



# ANZSCO 2524-11 Occupational Therapist

## Western Australia March 2014

**Current labour market rating**

**No shortage**

Previous labour market rating (March 2013)

No shortage

### Comments

*This survey found there were no shortages of occupational therapists in WA. Employers reported they received multiple applications from suitably qualified applicants and experienced no difficulties filling their advertised vacancies.*

### Survey results

- During the survey period 93 per cent of positions for occupational therapists were filled within six weeks of advertising. This was an increase compared to the proportion of vacancies filled in 2013, which was 89 per cent.
- There was an average of about eight applicants per vacancy and an average of approximately two applicants per vacancy rated as suitable by the employer.
- All of the advertised vacancies were in the metropolitan area, with less than a quarter of all vacancies being for newly created positions.
- There was a fairly even split of employers who used agencies to recruit on their behalf and employers who chose to advertise their vacancies directly themselves. Direct advertising was generally the preference of the state government public health system. Both methods had similar success rates.
- Most employers only wanted only experienced occupational therapists to fill their vacant positions, but appeared to be more willing to hire new graduates compared to other health professions.
- Vacancies for experienced occupational therapists tended to be senior positions, requiring at least five years of experience in a specialised field such as vocational rehabilitation, or clinical domains such as surgical and orthopedics.
- More than half the numbers of qualified applicants were deemed unsuitable by employers because they were inexperienced. New graduates applying for positions contributed to the number of qualified applicants being considered as unsuitable by employers.

### Reasons for rating

- Advertised vacancies attracted multiple, suitably qualified applicants.
- A high proportion of the advertised vacancies were successfully filled.
- Most employers commented that they experienced no difficulties filling their vacancies.

### Unsuitable applicants

- The most common remark made by recruitment agency staff and private employers regarding the unsuitability of applicants was that they lacked experience in a particular specialised area such as vocational rehabilitation.
- A number of applicants submitted poor quality written applications and failed to address all of the selection criteria, or provide examples to demonstrate particular skills.

## Demand and supply trends

- Demand for the services of occupational therapists is affected by a number of factors, including above average growth of the state's population, growth of an ageing population, rising community expectations, advancements in medical technology, and increasing numbers of people in the community with chronic illnesses requiring regular access to health services.
- In June 2013 the total resident population of WA was 2,517,165 (increase of nearly 4%) compared to June 2012<sup>1</sup>.
- According to ABS Population Projections Series B to June 2013 for WA, between the years 2010 to 2015 there will be a decrease in the proportion of children 0-14 years, and in the working aged population (15-64 years). At the same time there will be an increase in the aged population (people aged 65 years)<sup>2</sup>. This projection of growth in the aged population will have a serious impact on future government health budgets and the availability of health services.
- ABS 2011 census figures show there were 1,230 occupational therapists employed in WA, an increase of 41 per cent compared with 2006 census data, with the majority being employed in hospitals, allied health services and aged care residential services<sup>3</sup>.
- Although demand for health services is driven by population growth it is mitigated by government expenditure and the economy.
- The WA Health Budget for 2013-14 is \$7.2 billion. This funding will contribute to a number of large public health construction projects, such as the Fiona Stanley Hospital (opening in October 2014), the New Children's Hospital, upgrading of existing regional and suburban hospitals and addressing a growing health workforce shortage<sup>4</sup>.
- In WA to become a qualified occupational therapist a student must complete a Bachelor of Science (Occupational Therapy) degree at Curtin, Notre Dame and Edith Cowan universities. This undergraduate degree takes four years full time to complete and includes professional clinical practice placements.
- Supply of occupational therapists has increased over the last five years. There were about three per cent more student commencements to study occupational therapy in 2012 compared to 2011 and about 24 per cent more completions of courses in 2012 than in the previous year<sup>5</sup>.
- Graduates are entitled to provisional registration with AHPRA and in December 2013 there were 2,308 registered occupational therapists in WA. This represents an increase of about seven percent compared to December 2012<sup>6</sup>.
- The Department of Employment Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) data shows a decrease of about four per cent in the number of vacancies advertised for occupational therapists over the 12 month period of January 2013 to January 2014<sup>7</sup>.
- The supply of occupational therapists at present appears to be adequate to meet existing demand.

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<sup>1</sup> ABS, Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2013 (Cat 3101.0)

<sup>2</sup> ABS, Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2013 (Cat 3412.0)

<sup>3</sup> ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006 and 2011

<sup>4</sup> WA Treasury, 2013-14 Budget at a glance

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education, Higher Education-Commencements and Completions 2006-2012

<sup>6</sup> Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency, December 2013

<sup>7</sup> Department of Employment, Internet Vacancy Index, January 2014