

POPULATION AGING AND ENGINEERS

QUESTION: The Australian population is aging. How is this likely to affect engineers?

The Australian Treasury's Intergenerational Reports have projected that the age structure of the Australian population will become older in coming decades. There have been no formal examinations of what these projections mean for specific occupational groups or professions. However, some indicators are available.

In the 2006 census, the average age of the engineering labour force was 41.9 years (42.5 years for men and 36.6 years for women).

The average age for comparable non-engineering skills (with the same level of qualifications) was 40.3 years (41.9 years for men and 40.3 years for women).

Survey evidence shows that the average age of engineers has increased from 38.7 years in 1997 to 42.0 years in 2010. Average age was at its highest in 2008 and was 42.4 years. (The survey evidence shows an average age of 42.1 years in the census year 2006, very close to the census outcome).

Projecting the future is notoriously difficult and is not attempted here.

Some indications of how the engineering labour force may change are as follows:

- There are fewer young people (15 to 34 years) in the engineering labour force than is the case in comparable non-engineering skills (30.9% compared to 36.8%).
- There are more older people (55 years and older) in the engineering labour force than in comparable non-engineering skills (16.2% compared to 13.4%).
- Although skilled migration favours younger people, in engineering skilled migration is not a recent phenomenon and the overseas born engineering labour force has fewer young people and more older people than the Australian born engineering labour force (younger group 26.7% compared to 34.4% respectively and older group 17.1% compared to 15.4% respectively). Since the census skilled migration has favoured large numbers of younger engineers.

If you need further details about this answer two options are available. Either

- Look at the publication *The Engineering Profession; A Statistical Overview*, Ninth Edition, 2012 at www.engineersaustralia.org.au/
- or send an email to policy@engineersaustralia.org.au and ask your question.