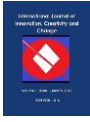


Employment Trends in Counselling – Australia 2015/2016

Thomas Parker, Australian Counselling Associationⁱ

Counselling as a profession in Australia is still in its infancy and faces competition from numerous sources and an ever-changing marketplace. Situated in the industry of Health Care and Social Assistance, Registered Counsellors face rivalry as an occupation in this populous industry. Registered Counsellors in Australia provide a valuable and worthwhile service to many individuals experiencing mental health illnesses and/or issues. Navigating the “business of mental health” and “providing counselling services in Australia” are key focuses of this study. The study shows that there is great diversity and growth in the profession of counselling with significant opportunities across Australia. The study also provides an overview of the industry of counselling in Australia, maps the different major employer groups, identifies niche markets for Registered Counsellors and highlights several professional issues in paid employment that may impact the profession of counselling.



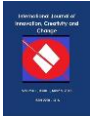
Introduction

The Australian Counselling Association is Australia's largest peak body for counselling and psychotherapy; protecting the mental health consumer through a registration process that is vigorous and consistent with industry standards for practitioners in many mental health professions. For the purpose of this study, Registered Counsellors will refer to counsellors or psychotherapists that are registered with the Australian Counselling Association.

The frame of reference for this study is to address one central questions; what are the employment opportunities for counsellors in Australia? Additional points that are examined in this study include; professional issues that counsellors face in employment and industry diversity in counselling. Both aforementioned points are necessary to be examined to provide a clearer understanding of employment opportunities and context for counsellors in Australia.

Precious little research committed to the types of employment opportunities that is available in the industry for counsellors, and the employments outcomes for each level of qualification in counselling (Australian Government, 2017). The outcome of this study allowed the Australian Counselling Association to promote the abilities of Counsellors to major employer groups, demonstrate the breadth and depth of the counselling industry in Australia and provide a clearer picture of the mental health services roles that are provided in Australia. This research also laid the foundation for the *Scope of Practice for Registered Counsellors* (Australian Counselling Association, 2016), the first of document of its kind in Australia for Counselling and Psychotherapy practice.

During a twelve-month span, the Australian Counselling Association's Office of Industry Liaison tracked mental health employment opportunities for Registered Counsellors and determined the roles most frequently appeared for counsellors, average pay, locations of those roles and identified further areas of study moving forward. Counsellors are employed in mental health service provision roles. All positions researched elsewhere were re-advertised within the ACA Career Resource, a unique job portal for ACA Registered Counsellors.



Analysis Process

Previous research failed to recognise one key factor; employment trends are difficult to track and extrapolate. Certain providers will track employment through the total number of job advertisements made (Seek Australia, 2016), or the number of individuals paying taxes on their income (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015), or by asking individuals to declare their employment positions/status/income/, etc. (Australian Taxation Office, 2016). All of these datasets have significant flaws. The data collected in each of the previously mentioned processes fails to take into account duplicate data, future growth or requires honesty and engagement from the entire sample size.

The research conducted by the Australian Counselling Association examined the types of roles advertised that counsellors could fill, where those positions were in Australia, and what qualification the employer required. Therefore, the data collected by the Office of Industry Liaison within the Australian Counselling Association was more data-rich than previous studies and addressed some of those previously mentioned flaws (Australian Government, 2017). Naturally, further research will be required on the subject – especially to maintain accuracy in a continually changing space (Huber, 1992).

For instance, the research conducted did not capture if registered counsellors were able to convert the position vacancy to gainful employment, the research conducted did not capture 100% of position vacancies in Australia (a large amount of employment vacancies are never listed online) (Augustine, 2014), role and title confusion of the employment vacancies for counsellors prevented a true indication of where registered counsellors were able to secure employment (and if that employment was appropriate to their qualification), and the short “shelf-life” of employment vacancies (Chamberlain, 2015) (Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR), 2015).

As such, the information was collected, verified and collated across a number of different providers. The majority of data was collected from the major community service providers across Australia, within their in-house recruitment web pages (which includes, but is not



limited to, Anglicare, Centacare, and Uniting Care, Bravehearts, EACH, Neami National, Merri Health, Life Without Barriers, ASCO, Carers Australia, Wesley Mission, Save the Children, Relationships Australia, the FASTT Network and numerous others). Employment information was also recorded from a number of online job boards (Seek, EthicalJobs.com, I work for NSW, Queensland Government Smart Jobs, and others). The purpose of this information collection was to determine what employment opportunities are available to registered counsellors, answering the research question. The data collected is designed to be an information service, rather than a recruitment service.

Findings

After tracking employment vacancies for registered counsellors for 12 months, there were a total of 1,735 positions available and advertised through formal channels (in-house recruitment sites, and online job boards). All of these were compiled and re-advertised through the Australian Counselling Association *Career Resource Centre*, which registered counsellors were able to access until the position's application process closed. Of the 1,735 positions available, 712 positions were available to Diploma-qualified counsellors. Of those 712 positions, 462 of those positions the employer preferred that candidates have tertiary qualifications. A total of 1,023 positions required a bachelor degree minimum (in counselling, or closely related qualification in Allied Health qualifications that serviced mental health diagnosis, treatment or rehabilitation).

Total in 2016	1748
Diploma roles	712
Bachelor Preferred (Diploma eligible)	462
Tertiary Only	1036

Figure 1: Total employment captured on the ACA Career Resource Centre by qualification (chart).

