Construction sector could be a safety net for many auto workers

Employers in the north of Adelaide are suffering from a skills shortage and the need to constantly retrain their workers, and finding the right staff is proving difficult for many companies, according to a survey by University of Adelaide researchers.

The University's Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre has conducted the first in a planned long-term series of studies, taking a snapshot of business intentions in the northern Adelaide cities of Salisbury and Playford.

The surveys are aimed at better understanding the needs of business and helping to inform decision-making for workforce and industry development in the area.

The first survey, conducted just prior to the Holden closure announcement, has found that by the end of 2013, industry in the north of Adelaide collectively had more than 1000 vacant positions, mostly for skilled labour, with a total of 3500 vacancies expected this year.

"Many employers expressed difficulties with finding skilled labour, and one in five companies said technicians and tradespeople were highly sought after," says the University's Associate Professor John Spoehr, Executive Director of the Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre.

"The highest demand comes from the construction industry, an area which auto workers are likely to be able to transition into if investment in infrastructure remains high over the next five years."

More than one third of companies said that attracting experienced and qualified staff was a major issue. The survey also highlighted that almost one half of employers had no staff living within 5km of the workplace.

"This is an interesting situation, and it begs the question why – what is it about workers in the local area that is not meeting the employers' needs?" Associate Professor Spoehr says.

"More than a third of employers said they didn't feel local people had the skills or experience needed for the job. However, nearly 70% of employers surveyed indicated that hiring local people was desirable or very desirable.

"Our survey also showed that many companies are consistently needing to train or retrain their workers, some on an annual basis. This might indicate that further government assistance is required to help boost skilled labour and to address skills shortages in the north of Adelaide."

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