



Skills shortage beginning to bite

The gas industry in Queensland is on the cusp of a massive boom

John McCarthy

QUeensland is sliding slowly back towards what experts consider full employment of 5 per cent, but already the signs of a new crisis are emerging.

Too few people are doing the types of jobs Queensland needs, namely trades.

The losers in Queensland's fast-running economic and industrial evolution will be the unskilled.

The housing industry is facing a dire skills shortage of 16,000 workers this year. There's a desperate shortage of apprentices, and the tradesmen who do end up in the industry are generally unskilled.

It lost more than 4000 building apprentices during the financial crisis and fewer people are taking up a career in any of the critical trades.

The mining industry is already getting desperate enough that one company is trying to lure tradesmen by offering a two-weeks-on, two-weeks-off roster where workers could live on the Gold Coast and fly direct to Mount Isa on a salary of \$100,000 a year.

The fastest-growing occupational category in Australia is that of managers and administrators and associated professionals, according to the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University. It forecasts these occupations will grow by 26 and 28 per cent respectively during the next decade, but the biggest demand will be for tradespeople and semi-skilled workers where demand will jump by 71 per cent until 2020.

The gas industry in Queensland is on the cusp of a massive boom. This year alone experts forecast jobs growth of 3.5 per cent in the sector but eventually more than 18,000 workers could be sought.

Where they will come from is the question many in the industry are asking, particularly with a similar and competing gas industry boom happening in Western Australia.

One of the key companies involved in the liquefied gas plans for Gladstone, Santos, will employ about 250 people this year, with jobs ranging from engineers and geologists to project managers and drillers.

On top of that, the demand for work in Queensland mines could exceed 23,000

within 10 years.

A sign of emerging health in the sector was this week's announcement of Leighton winning a \$260 million contract for the construction of Vale and Aquila's Isaac Plain coal mine in central Queensland.

Xstrata is also in the early stages of a coal-mine development near Collinsville.

Added to this is the abundant rainfall in western Queensland that could spur agricultural production and jobs growth in that sector as well.

Corporate research firm IBISWorld lists the biggest jobs growth this year to be in insulation and commercial construction, but both of these sectors will slow dramatically when the Federal Government's stimulus ends.

However, alternative health, organic farming, online shopping, fitness and weight loss, health insurance and baby products should all be big employers this year, according to IBISWorld.

The Queensland University of Technology also said the major infrastructure projects already started are causing a need for more surveyors and spatial science graduates for jobs involving hydrography and cartography.

Spatial science program co-ordinator Robert Webb said an increase of 25 per cent in graduates was needed to meet demand. "Graduate work is almost guaranteed," he said. "They can take their skills anywhere from measuring polar icecaps to constructing skyscrapers and land-titling housing developments."

Sarina Russo Group's Kevin Ayre said there were already shortages appearing in trades, but areas like manufacturing and aged care were also showing signs of growth in job demand.

"We are going to experience shortages in most of the trades this year and that's partly because mining is picking up. The orders are starting to come through again now," he said.

"That drives demand through the coastal towns and soaks up a lot of jobs and then the southeast employers start to struggle because of the big money paid by the mines."