

Environmental Health Officer		Queensland
ASCO Code: 2543-13	February 2007	
Labour market rating	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

Environmental health officers develop, monitor and enforce laws and regulations governing public health standards and environmental management in order to promote good health, hygiene and environmental practices. Local government is the most significant employer of environmental health officers in Queensland, but they are also employed by the State's health and environmental departments and area health services, the Australian Defence Force, major food processing and service companies, and elsewhere in the private sector. Demand has grown in Queensland over recent years due to the State's expanding population and industrial development, and in line with growing community expectations.

Occupational supply

Formal education for this profession in Queensland is through a three year undergraduate degree offered at Griffith University, or a combined three year undergraduate degree in a relevant field and a twelve month Graduate Diploma available at the Queensland University of Technology. Students can study full time, part time or externally, with almost half of the current students studying externally while living in regional locations, according to university contacts. Data from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations show that annual enrolments for environmental health officers have gradually declined since 2003 while wastage from these courses is high, at around 50 per cent. Consequently, about 40 graduates each year, on average, have entered the labour market over the last few years. Department of Immigration and Citizenship figures show a net permanent and long term gain to the State of 24 self-identified occupational and environmental health professionals in 2005-06.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

About 53 per cent of the vacancies included in this year's survey were filled within six weeks of advertising, and less than one third of applicants were considered to be suitable. Most employers said they had to advertise multiple times and used a variety of methods to recruit suitable workers. According to employer and agency contacts, the majority of applicants lacked general experience or specific knowledge of Queensland environmental legislation. Some contacts said that higher wages available elsewhere both attract workers away from Queensland and act as a disincentive to potential migrants to the State. Survey respondents indicated that moderate staff turnover in all locations, and the subsequent need for replacement staff, have contributed significantly to demand. Employers in regional areas reported higher levels of turnover, with the average length of stay of an employee being 24 months or less. It was suggested by some contacts that it is difficult to attract workers to regional areas, even with the offer of attractive remuneration.

Labour market outlook

With levels of industry development and government health activity expected to increase and the State's population continuing to grow, demand for environmental health officers should continue to expand over the next few years. At the same time, the supply of suitably qualified professionals from all sources will remain limited, especially in regional areas. The present State-wide shortage is therefore expected to continue over at least the coming year.