

Civil Engineering Associate		Western Australia (WA)
ASCO Code: 3122-11		November 2006
Labour market rating:	Shortage	
Comment <i>Local government positions are the most difficult to fill.</i>		

Occupational demand

Demand for civil engineering associates has continued to increase due to the buoyant WA economy, particularly the resources sector. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that there was an increase of 70 per cent in the value of all engineering construction work done in WA to June 2006, compared with the same period to June 2005. The total value of work remaining to be done at June 2006 is 73.1 per cent higher than a year ago. Mineral exploration in WA decreased by 2.2 per cent in the same period, however petroleum exploration rose by 12.7 per cent.

This occupation is too small for quarterly Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Force Survey figures to be reliable, however the number of civil engineering associates recorded in WA increased by 12.9 per cent to 544 over the five years to the 2001 Census.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Skilled Vacancy Count shows that newspaper vacancies for civil engineering associates from January to November 2006 increased by 59 per cent, over the number for the same period last year.

Occupational supply

Civil engineering associates generally complete a Certificate III/IV or Diploma in civil or structural engineering. Suitable courses appear to have become available only in recent years. Limited data on course completions is available, however, there were 77 completions in 2005, compared with an average of 55 completions annually over the previous three years. Graduates may work as an engineering technical officer or civil/structural engineering design drafter. Some employers are prepared to recruit people who have no formal qualifications but have gained a number of years of relevant experience, or others who have part-completed engineering degree courses. Net overseas migration contributed 40 civil engineering associates to WA in 2005-06, significantly higher than the annual average of four over the previous four years.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Just over one-third (40 per cent) of the surveyed vacancies were filled, with less than one (0.6) suitable applicant per vacancy. Only 19 per cent of the applicants were considered suitable with the main reasons for unsuitability being that applicants were unqualified or lacked relevant and/or sufficient experience. Employers reported that recruitment was at least as, if not more, difficult than 12 months ago. The shortage of suitable applicants covered positions for both technical officers and design drafters. Sixty per cent of the vacancies surveyed were for new positions, reflecting new business growth. Many civil engineering associates are attracted away from Perth to remote mine sites with higher salary packages. Employers such as local government councils find that they are unable to compete. Due to high demand, good remuneration and a formal training period of only two years, some contacts suggested the occupation should be more strongly promoted to school leavers as an alternative to professional and trade-level occupations. The WA Labour Economics Office has not previously assessed this occupation.

Labour market outlook

High demand for civil engineering associates from the both the construction and resource sectors is likely to be maintained for at least the next six months. As supply from course completions is not expected to be sufficient to meet the demand, shortages are likely to persist over the short-term.