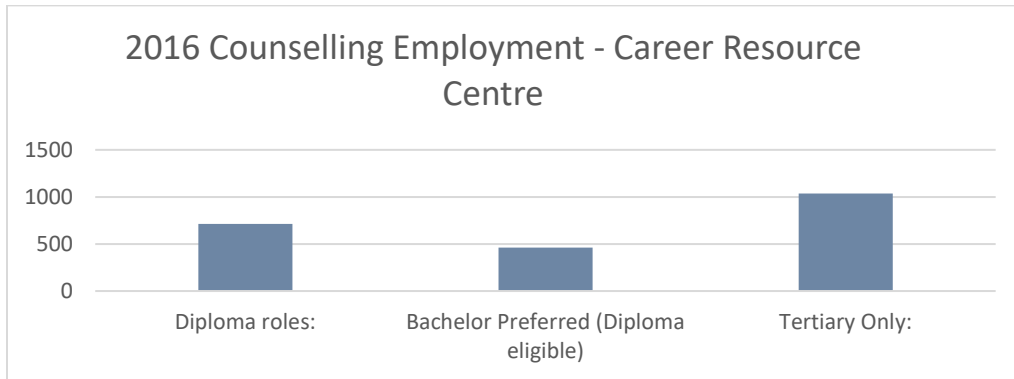


Figure 2: Total employment captured on the ACA Career Resource Centre by qualification (graph).

Vocationally Qualified registered counsellors will find employment prospects particularly competitive, as the overwhelming majority of employers require or prefer tertiary qualifications.

Employment trends by location

Each month saw a number of interesting figures in the total number of roles available to counsellors, culminating in an overall positive trend in a twelve-month period. Logic suggests that the majority of employment within Australia would be in the states with the greatest population (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017); however, the research collected in this study suggests that there are far greater employment opportunities for counsellors in less populous states (Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia) due to decreased competition with other Allied Health professions and smaller population size. While there may have been more opportunities available to counsellors in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in total; there were more opportunities available than counsellors in Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia. The following figures (Fig. 3 – Fig. 13) show the percentage of employment trends that are available to counsellors, broken down by state/territory within Australia.

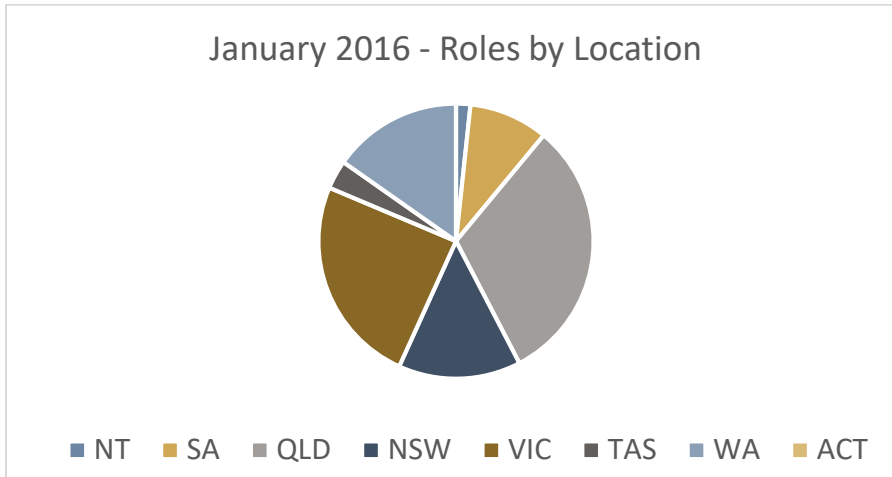


Figure 3. January employment by State/Territory (graph). Significant emphasis on QLD, VIC and NSW employment, accounting for 70% of total employment.

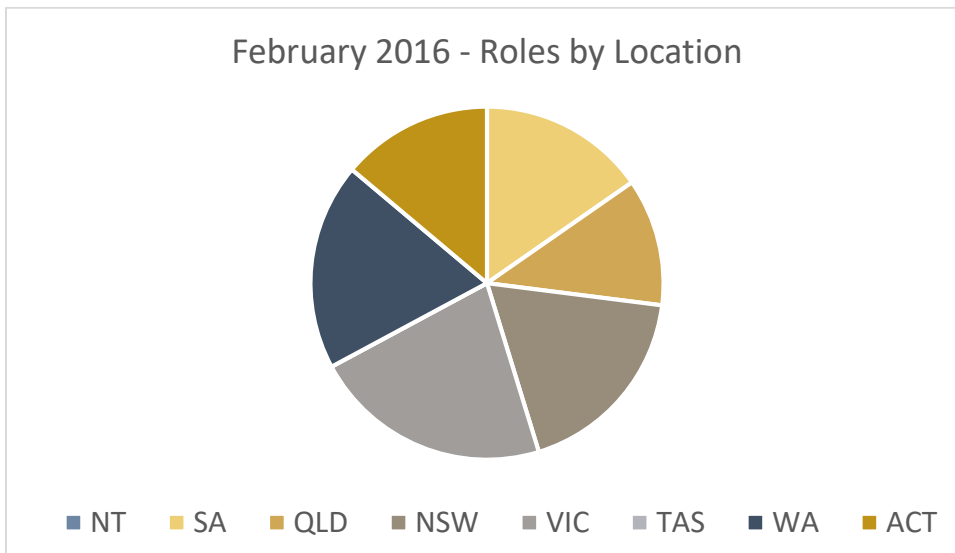


Figure 4. February employment by State/Territory (graph). Limited opportunities represented in Tasmania in February 2016.

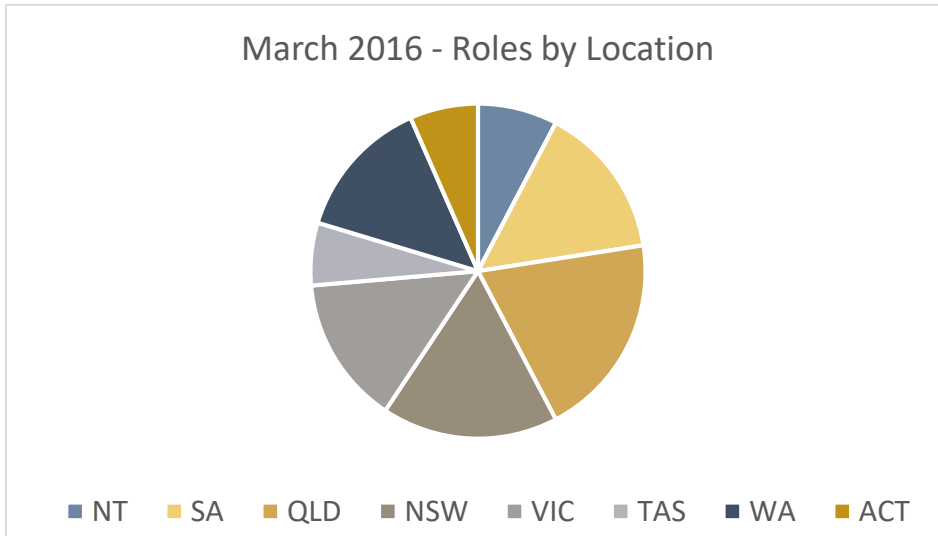


Figure 5. March employment by State/Territory (graph). QLD, VIC, NSW represents 51% of total employment this month.

