

Occupational Therapist		Western Australia
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11	June 2009	
Labour market rating:	Recruitment difficulty	
Comment: <i>Recruitment difficulties exist in specialised areas of primary, aged, residential, community care and regional locations. No shortages exist for private practices.</i>		

Occupational demand

The demand for occupational therapy services has grown in WA due to an increase in population and the ageing of the WA population. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that the population in WA has increased by three per cent for the year ending in December 2008. ABS data also indicate the number of people who are aged 60 years and over living in WA has increased. The 2006 ABS Census data regarding occupational therapists shows that, in WA, the majority (over 92 per cent) work in the major industry division of Health care and Social Assistance, mainly within the specific industry classifications of Hospitals and Other Allied Health Services and to a lesser extent Aged Care. ABS data show that the number of occupational therapists in WA has increased by 16 per cent between 2001 and 2006 to 871. This number of occupational therapists is too small to measure annual change with the ABS Labour Force Survey.

Occupational supply

In Western Australia, Curtin University of Technology and Edith Cowan University (ECU) both offer a Bachelor of Science (Occupational Therapy). The ECU students will be graduating students for the first time at the end of 2009 when 37 graduations are expected. This is expected to be followed by 40-50 each year in the next few years. The Curtin graduate numbers of domestic students were 57 in 2007, 89 in 2006 and 77 in 2005.

It is a legal requirement that occupational therapists be registered with the Occupational Registration Board of WA. Their records show that registrations have gradually increased from 1463 in December 2006, to 1575 in June 2008. Recent immigration data shows that overseas migration has provided a net loss to WA of 12 occupational therapists in 2007-08, compared with a net loss of 10 in 2006-07.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for occupational therapists found that 80 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks following advertising. There were approximately two applicants per vacancy of whom an average of one applicant per vacancy was considered by employers to be suitable. The main reason employers were unable to fill positions was a lack of applicants with recent or suitable levels of experience in required areas, such as primary health care in hospitals, aged care facilities and in rehabilitation services.

Employers who worked in private practice and with children reported a solid response to their advertised vacancies and indicated they had no difficulties filling positions. Conversely, employers in regional areas reported difficulty in attracting applicants, as did large employers of occupational therapists such as Hospitals and Aged Care facilities. A spokesperson for a major public hospital in Perth said that even though they time their pool advertisements to attract graduates and were willing to take on people with limited experience they still had difficulty recruiting. Surveyed employers who managed Aged Care facilities reported recruitment difficulties and were of the opinion that they could not attract suitable candidates as they were unable to provide competitive pay rates.

Overall the consensus of employers was there was that shortages exist of occupational therapists who are willing to work in the areas of aged care, residential care, community care and primary health care, but no shortage of occupational therapists who wished to work in private practices or with children.

Labour market outlook

The labour market outlook for occupational therapists is recruitment difficulty in areas of aged care, residential and primary care in the short to medium term. Difficulties also exist in regional areas.