

Welfare Worker		Queensland
ASCO Code: 2512-11	June 2008	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

Welfare workers educate and support individuals, families, groups and communities who are experiencing difficulties in matters relating to disability, age, housing, alcohol and other drugs, protective intervention and child protection. Over the recent past, much of the demand for welfare workers has increased in line with population growth and the subsequent demand for welfare services. Industry growth is indicated by data on Counts of Australian Businesses with the number of health and community organisations increasing by 3.7 per cent or by 590 businesses each year since 2003. Queensland's Skilled Vacancies Index suggests that the number of newspaper advertisements for welfare workers more than doubled over the year to June 2008.

Occupational supply

Entry to this occupation is via the completion of a diploma in community or welfare work or through the completion of a bachelor degree in community welfare or human services. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations data indicate that 64 students entered degree related course in 2006 compared to an historic annual average of only 35. Much of this growth can be attributed to new courses commencing at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Since 2001, the average number of graduates entering the labour market each year has been 13, which suggests a moderate to high level of wastage from education for this occupation. Data from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship show that overseas migration may be a moderate source of supply to the occupation as there was a net gain of 37 self-identified welfare and community workers to the State in 2006-07. However, the number of welfare and community workers migrating to Queensland has been on a downward trend, falling by 30 per cent since 2003. Census data indicate negative employment growth for this occupation with the welfare worker workforce declining by eight persons each year between 2001 and 2006.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

Most employers had advertised multiple times through a variety of methods to secure suitable applicants and 38 per cent of vacancies for welfare workers were filled within six weeks of advertising. Employers considered 76 per cent of applicants to be unsuitable because they did not have the minimum qualification or the specific experience for the advertised role. Employers from the community sector reported that much of their recruitment difficulty arises from their dependence on government funding, which limits employment offers to short-term contracts and they believe applicants would prefer the security of full-time employment. Others noted they are unable to compete with the high remuneration available in the public sector and their offers of longer paid maternity leave, salary sacrificing and flexible rostering make little difference to their recruitment efforts. Employers outside Brisbane report shortages of local applicants and nil interest from applicants willing to relocate. Central Queensland respondents attribute their inability to attract candidates to the booming mineral resources' impact on the cost of living and lack of affordable housing in their region. Most contacts report an ageing workforce with pending retirements, the eroding supply of migrants and an increasing proportion of workers requesting part-time employment as major contributors to the current shortage.

Labour market outlook

As the State's population expands and demand for welfare services continues, so will demand for welfare workers. In 2006, the number of students commencing welfare majors grew significantly but graduate numbers have remained unchanged since 2001. The shortages are compounded by an ageing workforce (according to Census 2006 data, 48 per cent of the welfare worker workforce are 50 years or older) and there has been a depleting number of welfare workers migrating to Queensland from overseas. The current shortage of welfare workers in Queensland is therefore likely to continue over 2008-09.