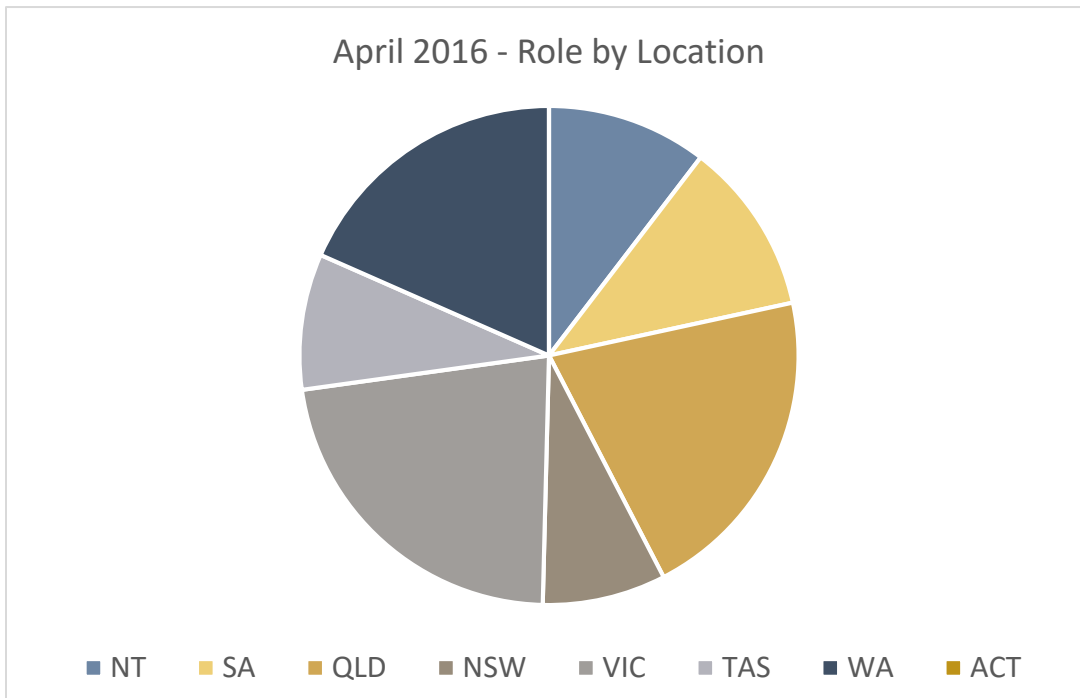


Figure 6. April employment by State Territory (graph). Significant reduction in employment opportunities in NSW represented here.

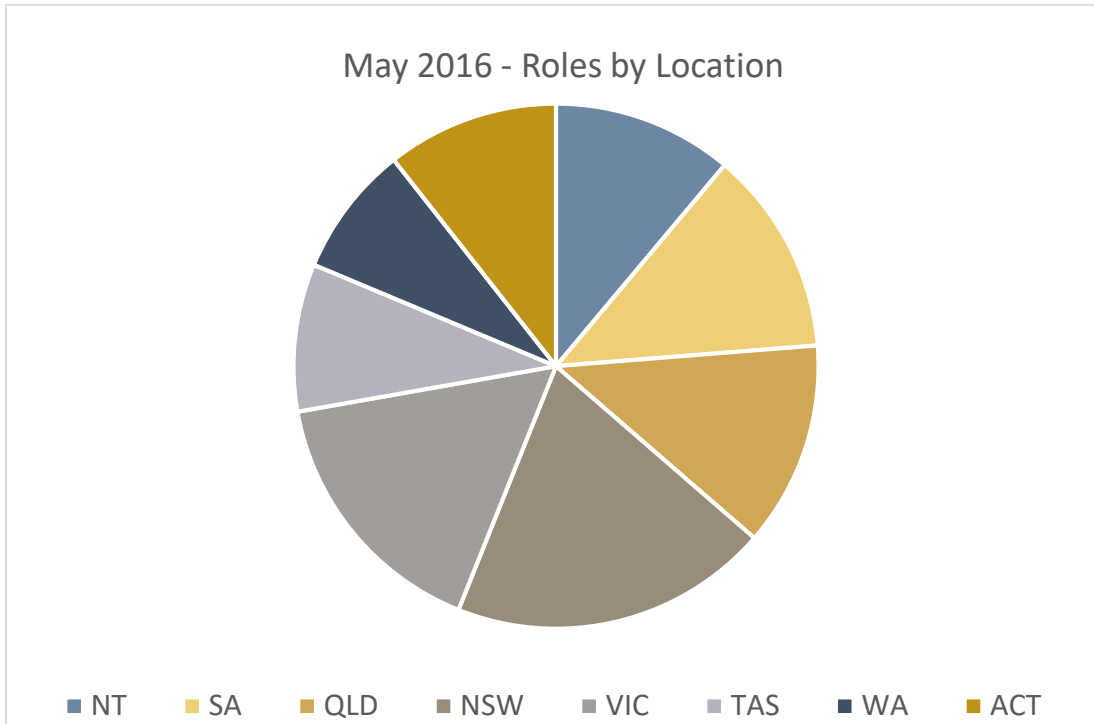


Figure 7. May employment by State/Territory (graph). Over 50% of opportunities for counsellors outside of the most populous Australian states/territories.

