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| Environmental Health Officer | | South Australia |
| ASCO Code: 2543-13 | January 2007 | |
| Labour market rating | No Shortage | |
| Comment | | |

Occupational demand

Environmental health officers work mainly in the public sector, with a significant proportion employed in local government councils. Occupational demand may be affected by government spending on public health, changes to legislation relating to health matters, and public awareness and demand for action on environmental issues. Anecdotal evidence suggests recent demand for environmental health officers has been confined to replacing staff who have resigned or changed jobs, although overall turnover rates within the occupation are considered to be low. DEEWR's Skilled Vacancies Index data indicate that demand for the broader category of occupational and environmental health officers remained reasonably stable over the twelve months to January 2007. A 2004 industry review of the environmental health officer (EHO) workforce raised concerns over the ageing EHO workforce, noting that wastage would be a prime demand determinant in future years.

Occupational supply

Entry into the occupation is usually achieved by completing a degree in science or applied science, with a major in environmental health. Flinders University offers a Bachelor of Environmental Health over three years full time or equivalent, and this is the major source of new supply in SA. The number of students commencing this course is in decline, with commencements falling 46 per cent over the three years to 2006, compared with the previous three years. The number of completions has fluctuated from year to year, with 9 in 2003, 26 in 2004 and 14 in 2005. Around 20 students were expected to graduate in 2006, while completions are likely to be significantly lower in 2007. Skilled migration increased in 2005-06, with a net supply of 13 environmental health officers, compared to zero in 2004-05.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of employers who had recently advertised for environmental health officers showed that 100 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. The survey sample included a small number of both Adelaide-based and regional South Australian vacancies. Each vacancy attracted an average of 16 applicants, while there were 6 suitable applicants per vacancy. Overall, the general standard of applicants was considered satisfactory and there were no reports of recruitment difficulty. One employer indicated it was a challenge recruiting temporary EHOs during periods of peak workload, while retention of workers in regional areas of the State was also an issue. The ageing workforce was a further concern for some councils, suggesting recruitment difficulties could emerge in the not too distant future as more experienced workers retire. However, despite these issues, employers were able to source workers with appropriate qualifications and experience when required and the high vacancy fill rate supports a current labour market rating of 'no shortage'.

Labour market outlook

The number of commencing students has been in decline and therefore the number of university completions is also likely to trend downwards. At the same time, the environmental health officer workforce has a higher age profile than the average for all South Australian occupations and occupational wastage is expected to be the major stimulus for demand in the short to medium term. Lower supply and escalating demand could potentially result in recruitment difficulties emerging over the same period.