

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS IN NEW ZEALAND

(Editorial Note: The Council of the New Zealand Psychological Society created a subcommittee in 1974/1975 under the chairmanship of Professor Richard Kammann of Otago University, to survey and report on the future employment opportunities for psychologists in New Zealand. Some of the detailed information provided by prospective employers was tentative and confidential but the major trends have been summarised here as a record for the guidance of members, and as a baseline for future forecasting exercises.)

The terms of reference of the investigations were "to study employment opportunities for psychologists graduating in New Zealand" (a remit passed at the August 1973 Conference of the Society) and this was further interpreted by Professor Kammann as a series of specific questions including "on the basis of past and current data, how many jobs will there be for psychologists in New Zealand in the next six years and at what level?"

Our summary of the reported findings covers trends and appointments in clinical areas, Government, and business and industry. Hopefully other areas will be surveyed in later reports.

The major potential employer of psychologists in New Zealand will continue to be the Government with the Departments of Labour, Justice, Education and Defence, but not Social Welfare, being involved unless there is a policy change. The delegation of responsibility from the Department of Health to regional Hospital Boards has meant that this Department has no longer any first-hand basis for labour predictions involving clinical psychologists. Forecasts from Government Departments rest on projections of staffing which may not have necessarily obtained financial approval so that they are best interpreted as ceiling figures. Departments which see themselves as currently understaffed do not report future likely expansion beyond planned limits which are not set far above current staffing levels in most cases.

At the most generous, there could be a total of 87 new vacancies over the next five years in Government Departments, but this figure assumes that all projections are accepted, that the economy and planning are sufficiently buoyant to support expansion and that all positions are filled. This represents at best 17 new jobs per year for qualified psychologists who would almost certainly be persons with more than an ordinary B.A. or B.Sc. degree in psychology. As is well known, psychologists in education are expected to have had some teaching experience in addition to their formal training in psychology.

An exception is audiology, where graduates are taken on and then may train for a diploma; there are currently six vacancies.

In clinical psychology it was necessary to obtain estimates from a survey of the 30 Hospital Boards spread over New Zealand, each of which is an autonomous potential employer of clinical psychologists. Twenty-six of these hospital administrations answered, 7 envisaged no present or future employment of psychologists; of the remaining 19, the expected new additional vacancies total 34 or about 7 per year. There is a problem in interpretation of these figures (identified by Mr W. A. M. Black) in that the Department of Health keeps manpower statistics which do not reconcile with the sum of returns from hospital boards specifying their current filled positions. The 1975 total employed, including mental hospitals, general hospitals, psychopaedic and child health clinics, is 62 full time and 24 part time and the forecasts are thus to be understood as extrapolations from this base. Hospitals have not always been able accurately to forecast the level of future employment of clinical psychologists in recent years, but the total number employed has grown during 1973-1975 from 51 to 86 and the establishment has been about 60 percent filled. It is, of course, dangerous to extrapolate such trends without regard to the economic climate and to national policy changes in the level and nature of medical and paramedical services.

The position for commerce and industry is even more difficult to assess; there are thought by some persons, who are senior in management consultancy and trade associations, to be a few vacancies for psychology graduates (not running into double figures) provided those graduates have additional skills centering on industry negotiation, manpower selection and training and labour law. There are some vacancies where a degree in psychology is an acceptable or contributory alternative qualification but work is specifically not designated psychology. The figure of 60-70 graduates a year being employed in the major North Island centres has been essayed, but with the usual qualifications concerning the buoyancy of the economy.

One of the original intentions of these surveys was to establish a supply/demand ratio for psychology graduates by comparing output at the Bachelors and M.A. levels with demand. This has not been quantified on the figures so far available. There are difficulties precisely because some jobs open to psychology graduates are equally open to graduates in other social sciences who have increased their output in the same period that the number of psychology graduates has risen.

Members of the subcommittee who contributed information for this review were Dr N. V. Adcock and Mr W. A. M. Black. It is hoped to publish later reports and comment from other investigators.