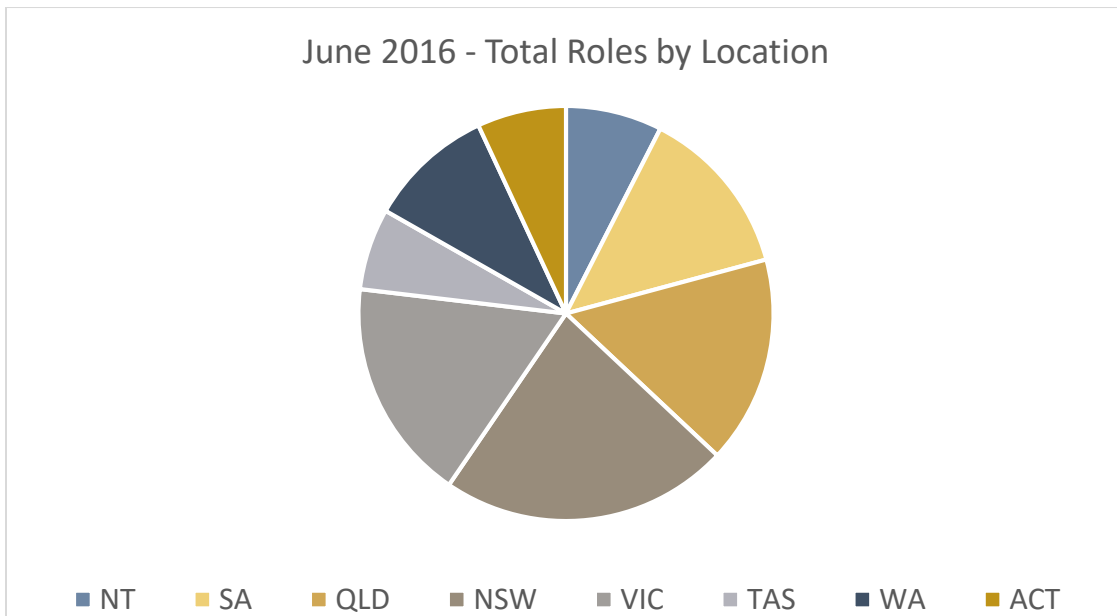


Figure 8. June employment by State/Territory (graph). Consistent employment opportunities in South Australia and Northern Territory represented here.

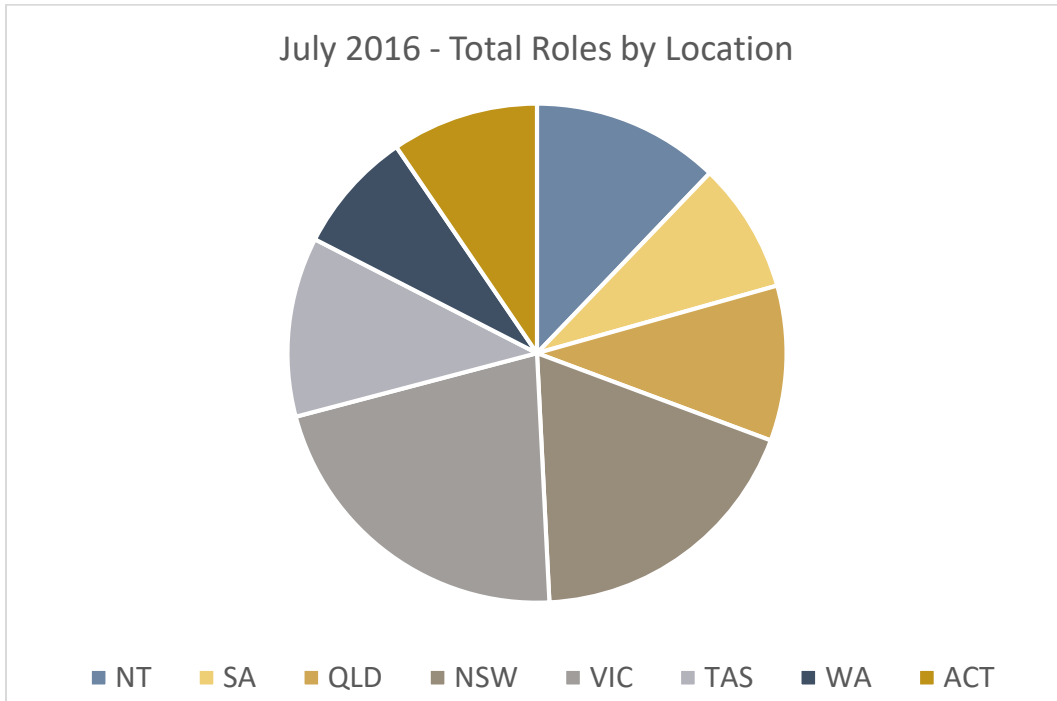


Figure 9. July employment by State/Territory (graph). 49% of employment opportunities outside of QLD, NSW, VIC.

