

Petroleum and Gas Plant Operator		Queensland
ASCO Code: 4987-13	September 2006	
Labour market rating	No Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

The ever-growing energy needs of Queensland and Australian transport and industry have resulted in steady growth in demand for petroleum, refined petroleum products and gas over recent years. This has led to rising demand for skilled petroleum and gas plant operators. The occupation itself can be difficult to identify, with a variety of job-specific titles that depend on the particular operational practices and terminology of the workplace, and may be located near the point of extraction of the raw product or in city-based industrial plants. Petroleum and gas plant operators may have a key role in planning for and managing production runs and the skills they employ can expose them to competing demand from aligned industries, such as other chemical production.

Occupational supply

Formal training for this occupation in Queensland is available through a three year traineeship based on the Certificate III in Process Plant Operations. The traineeship is not a compulsory requirement and most employers are willing to train their operators less formally on the job if they are unable to recruit experienced workers. Data from the Queensland Department of Employment and Training indicate that there were thirty-three commencements of new traineeships and two completions in 2005, and only some of these would be working in the oil and gas industry. Generally speaking, a lack of formal training is not a barrier to employment in this occupation, while practical experience is valued by employers. The pool of experienced operators in Queensland remains overwhelmingly male-dominated.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Employers contacted for this year's survey reported that there had been a very strong response to most of their advertisements for petroleum and gas plant operators. On average, there were more than twenty suitable applicants per vacancy. Despite this, more than half of all applicants were regarded as unsuitable due to a lack of relevant qualifications or experience or, in some cases, a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Employers were not able to fill some positions due to specific job requirements but, overall, over 92% of the surveyed vacancies were filled within four weeks of advertising. Industry contacts were concerned about the future supply of new entrants to the occupation when the emphasis on recruiting experienced workers is leading to an ageing of the workforce. They claimed that a lack of marketing of the occupation has meant that young people have not chosen it as a career. Employers also identified the present resources boom as both increasing demand within the occupation and enticing skilled workers away from the oil and gas industry and into more lucrative positions in mining and minerals processing.

Labour market outlook

Continuing growth in exploration, extraction and refining of petroleum and gas in Queensland should mean that demand for skilled petroleum and gas plant operators will grow at a steady pace over the next few years. Competing demand from the growing mining and minerals processing sector will also continue to absorb experienced workers and potential new recruits. Uncertainty surrounding the Papua New Guinea gas pipeline has seen the prospects for domestic gas strengthen in Queensland, with several major coal seam gas projects secured. However, if employers maintain their present attitudes and approach to recruitment, the lack of barriers to supply makes it unlikely that shortages will appear for this occupation in the near term.