

Welfare Worker	New South Wales (NSW)
ASCO Code: 2512-11	June 2008
Labour market rating	Shortage
Comment: <i>Shortages exist for welfare workers requiring a relevant degree, three years or more of professional experience and experience with relevant client groups and services.</i>	

Occupational demand

According to Census data, demand for welfare workers grew by just under one per cent a year from 2001 to 2006. Demand for the occupation has grown further in the past two years following rising government expenditure on a number of programs, including an increase in the number of NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS) caseworkers by 841 from June 2004 to March 2008.

Occupational supply

DEEWR estimates that additions to supply from university completions increased by eight per cent in the two years to 2007. The training rate (annual university completions as a percentage of employed welfare workers) is 10.7 per cent based on an estimated workforce of 3,600. The above-average training rate for the occupation reflects the diversity of career paths for welfare work graduates including related occupations in the welfare, community and health sectors. While there are no separate immigration data for this occupation, net overseas immigration to NSW in the broader category of welfare and community workers increased from 13 per annum to 40 per annum over the two years to June 2007. Nevertheless, immigration remains a minor supply source relative to university course completions. There are no reliable data on wastage from the occupation. However, the consensus of employers was that turnover of welfare workers was moderate to low.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for welfare workers found that 71 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. While the survey results indicated a shortage of degree-qualified welfare workers, the recruitment experience of employers varied considerably. Almost half of the employers surveyed filled their position with little difficulty and in some cases were able to choose the best of several degree-qualified applicants. In other cases, employers had a preference for degree-qualified professionals but nevertheless settled for an applicant with an appropriate diploma and several years of relevant experience. A substantial minority of employers, however, were unable to fill positions for degree qualified welfare workers and considered that the seniority and responsibility level of the position precluded them from considering diploma-level applicants and recent graduates. Unfilled and hard-to-fill vacancies were distributed across a number of Sydney suburbs and regional locations and a range of specialisations including carers' support, disability support, youth work, family support and drug and alcohol. The most difficult to fill positions were those requiring a relevant degree, three years or more of professional experience and experience with the relevant client group and services. Positions requiring experience in more than one area – for example, family support and temporary accommodation – proved particularly difficult to fill. Several employers in the not-for-profit sector also reported that they had difficulty in attracting and retaining highly qualified and experienced welfare workers as they could not compete with the remuneration and working conditions on offer in the public sector.

Labour market outlook

Demand for the occupation is likely to increase moderately over the short term in line with the longer-term trend. DOCS is expected to complete recruitment for an additional 84 caseworker positions over 2008-09 and this should also have a positive impact on demand for the occupation. DEEWR projections show a small decline in university completions over the short term and, assuming stable net immigration, shortages are expected to continue over the next year.