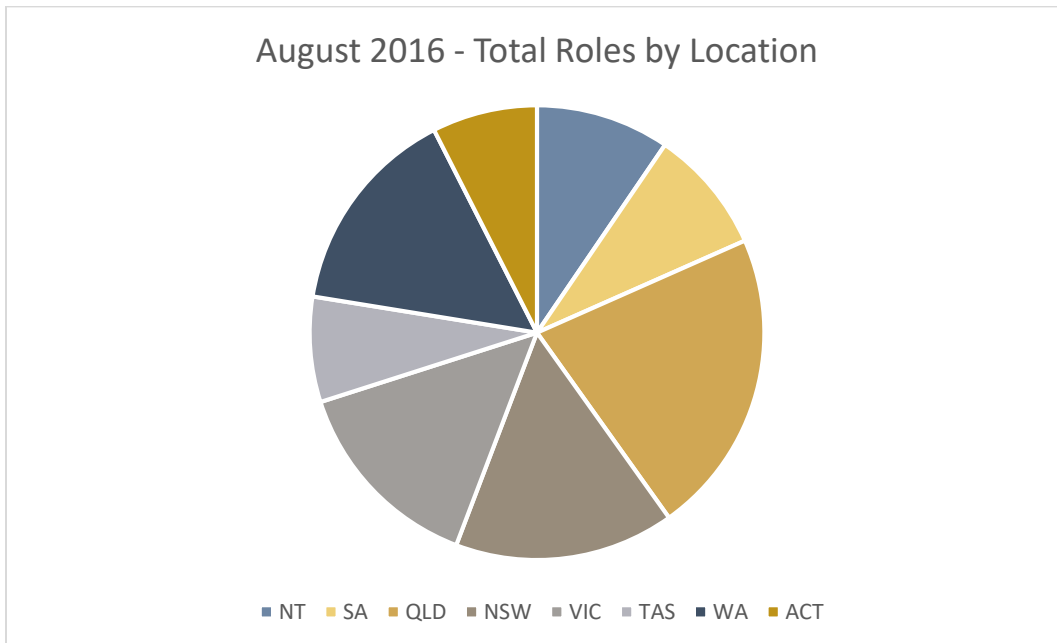


Figure 10. August employment by State Territory (graph). 15% of total employment opportunities for counsellors in Western Australia.

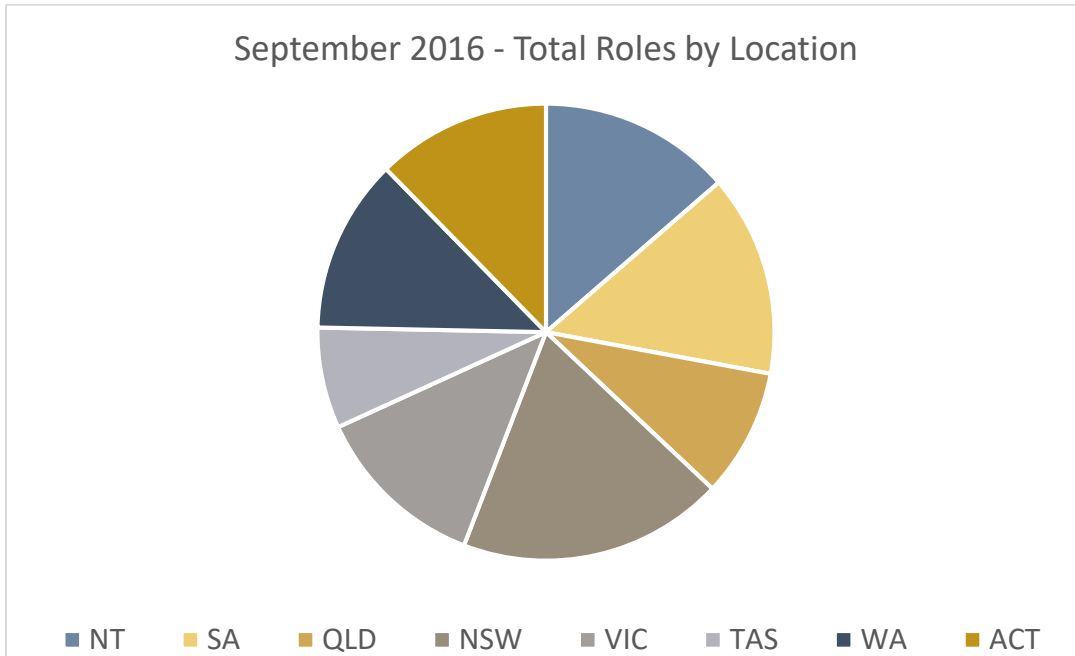


Figure 11. September employment by State/Territory (graph). 42% of employment opportunities represented in QLD, NSW, VIC – significant shift in employment location represented here.

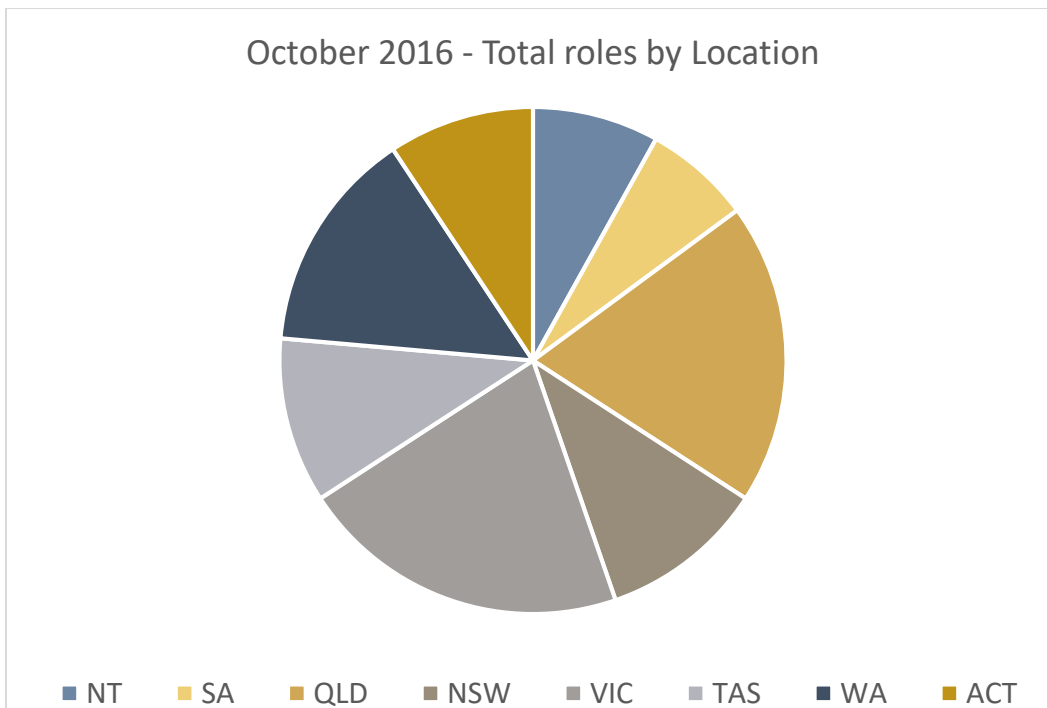


Figure 12. October Employment by State/Territory (graph). Return to normal for QLD

