

Leather Production Operator – Retanning

1. Job role

TCF sub-sector	Leather Production
Functional area	Leather Production
Job role	Leather Production Operator - Retanning
Job role description	Responsible for modifying leather characteristics such as softness, fullness and colour through retanning, dyeing and fatliquoring processes. Operates retanning drums and ensures correct chemical sequencing and mechanical action.
Performance expectations	• Achieve production targets without compromising leather quality • Maintain correct machine settings and process parameters • Operate machinery safely within WHS requirements • Minimise defects, waste and rework • Ensure consistent preparation for downstream processes
Specialisation	May specialise in specific machinery or process stages.
Application in other Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) sectors	Transferable to textile finishing plants, footwear leather colouring processes and technical textile finishing operations.

2. Key tasks and critical work functions

Key tasks	• Operate retanning and dye drums with correct loading and timing • Prepare dyes and fatliquors according to formulation sheets • Monitor colour penetration and batch consistency • Adjust drum cycles under supervision to correct deviations • Clean equipment to prevent cross-contamination
Critical work functions	• Controlled chemical sequencing and drum agitation • Consistent colour and softness outcomes • Prevention of contamination between batches • Identification of uneven dye uptake or mechanical irregularities • Safe chemical handling in wet environments

3. Technical skills

Retanning drum operation	Operate drums controlling cycle time and agitation levels.
Dye and chemical preparation	Measure and mix dyes and fatliquors under established procedures.
Colour consistency monitoring	Monitor batch uniformity and penetration.

Machine monitoring	Detect abnormal vibration or rotation irregularities.
Cleaning and preparation	Prepare drums between batches to prevent contamination.

4. Generic Skills

Teamwork	Works effectively within production teams.
Communication	Reports faults, quality issues and safety risks clearly.
Problem solving	Responds to process or machinery irregularities.
Learning	Builds proficiency in machinery setup and process control.
Initiative	Supports yield improvement and waste reduction.
Service / customer orientation	Understands impact of role on final leather performance and customer requirements.

5. Emerging skills

Emerging skills	• Use of electronic work orders and digital formulation sheets to confirm retanning, dyeing and fatliquoring specifications • Interaction with visual display units (VDUs) and touch-screen drum control panels for monitoring cycle time, rotation speed, float ratios and chemical dosing • Operation of automated or semi-automated chemical dosing systems to improve accuracy and reduce manual handling risks • Application of new metal-free, chrome-reduced and environmentally sustainable retanning chemistries • Greater precision in colour matching and batch consistency to meet export and customer quality standards • Monitoring and adjustment of automated temperature and pH control systems within drum processes • Increased traceability requirements linking retanning batches to customer orders and compliance documentation • Adaptation to lean production scheduling systems that require tighter coordination between tanning, retanning and finishing stages
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6. VET Qualifications and Skill Sets

Entry-level preparation	No qualification.
Intermediate / trade-level development	No qualification.

7. Job progression

Possible job progression	Operator → Senior Operator → Team Leader → Production Supervisor
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8. Classification

Australian Qualifications Framework	AQF Level 2-3
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Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Skill Levels	Skill Level 4
Open Source Classification of Occupations for Australia (OSCA)	Manufacturing Process Worker - Finishing context.



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