

Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (Mechanical and Avionics)		Queensland
ASCO Code: 4114-11, 15	September 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

Aircraft maintenance engineers or technicians service and repair aircraft components and systems, electrical and hydraulic systems, propellers, avionics equipment, aircraft instruments and aircraft structural integrity. Employment is available in general aviation firms, domestic and international airlines, aerospace businesses and the Australian Defence Force. Demand for these trades is being generated by a sustained period of business growth and confidence in the aviation and aerospace industry. Queensland now has more than 500 aviation and aerospace businesses in operation and a number of new or expanding aircraft maintenance facilities are currently under construction.

Occupational supply

Entry to these trades is via the successful completion of a four-year apprenticeship. In this State, most students complete the theoretical component of the apprenticeship in the first year before completing practical competencies through on-the-job training. According to respondents, this training model has produced high quality technicians well before the nominal timeframe. Data from the Department of Education, Training and the Arts indicate that commencement numbers have been steadily increasing since 2004 with the first cohort of students from these increases expected to boost supply from 2007. Overseas migration may have supported supply to these trades with a net gain to Queensland of 30 self-identified technicians to the workforce each year since 2003. In an attempt to address the current shortages within the burgeoning industry a multifaceted approach by prominent aviation firms has led to the development of Australia's first dedicated aviation high school. Opening in January 2007, Aviation High provides students with a direct pathway to aviation and aerospace careers.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Only 15 per cent of vacancies for aircraft maintenance technicians were filled within four weeks of advertising. All contacts reported that it is more difficult to recruit avionics technicians than mechanical technicians and although the following trades are outside the scope of this study, employers stressed that vacancies for the related occupations of bench top technicians and structures technicians (ASCO 4114-13) were impossible to fill. Employers used a multitude of methods and advertised continuously to recruit suitable workers, but in 60 per cent of cases, they received no response. Almost 80 per cent of the applicants were deemed unsuitable because their overseas qualification did not meet Australian aviation maintenance regulations. Others did not have the specialist skills or experience needed for the advertised role. To reduce migration processing time, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority is in the process of amending Australian regulations and apprenticeship curricula to be congruent with European Aviation Safety Authority regulations. This will allow technicians from Australia and overseas to move more readily in an international labour market. Employers reported high levels of wastage from these trades with many workers 'leaving the tools' and moving into administrative positions. Others claimed that a large proportion of technicians are due to retire and with the loss of these workers, supply will be further eroded.

Labour market outlook

Demand for aircraft maintenance technicians will continue to strengthen as Queensland's aviation and aerospace industry expands and the construction of several aircraft maintenance projects near completion. At the same time, the rapidly growing industry continues to lose existing workers to retirement and other occupations and supply of new technicians from training and migration is falling well below demand. It is therefore anticipated that the current State-wide shortage of aircraft maintenance technicians in Queensland will persist in 2007-08.