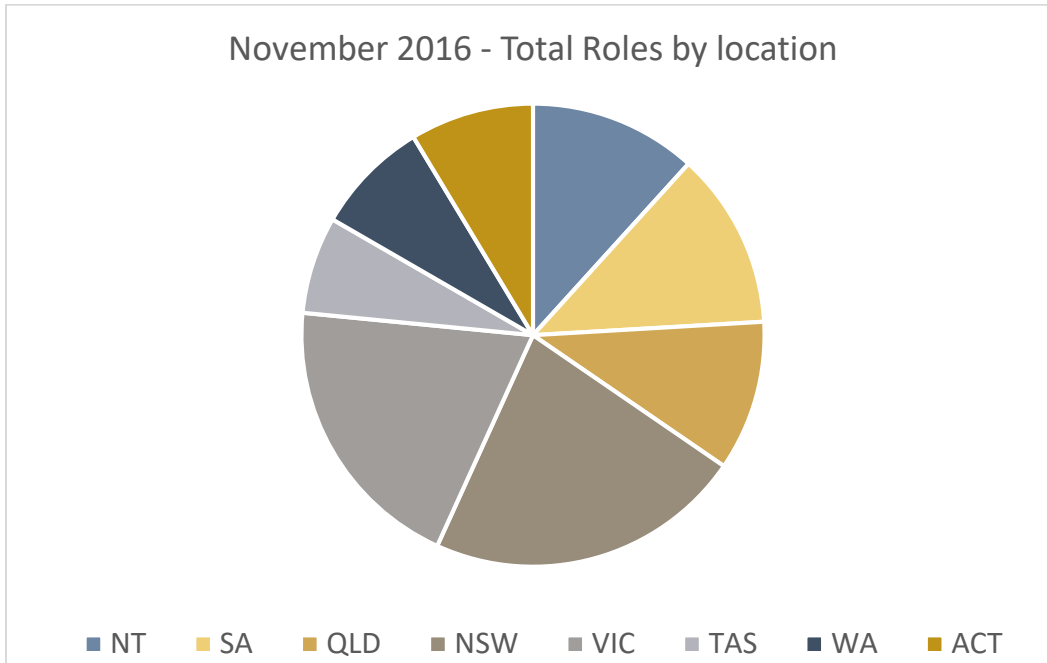


Figure13. November employment by State/Territory (graph). 52% of employment for counsellors in Australia's most populous states

The overall trends of employment opportunities for registered counsellors were quite positive. When interpreting these results, it is important to note that each state and territory will have varying population sizes. Those variable population sizes make counselling employment more likely to occur in states or territories that have a smaller population (Northern Territory or Western Australia, for example).

On the following pages; the combined results for all states and territories employment will be found (Fig.15-26). Throughout the course of the research, there was a positive improvement across total employment opportunities available to registered counsellors.

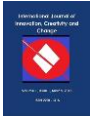


Figure 14. Employment statistics December 2015 (chart).

Totals	125	
Diploma Roles	69	
Bachelor Preferred	33	
Bachelor Only	56	

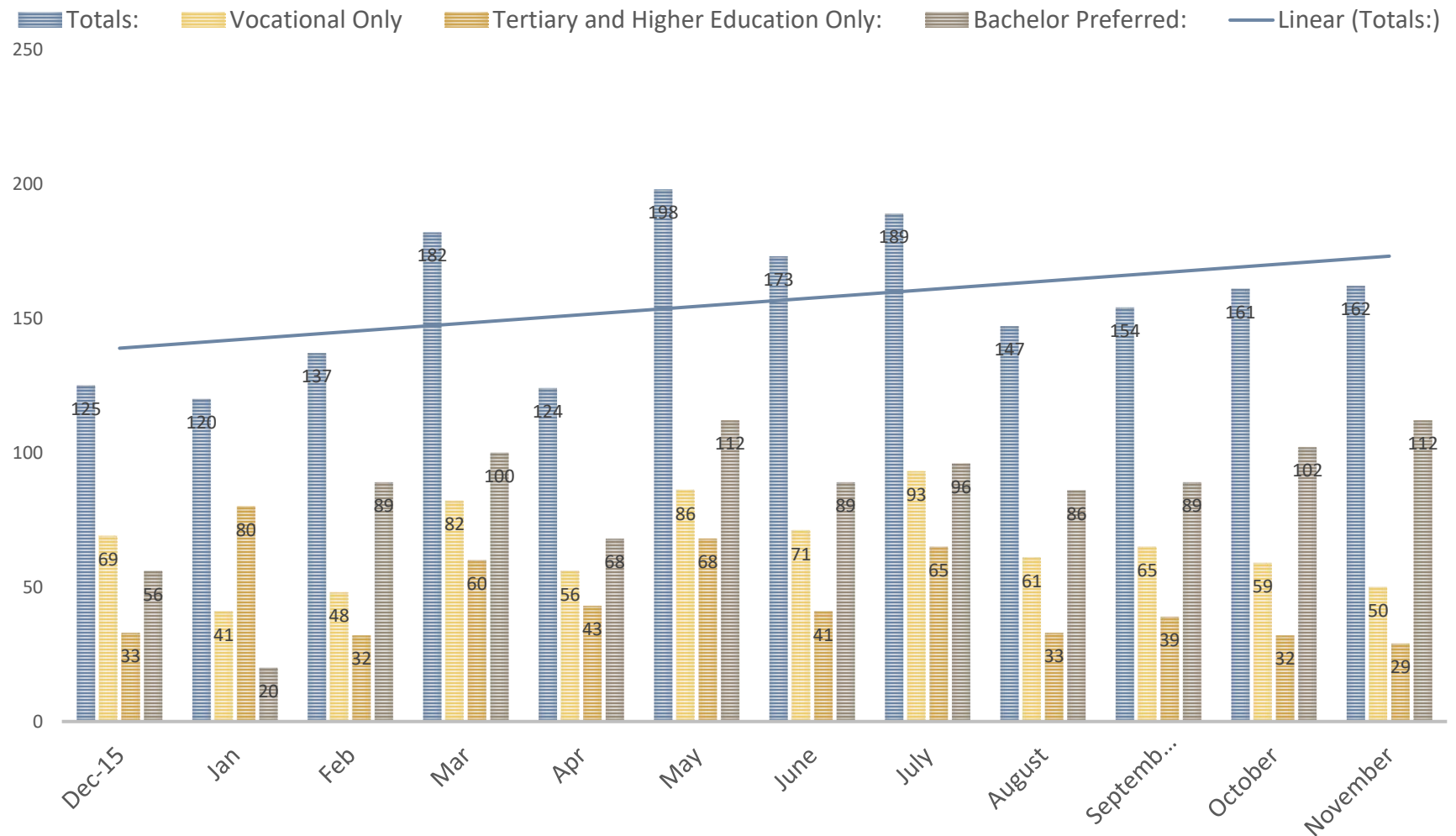
Diploma Roles:	
NT	2
SA	2
QLD	22
NSW	21
VIC	16
TAS	1
WA	4
ACT	1
Total	69

