

Earth Science Technical Officer		New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 3112-13	March 2007	
Labour market rating	No shortage	
Comment: No significant shortages are evident in either field work or laboratory work.		

Occupational demand

Earth science technical officers collect and test earth and water samples, record observations, and analyse data in support of geoscience professionals. Most are employed in mining exploration companies and consultancies, laboratories, and government agencies concerned with geoscience. There is no reliable information on the size of the workforce for this occupation since the 2001 census recorded 570 employed earth science technical officers in NSW. However, the consensus of employer and industry contacts was that employment in this occupation had increased over the last two years due to the high level of exploration activity. The value of mineral exploration in NSW increased by 54 per cent in 2006 following growth of 52 per cent the previous year.

Occupational supply

There are no formal courses in NSW designed to provide entry-level training for this occupation. Various certificate and diploma courses in surveying, laboratory technology and electronics, however, may provide some relevant skills. Most earth science technical officers are trained by employers to use specialised survey and measurement equipment and to undertake a specific set of tasks. However, as the range of task undertaken by earth science technical officers varies significantly from employer to employer, technicians may need further training when they change jobs. The consensus of employer and industry contacts was that informal training of earth science technical officers was well attuned to demand and had consequently increased over the last two years.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for earth science technical officers was conducted for this report. All surveyed vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising, with an average of four applicants per vacancy and 1.5 suitable applicants per vacancy. Employers in mineral exploration all filled their vacancies, although the degree of difficulty in filling the vacancies varied. Some employers attracted several experienced applicants after having advertised once or twice and were able to select the best of the applicants. Other employers thought the response to their advertisements was disappointing and considered themselves lucky to secure one suitable applicant. It was not uncommon for promising applicants to withdraw due to misgivings over working in remote locations or due to dissatisfaction with some aspects of the working arrangements (for example, fly-in fly-out arrangements to a number of different locations).

Employers in the laboratory sector also filled all the surveyed vacancies, although some had to fill positions through informal industry networks after having failed to secure enough suitable applicants through press advertising. Remuneration for earth science technical officers working in laboratories is lower than for field work and this may have made recruitment in this sector relatively more difficult. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not indicate a shortage in either sector.

Labour market outlook

High world prices for many key commodities are expected to continue over the short term and this should help underpin exploration activity and demand for earth science technical officers. Nevertheless, due to the variety and flexibility of entry paths to the occupation and the relatively short length of on-the-job training required, it is unlikely that a significant shortage of earth science technical officers will develop over the short-term.