

Occupational Therapist	Queensland
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11	June 2009
Labour market rating	Shortage
Comment: <i>Shortages are greatest for regional and mental health sector employers.</i>	

Occupational demand

Occupational therapists assist people to overcome limitations caused by psychological or emotional difficulties, injury or illness, developmental delay or the effects of ageing. Employment can be found in hospitals, rehabilitation, mental health, aged care, community health and home services, schools and private practices. The underlying indicator of demand for this profession stems from population growth and the health and ageing of the community. Over recent years, public sector demand for occupational therapists has been strong and generated by the State Government's commitment to increasing allied health professionals in health and education services. Demand from the private sector is indicated in figures from the Private Health Insurance Administration Council, which show privately funded occupational therapy services in Queensland increasing by 20.8 per cent or approximately 6000 services over the year to March 2009.

Occupational supply

Entry to this profession is via the completion of a four-year Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program. Registration with the Occupational Therapists Board of Queensland is mandatory in order to practice in this State. As at June 2009, there were 2411 occupational therapists on the Board's register, which represents an increase of 11.4 per cent or 247 registrations since this report was last released in 2007. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations data show that student numbers remained virtually unchanged between 2003 and 2007, with an average of 167 commencements and 137 completions recorded annually. However, in 2008 the University of the Sunshine Coast introduced a program specifically designed to supply at least 30 graduates a year to the workforce and the first cohort of students from this program are expected to boost supply when they enter the labour market at the end of 2011. Department of Immigration and Citizenship arrivals and departures data indicate there was a net gain of 24 self-identified occupational therapists to Queensland in 2007-08 from overseas migration.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

This year, only 40 per cent of vacancies for occupational therapists were filled within six weeks of advertising. Employers considered 55 per cent of the applicants as unsuitable mostly because they had no experience in the advertised role. Demand this year stemmed largely from the non-government sector, especially for therapists with community, mental health or aged care experience. Many of these employers advised that the current shortage in this sector has led to a large volume of unmet demand for occupational therapy services and they attribute their recruitment difficulties to the high level of Queensland Government recruitment absorbing most of the profession's supply. In particular, respondents from the mental health sector reported the termination of student placements in mental health as underpinning their recruitment difficulties. These contacts stated that with no exposure to mental health during their training, students do not develop an interest in mental health and without a basic level of experience in the setting graduates are not considered for mental health positions. Regional employers of this profession continue to report high levels of vacancies remaining unfilled for twelve months and beyond.

Labour market outlook

There is currently strong demand for occupational therapists across all practice sectors and all areas of Queensland and as the State's population continue to age and grow that demand is expected to strengthen. Although a boost to the profession's supply is anticipated at the end of 2011 in line with growth in student numbers, the current shortages of occupational therapists in Queensland is expected to continue over 2009-10.