December 2015 saw the start of this study, and yielded limited opportunities. December typically is a “quieter month” for new employment opportunities in the Counselling and Allied Health space (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

ACA ADVERTISED ROLES - DECEMBER 2015 TO NOVEMBER 2016

Fig 15. Demonstrated overall employment trends, based on qualification requirements (graph)

*Prepared by the office of Industry Liaison – Australian Counselling Association





January	
Total	121
Diploma Roles	41
Bachelor Only	80
Bachelor Preferred	20
Diploma Roles:	
NT	1
SA	3
QLD	14
NSW	9
VIC	8
TAS	1
WA	5
ACT	0
Total	41
Locations:	
NT	2
SA	11
QLD	37
NSW	17
VIC	29
TAS	4
WA	18
ACT	0
Total	118

February	
Total:	137
Diploma Roles	48
Bachelor Preferred	32
Bachelor Only	89
Diploma Roles:	
NT	0
SA	10
QLD	7
NSW	6
VIC	8
TAS	0
WA	9
ACT	8
Total	48
Locations:	
NT	0
SA	21
QLD	16
NSW	25
VIC	30
TAS	0
WA	26
ACT	19
Total	137

March	
Totals	182
Diploma Roles	82
Bachelor Preferred	60
Bachelor Only	100
Diploma Roles:	
NT	6
SA	14
QLD	13
NSW	14
VIC	13
TAS	8
WA	10
ACT	4
Total	82
Locations:	
NT	14
SA	27
QLD	36
NSW	31
VIC	26
TAS	11
WA	25
ACT	12
Total	182

Fig. 16, 17, 18 (above, charts) demonstrated a consistent increased in the total amount of employment opportunities available to counsellors across Australia



April	
Totals:	124
Diploma Roles	56
Bachelor Preferred	43
Bachelor Only	68
Diploma Roles:	
NT	8
SA	7
QLD	9
NSW	3
VIC	11
TAS	7
WA	11
ACT	0
Total	56
Locations:	
NT	13
SA	14
QLD	26
NSW	10
VIC	28
TAS	11
WA	23
ACT	0
Total	125

May	
Totals	198
Diploma Roles	86
Bachelor Preferred	68
Bachelor Only	112
Diploma Roles:	86
NT	14
SA	12
QLD	4
NSW	18
VIC	8
TAS	9
WA	6
ACT	15
Total	86
Totals	
NT	22
SA	25
QLD	25
NSW	39
VIC	32
TAS	18
WA	16
ACT	21
Total	198

June	
Totals	173
Diploma Roles	71
Bachelor Preferred	41
Bachelor Only	102
Diploma Roles:	
NT	5
SA	10
QLD	10
NSW	18
VIC	11
TAS	6
WA	5
ACT	6
Total	71
Totals	
NT	13
SA	23
QLD	28
NSW	39
VIC	30
TAS	11
WA	17
ACT	12
Total	173

Fig 19, 20, 21 (above, charts) May was an anomalous month, with the most amount of opportunities sourced thus far. It would eventually become the norm, as the study continued



International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
 Volume 3, Issue 3, Special Edition: Mental Health, December, 2017

July	
Totals	189
Diploma Roles	93
Bachelor Preferred	65
Bachelor Only	96
Diploma Roles:	
NT	14
SA	9
QLD	7
NSW	14
VIC	21
TAS	8
WA	11
ACT	9
Total	93
Totals	
NT	23
SA	16
QLD	19
NSW	35
VIC	41
TAS	22
WA	15
ACT	18
Total	189

August	
Totals	147
Diploma Roles	61
Bachelor Preferred	33
Bachelor Only	86
Diploma Roles:	
NT	7
SA	7
QLD	7
NSW	11
VIC	5
TAS	9
WA	9
ACT	6
Total	61
Totals	
NT	14
SA	13
QLD	32
NSW	23
VIC	21
TAS	11
WA	22
ACT	11
Total	147

September	
Totals	154
Diploma Roles	65
Bachelor Preferred	39
Bachelor Only	89
Diploma Roles:	
NT	11
SA	10
QLD	5
NSW	11
VIC	5
TAS	3
WA	12
ACT	8
Total	65
Totals	
NT	21
SA	22
QLD	14
NSW	29
VIC	19
TAS	11
WA	19
ACT	19
Total	154

Fig. 22, 23, 24 (above, charts) July sees a return to high totals of employment opportunities for counsellors; average total of employment opportunities is 163.33



October	
Totals	161
Diploma Roles	59
Bachelor Preferred	32
Bachelor Only	102
Diploma Roles:	
NT	5
SA	5
QLD	8
NSW	7
VIC	10
TAS	8
WA	9
ACT	7
Total	59
Totals	
NT	13
SA	11
QLD	31
NSW	17
VIC	34
TAS	17
WA	23
ACT	15
Total	161

November	
Totals	162
Diploma Roles	50
Bachelor Preferred	29
Bachelor Only	112
Diploma Roles:	
NT	8
SA	8
QLD	0
NSW	11
VIC	13
TAS	5
WA	4
ACT	1
Total	50
Totals	
NT	19
SA	20
QLD	17
NSW	36
VIC	32
TAS	11
WA	13
ACT	14
Total	162

Fig. 25, 26 (above, charts) There has been an overall and consistent decline for five months in the employment opportunities available to Diploma-qualified counsellors in these above figures.



