

Legal Professionals		South Australia
ASCO Code: 2521	March 2007	
Labour market rating	No Shortage	
Comment		

Occupational demand

In 2006, the ABS Labour Force Survey recorded a workforce of around 2900 legal professionals in South Australia. The most recent annual report prepared by the Law Society of South Australia showed there were 3008 practising certificates issued in 2005-06. This represented a four per cent increase compared to 2004-05. ABS Census data indicated that 83 per cent of legal professionals were employed in the property and business services industry in 2001 with a further 10 per cent employed in government administration and defence.

Occupational supply

The major source of supply is successful completion of a law degree from either the University of Adelaide or Flinders University. To become a legal practitioner, students must also undertake practical training. Since the Flinders University degree course incorporates practical training, graduates are entitled to admission to legal practice in the State. Students enrolled in the University of Adelaide's law degree course who wish to enter legal practice are also required to successfully complete the Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice offered by the Law Society of South Australia in the final two terms of the law degree. Aggregated data indicate there has been an increase in university commencements over the past few years with around 300 commencement in 2005 compared to 280 in 2004 and 260 in 2003. Additionally, there was a 16 per cent increase in completions in 2005, following a 6 per cent fall in the previous year. The GCCA Graduate Destination Survey indicates that 90 per cent of South Australian law graduates seeking full-time employment were successfully employed in 2005 compared to 83 per cent in 2004. However, the data does not show in which occupations they were employed. Immigration has a negative impact on supply. Permanent and long-term arrivals and departures data for South Australia show that there was a net loss of 64 legal professionals in the 2005-06 financial year, following a net loss of 13 in 2004-05.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A survey of employers who had recently advertised for lawyers and solicitors in a metropolitan newspaper indicated that around 87 per cent were filled within six weeks. This represented a slight reduction compared with the previous survey in 2005 which recorded a vacancy filled rate of 93 per cent. Most employers had little difficulty filling positions, although there was a consensus that lawyers experienced in commercial and financial litigation were harder to source than most others. There was also a view in the government sector that it was difficult to attract lawyers from private law firms to fill senior government roles due to the significantly different pay rates between the two sectors. In addition, it appears that in-house or corporate positions are easier to fill than positions in public practices. Employers did not report any difficulties recruiting newly admitted lawyers as evidenced by the large number of graduate applicants for entry-level positions.

Labour market outlook

Over the past eight years demand for legal practitioners, as measured by the number of issued practising certificates, has grown at around three per cent per annum. This rate of growth is slightly above the average employment growth rate for the State over the same period. It is unlikely that demand for lawyers will deviate significantly from this growth rate in the foreseeable future. Based on this assumption, and given that the number of persons graduating from law courses is expected to remain high in 2007, shortages of lawyers are unlikely to emerge in the next 12 months.