

Plumbers		New South Wales
ANZSCO Codes: 3341-11,-12,-13,-14,-15	September 2009	
Labour market ratings:	3341-11 Plumber (general) – Recruitment difficulty 3341-12 Air-conditioning and Mechanical Services Plumber – No shortage 3341-13 Drainer – No shortage 3341-14 Gasfitter – No shortage 3341-15 Roof Plumber – No shortage	
Comment: <i>Recruitment difficulties are evident for plumbers specialising in hot water systems for small and medium employers and for general plumbers in some inland towns.</i>		

Occupational demand

ABS Census, Labour Force Survey and apprenticeship data from the NSW Department of Education and Training indicates that employment of qualified plumbers in NSW grew by a solid 2.6 per cent a year between 2001 and 2006. Industry activity has been mixed since then with the real value of building work done in NSW falling by eight per cent in 2008-09 after growing by only one per cent the previous year. Engineering construction activity has been stronger, growing by 31 per cent in 2008-09, following growth of eight per cent the previous year. Demand for plumbers has also been supported by ongoing maintenance work while industry contacts indicated the recently introduced Australian government rebates for heat pump hot water systems and solar hot water systems have led to greater demand for plumbers with experience in hot water systems.

Occupational supply

Supply to this trade has been increasing in recent years, especially from apprenticeship completions which rose by 31 per cent in the two years to 2008-09. The increase in apprenticeship completions has pushed the training rate (apprenticeship completions as a percentage of employed plumbers) to 3.4 per cent a year, which is slightly above the average of 3.0 per cent for the trades as a whole. ABS Census data indicates wastage from the occupation was one per cent a year from 2001 to 2006 which was one of the lowest rates among the construction trades. The low wastage rate is in part due to the licensing requirements for the trade and the relative importance of maintenance work which helps insulate the trade from fluctuations in new building work. If wastage has continued at a similar level since 2006 then supply from local training would be sufficient to offset wastage and allow for solid employment growth. Net immigration of plumbers from overseas to NSW jumped to 118 persons in 2007-08, compared with an annual average of 67 for the previous five years. However, Census data indicates overseas immigration of plumbers from 2001 to 2006 was more than offset by a net loss of plumbers interstate. This suggests net overseas and interstate immigration is less important as a supply source to this occupation than is the case for most construction trades.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for plumbers found 82 per cent of vacancies were filled within four weeks of advertising. While this was a decrease on the success rate of 92 per cent in 2008, the consensus of employers was the response to recent advertisements was the best in a number of years. This is supported by the results of the survey, which found an average of 22 applicants and three suitable applicants per vacancy. Employers seeking plumbers for most specialisations, including maintenance plumbing, roof plumbing, mechanical services, draining and gasfitting were generally able to fill vacancies with little difficulty on either a wage or sub-contract basis. In most cases employers were able to choose the best of a number of suitable applicants and in some instances employers engaged more plumbers than they had originally intended due to the high quality of applicants.

In most cases where vacancies remained unfilled, employers received a response from qualified and experienced applicants but either considered these applicants lived too far away or failed to reach an agreement with the applicants regarding remuneration and working conditions. Nevertheless, some recruitment difficulties were evident in inland towns and for plumbers with experience in hot water systems. In the latter specialisation, recruitment difficulties were generally confined to small and medium employers. In contrast, one large employer seeking hot water plumbers was able to fill a number of vacancies with few problems.

Labour market outlook

The Construction Forecasting Council is forecasting a modest recovery in building activity in 2009-10, although it expects further strong growth in the engineering construction sector. Demand for plumbers will also be supported by ongoing maintenance work and by the subsidy for solar and heat pump hot water systems, which is available until June 2012. As a result, demand for plumbers is likely to grow moderately over the short term. DEEWR projections indicate apprenticeship completions will remain high in 2009-10 and it is likely in the short term recruitment difficulties will remain confined to a small number of specialisations and regional locations.