

Solicitor	New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 2521-13	May 2008
Labour market rating	Metropolitan shortage
Comment: <i>Shortages were evident for Sydney-based positions requiring two years or more experience in specialised areas such as corporate law, finance and commercial property.</i>	

Occupational demand

Demand for solicitors has shown robust growth in recent years. The number of practicing solicitors in NSW rose by 4.7 per cent in 2007: well above the growth of 2.5 per cent the previous year and close to the average increase of 4.6 per cent a year for the previous five years. The improvement in growth in 2007 was consistent with the faster pace of economic activity and domestic demand in NSW. Data from the NSW Law Society indicate that the fastest growing areas of practice over the past ten years were corporate law, employment law and administrative law, while declining areas of practice included personal injury, civil litigation and conveyancing /real property.

Occupational supply

DEEWR estimates that 1600 persons completed entry-level degrees and diplomas in law in NSW in 2007 which was a fall of 18 per cent from the average for the previous three years. The number of newly-admitted legal practitioners fell to 1838 in 2007, which was seven per cent below the average for the previous three years. The supply rate for legal practitioners (annual admissions as a percentage of practicing solicitors and barristers) averaged 7.7 per cent a year in the past three years, which was significantly above the employment growth rate. However, based on admissions data and the number of practicing solicitors and barristers in NSW, DEEWR estimates that wastage of legal practitioners averaged 5.3 per cent a year between 2002 and 2007. A significant contributor to wastage in recent years has been net overseas emigration from NSW, which averaged 160 persons a year for the three years to 2006-07.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for solicitors showed that 65 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising, which was a decline on the filled rate of 78 per cent in 2007. Shortages were most evident in Sydney, particularly for positions requiring two years or more experience in a specialised area of law. While the most difficult-to-fill vacancies were those requiring experience in corporate law, finance and commercial property, unfilled positions for experienced solicitors were also distributed across other specialisations including environmental law, planning law and taxation. The most common reasons applicants were considered unsuitable for such vacancies were insufficient experience in the required specialisation or perceived incompatibility with the employer's corporate culture. General practice positions based in suburban Sydney and vacancies in the not-for-profit sector were less difficult to fill although in some cases employers had to advertise more than once and compromise on their experience requirements due to their inability to compete with the remuneration on offer for experienced solicitors from more prominent employers in the central business districts of Sydney. Employers based in regional NSW generally had more success in filling vacancies, although a small number of positions in inland towns proved difficult to fill. Employers in Sydney and the larger regional centres reported few problems in filling vacancies for junior solicitors.

Labour market outlook

Australian Budget forecasts are for a slowing in economic growth in 2008-09 and this will tend to moderate demand for solicitors in NSW in the short term. DEEWR projections indicate that supply to the occupation from entry-level courses will increase modestly in 2008-09 but this is unlikely to improve the supply of experienced solicitors. As a result, shortages in a number of specialisation are expected to continue over 2008.