

Occupational Therapist		Victoria
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11	June 2009	
Labour market rating:	Shortage	
Comment:		

Occupational demand

Occupational therapy is a health profession that uses selected activities to prevent or overcome physical, emotional, social and other disabilities in people. OT's often work as part of an integrated healthcare team with other health professionals in both the public and private sectors such as public hospitals, community health services and private practice. There is state-wide demand for OT's in Victoria and the state government is currently offering visa sponsorship in the allied health sector to counteract the shortage. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) employment projections indicate growth in this sector is expected to be strong over the next five years (2009-14) based on employment trends and prospective industry developments. An ageing population and growth in home-based services are expected to increase the future demand for OT's in Victoria.

Occupational supply

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census data indicate 78 per cent of employed OTs have a bachelor degree and 16 per cent have a postgraduate education. There is no legal requirement for licensing or registration in Victoria, although many workplaces request that OT's be members of the Australian Association of Occupational Therapists (Victoria). According to ABS 2006 Census figures there are 1746 OT's employed in Victoria and 96 per cent of these are female employees.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised (SERA) for occupational therapists was conducted for this report. Around 70 per cent of vacancies were filled, attracting an average of 6.7 applicants per vacancy. Of these, employers reported they considered around two applicants per vacancy to be suitable. All of the employers who participated in the survey indicated they had experienced difficulties filling vacancies. A number of employers stated they compromised on the quality of candidates they employed and a large number of employers indicated they could not find experienced Grade 2 OT's. Employers indicated that in these instances they filled vacancies with less experienced staff and provided additional training and support to 'skill up' candidates in order to meet demand.

Contacts observed a trend amongst OT's who are choosing to remain at Grade 2 level because working at level 3 requires clinician work and additional responsibilities, without significant additional remuneration. The majority of contacts indicated they believe there is a shortage of experienced Grade 2 OT's across metropolitan and regional areas of Victoria suggesting this is due to the high number of OTs working overseas, particularly Great Britain where Australian-trained OT's are well regarded. The sector indicated there was a lack of experienced OT's in specialised areas such as neurological rehabilitation, mental health and clinical experience. Some employers stated that at times it was difficult to fill Grade 1 positions, particularly mid year as most Grade 1 candidates are already placed in positions by this stage. The high turnover of employees in the industry is attributed to the number of females in the profession utilising parenting leave with many OT's returning to work in the industry part-time.

Labour market outlook

The decreasing number of qualified occupational therapy graduates entering the occupation coupled with strong demand and high turnover of OT professionals in Victoria has led to a shortage that is expected to continue over the next six months.