

<b>Chemical Plant Operator</b>	<b>Western Australia (WA)</b>
ASCO Code: 4987-11	September 2006
<b>Labour market rating:</b>	No Shortage
<b>Comment</b>	

### **Occupational demand**

State Government Budget papers for 2006-07 show that the WA economy grew by 4.8 per cent in 2005-06, almost twice the 2.7 per cent growth recorded in 2004-05. Further growth of 5.3 per cent is forecast for 2006-07. The Department of Industry and Resources has released preliminary statistics showing that the value of WA petroleum and mineral resources in 2005-06 increased by 29 per cent to \$43.2 billion. The overall rise in value of sales for 2005-06 is mainly attributable to the significant increases in the value of the petroleum and iron ore sectors (23 per cent and 56 per cent respectively), accounting for almost two-thirds of the total value of production.

Mineral exploration in WA decreased by 2.2 per whilst petroleum exploration rose by 12.7 per cent in 2005-06 compared with the previous year.

This occupation is too small for quarterly Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Force Survey figures to be reliable, however, the number of chemical plant operators recorded in WA increased by an annual average of 12.6 per cent to 484 over the five years to the 2001 Census. Industry data and industry and employer contacts suggest that this number has increased significantly.

### **Occupational supply**

The 2001 Census indicated that just over one quarter of chemical plant operators (26.2 per cent) held Certificate III or IV qualifications, however, this proportion has and is likely to continue to increase. Relevant local training is the Certificate II or III in Process Plant Operations, or the Certificate II or III in Metalliferous Mining Operations (Processing). The number of completions from these courses more than doubled to 70 persons in 2005, and increased commencements (including 151 persons in 2005), suggest that qualified supply should increase even more strongly in the next few years. The Process Plant Operations courses may also supply petroleum and gas plant operators. There is considerable crossover between the streams of process manufacturing.

### **Employer and industry comments/current labour market**

Nearly all positions advertised in the last six months by companies contacted were filled (99 per cent). Whilst one employer reported over 100 applicants for their vacancies, for most positions there were 15 to 30 applicants. The proportion of suitable applicants was low, but on average there were seven suitable applicants per vacancy. Because there are so many applicants for the available positions, employers generally seek candidates with either direct processing experience and/or a mechanical, instrument or electrical trade background. The WA Labour Economics Office has not previously assessed this occupation. A number of employers indicated that they would usually have expected more applicants, however they were being attracted to the more highly paying oil and gas industry. Turnover has also increased as a consequence.

Increasingly employers require chemical plant operators to progress through an Australian Apprenticeship. The trainee positions attract hundreds of applicants. Successful trainees are generally those who have a good work ethic and a stable work history. Initially trainees are employed by a registered training organisation with practical experience gained on-site.

### **Labour market outlook**

Although the demand for chemical plant operators is likely to continue to increase with the growth of mineral production and associated chemical facilities, it is likely that potential supply will continue to exceed this demand. There is expected to be no shortage for at least the next six months.