likely to remain difficult and the occupation is likely to remain in shortage over the coming year.