

<b>Legal Professionals</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
ASCO Code: 2521	March 2007
Labour market rating:	Recruitment difficulty in regional areas
<b>Comment</b> <i>The most difficult to fill vacancies are those for lawyers with 2-5 years of post Restricted Practice commercial experience in particular industries and also for community legal centres in regional and remote areas.</i>	

### **Occupational demand**

The ABS Labour Force Survey indicates that the number of Legal Professionals employed in WA fell by 10.4 per cent over the four quarters to November 2006, to reach an annual quarterly average of 3400. However, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations skilled vacancies count shows that the number of newspaper vacancies for Legal Professionals during January-December 2006 increased slightly (by 2.6 per cent) over the same period the previous year. The establishment of major resource corporation offices in Perth in recent years has increased demand for experienced commercial lawyers.

### **Occupational supply**

Current trends show that many law students enrol in 5-year double-degree courses. Increasing numbers of students study law, with more 3-year graduate entry courses and a fourth law school from 2005. However, a decreasing proportion of graduates currently do Articles and go on to practise law. From 2008 law graduates will be able to do a 12-month Practice Legal Training course instead of Articles, at a local accredited training provider such as the Perth office of the College of Law, followed by a two-year Restricted Practice period. The period of Restricted Practice for those law graduates who do a year of Articles will be 18 months. These changes could lead to an increase in the medium-term future supply of new legal practitioners in WA. Net overseas migration contributed a net average of approximately 75 lawyers per annum to WA over the four years to 2004-05. However, there was a net migration loss of 72 legal professionals in 2005-06.

### **Employer and industry comments/current labour market**

Slightly more than eighty per cent of the advertised vacancies surveyed in 2007 were filled, compared with 56 per cent of the vacancies filled in the previous survey of legal professionals in 2005. More than one third (37 per cent) of applicants were considered suitable and the main reason applicants were considered unsuitable by employers was the lack of relevant skills and/or experience within a particular field of law. Several employer and agency contacts had no difficulty filling their vacancies. However, some remote regional employers reported recruitment difficulties. Advertised positions with community legal centres and some government agencies could not offer higher salaries obtainable in large corporate and legal firms and instead sought applicants with a strong focus on social justice. Contacts suggest many legal professionals with two to five years experience travel interstate and overseas for more experience, higher salaries and life style. Vacancies for legal professionals with two or more years' experience are the most difficult to fill. Several employers received large numbers of applications from people who are yet to complete their year of Restricted Practice. Lawyers with considerable commercial and particular industry experience in the corporate sector can be difficult to recruit.

### **Labour market outlook**

Employers report strong demand for lawyers with five years or more of relevant experience, whereas there seems to be a sufficient supply of inexperienced graduates. Community legal centres are having difficulty recruiting lawyers because of their inability to pay competitive salaries, particularly in regional and remote areas where the cost of living is relatively high. Demand for legal professionals in regional areas is increasing, as these towns expand in association with mining and resources developments.