

Occupational Therapist	New South Wales (NSW)
ANZSCO Code: 2524-11	June 2009
Labour market rating:	Shortage
Comment: <i>Shortages are evident for those with several years of experience in specialisations such as medico-legal work, aged care, mental health, early intervention, brain injuries and serious motor vehicle injuries, especially outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.</i>	

Occupational demand

Demand for occupational therapists has grown steadily in recent years due to higher demand for health services, the ageing of the population, increased expenditure on mental health services and the increasing role of the profession in patient care and rehabilitation. ABS Census data show that employment in the occupation grew by 3.9 per cent a year between 2001 and 2006, which compares with an average of 3.1 per cent for health professionals as a whole. The consensus of employers contacted for this report was that demand for the occupation has since grown at a moderate pace.

Occupational supply

Supply to the occupation from entry-level course completions has been fairly stable at 240 to 270 per annum over the past five years. The training rate (annual university completions as a percentage of employed occupational therapists) is 9.3 per cent based on an estimated workforce of 2500. Net overseas immigration of occupational therapists to NSW added an average of only four persons per annum to supply in the five years to 2007-08. ABS Census data indicate that wastage from the occupation was about 10 per cent per annum between 2001 and 2006 which indicates that supply from local training is only sufficient to offset wastage. The consensus of employers was that turnover of staff in the profession was significant due to the increasing number of younger occupational therapists who were internationally mobile. This is consistent with the immigration data which show the number of occupational therapists leaving NSW for permanent or long-term overseas stays increased from 64 in 2003-04 to 115 in 2007-08.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for occupational therapists was conducted for this report. The survey found that 55 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising, which compares with a success rate of 73 per cent in 2007. The recruitment experience of employers was mixed. A number of large, prominent employers based in Sydney and Newcastle were able to fill vacancies for experienced occupational therapists in areas such as rehabilitation and paediatrics with little difficulty and reported that the supply of good applicants had improved considerably over the past year. However, employers requiring occupational therapists with several years of experience in some specialist areas were unable to fill their vacancies or experienced considerable difficulty in doing so. Positions proved difficult to fill for those with experience in medico-legal work, aged care, mental health, early intervention, brain injuries and serious motor vehicle injuries. Employers reported that the majority of applicants for such positions were recent graduates or had experience in other areas or had poor communication skills. However, a minority of employers were able to engage recent graduates for some specialised areas as they sometimes had recent formal training in emerging fields such as sensory processing for autism. Positions located outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong and requiring experience in a specialist area proved particularly difficult to fill.

Labour market outlook

Demand for the profession is expected to grow further in 2009-10 due to the underlying increase in demand for occupational therapy services and increasing Australian and NSW Government expenditure on health, including in areas such as mental health and aged care. As a result, shortages are likely to persist over the short term.