

Occupational Therapist		South Australia
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11	May 2009	
Labour market rating	No Shortage	
Comment		

Occupational demand

Demand for occupational therapists has continued to grow over recent years due to South Australia's ageing population and the ongoing incidence of work-related injuries requiring rehabilitation. Occupational therapists predominantly work in the health care and social assistance industry. Demand is also influenced by the high proportion of females working in the occupation, who are more likely than males to have breaks in their careers for family reasons, and are also more likely to work part-time. Statistics from the Occupational Therapy Board of South Australia show that 90 per cent of registered occupational therapists are female. The number of registered practising occupational therapists increased seven per cent in the year to July 2008 (from 732 to 685). DEEWR's Skilled Vacancies Index data show that the number of newspaper vacancies for occupational therapists increased significantly in 2008. Many of the employers contacted reported increasing the size of their workforce over the previous 12 months.

Occupational supply

The main source of supply comes from Australian students completing a four-year Bachelor degree in Applied Science (Occupational Therapy) at the University of South Australia. Between 2002 and 2005, there was a slight reduction in the number of new commencements in this course. Since then, commencements have increased significantly. Although there is some fluctuation from year to year, on average there have been around 57 completions per annum up to 2008. DEEWR projections indicate there will be around 63 completions in 2009 and 67 in 2010. Although skilled migration is a potential source of additional occupational supply, Australian government data show that net migration to South Australia is negligible.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of recently advertised occupational therapist vacancies showed that 75 per cent were filled within six weeks, this compares with a fill rate of 56 per cent in 2008. On average, there were 2.8 applicants per vacancy (compared to 3.1 in 2008) but since many of these were rated as unsuitable, the ratio of suitable applicants was 1.3 per vacancy (1.1 in 2008). The majority of employers were seeking replacement workers due to the loss of experienced staff for reasons such as maternity leave, extended holidays, promotions or transfers to other positions. Information supplied by contacts suggest that staff turnover tends to be high. Some employers raised concerns about skills mismatches. Due to the small pool of available suitable job applicants, some senior positions may be filled by occupational therapists with minimal experience. However, most vacancies were filled and there was little evidence of long-term unfilled positions, the occupation is rated as not being in shortage.

Labour market outlook

There are no indications that demand for occupational therapists is likely to diminish over the short-term. The current economic downturn is not expected to significantly impact on demand, unless there is a reduction in government funding for occupational therapy services. At the same time, the projected supply of new graduates from university training is forecast to increase. Labour market conditions are therefore expected to remain stable, shortages are not likely to emerge over the next year.