Discussion of Results

When the research began in December 2015 – there was no conclusive evidence about the depth and breadth of the counselling industry’s employment. Therefore, expectations could not be set. The lowest number of counselling positions found in one month was in January (120 total positions), and the highest total number of positions occurred was in May (198 total positions). January’s low total could be explained with the beginning of the New Year (where a number of key service providers enter “caretaker” mode until mid-to-late January). May’s high total of positions was not entirely anomalous, as a number of other months had similar figures (March = 182 and July = 189); but did occur during when an Australian election had been called – total employment opportunities in Australia also remained consistent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

The average amount of positions on the ACA Career Resource Centre was approximately 160 per month (158.9091/month), with approximately 95(94.18182/month) of those positions for the tertiary-qualified counsellor, approximately 65 positions (64.72727/month) were available to diploma-qualified counsellors. Of the 65 approximate positions available to diploma-qualified counsellors, 42(42.0/month) positions had a preference for tertiary qualifications. As such, the total percentage breakdown of average positions advertised through the Career Resource Centre is as follows:

- Tertiary-qualified counsellor: 59.26773%
- Diploma qualified counsellor: 40.73227%
 - o Preferred tertiary-qualified counsellors (still open to Diploma-qualified): 26.43021%
 - o Diploma-qualified only sufficient: 14.30206%

Each Australian state or territory is governed by different state regulations and laws, has its own unique population demographic, budget allocations for social and community services, service providers profile, and reactions to mental health illnesses/issues (Commonwealth of Australia, Treasurer and Minister of Finance, 2016). As such, the distribution of positions for registered counsellors will not be equal throughout the country. Overall, New South Wales saw more positions available for Diploma qualified counsellors (11.0901/month), while Victoria saw a great number of total positions available for registered counsellors (29.27273/month). However, when taking into account population size, the



Northern Territory demonstrated positive opportunities for counsellors; with 7.181818 positions available per month for Diploma qualified counsellors and 14 total positions available for registered counsellors.

The total averages for each state can be found below:

Averages	Total Roles (Diploma qualified counsellor)	Location	Total Roles available
NT	7.181818	NT	14
SA	8.636364	SA	18.45455
QLD	7.636364	QLD	25.54545
NSW	11.09091	NSW	27.36364
VIC	10.27273	VIC	29.27273
TAS	5.818182	TAS	11.54545
WA	8.272727	WA	19.72727

Fig. 27, 28 (above) Ongoing throughout this study provided illuminating information and confirmed that there are significant employment opportunities for counsellors

In short, there are a number of counselling employment opportunities across the country, and there has been a steady increase in the total roles available throughout this study. As was shown in Figures 1 – 28, there are a significant amount of employment opportunities, spread across Australia with differing qualification expectations attached to them. In the following sections, this study will highlight the industry diversity and potential professional issues facing registered counsellors

Industry Diversity

At any given moment, there are many different roles advertised that involve the delivery of counselling. However, only those that were available to registered counsellors were collated as part of this research. There is significant overlap that counselling experiences with similar professions; such as mental health nurses, psychologists, mental health social workers, mental health occupational therapists, career counsellors, community welfare workers and some other allied health professionals. Because of this great diversity in professions in the “Healthcare and Social Assistance” space, employers can be misinformed about the scope of practice and training for each different profession. As such, “counsellor” appeared as a role title for a registered counsellor far less frequently than other titles.



Roles that were available to counsellors included:

Domestic Violence Counsellor	Child and Adolescent Trauma Counsellor	Case Worker
Royal Commission Caseworker	Intake Worker	headspace Service Manager
Youth and Family Support Worker	Youth Development Facilitator	Adolescent Caseworker and Family Counsellor
Personal Helper and Mentor	Support Worker Enhanced Adult Community Living Support Program	Youth Counsellor
Counselling Manager	Gambling Addictions Counsellor	Family Support Worker
Counsellor Group Worker	Caseworker/Group Worker	Manager – Community Development
Youth on Track Senior Case Worker	Youth and Family Team Leader	Case Manager
Support Workers	Senior Team Leader School Counselling	AOD Counsellor
Counsellor/Advocate	Assertive Outreach Worker	Lecturer
Youth Outreach Worker	Welfare and Student Liaison Officer	Stronger Families Section Manager
Carer and Community Educator	Therapeutic Programs Officer	Mental Health Practitioner
Mental Health Clinician Group Facilitator	Community Leader	Clinical Practice Supervisor
Family Services Practitioner	Community Support Worker	Therapeutic Support Worker

For the purpose of this study, it was imperative to note the broad diversity of roles that counsellors can fill and demonstrate that counsellors have a significant place within the “Health Care and Social Assistance” space. The “Healthcare and Social Assistance” space is the largest industry group by total employees in Australia (Australian Government - Department of Employment, 2015).

Professional Issues

Title and role confusion is not a unique phenomenon and has been present for many decades (Grant, Berg, & Cable, 2014). “Imagineer” was the role title frequently used for those designing and building the Disney theme parks over 50 years ago (Wright, 2005). Naturally, this has led to many employers and employees being at odds over where each other fits in the employment marketplace. For the purpose of this study, information about the current trends were examined, rather than making a judgement about the current employment trends.



From the previous section, it is clear that there is a great diversity of the roles that counsellors can fill. However, without exposure to these key industry terms; it can be very difficult to secure gainful and appropriate employment.

Another key concept that has the potential to prohibit employment opportunities is professional nepotism. Professional nepotism is defined “as favouritism granted to relatives or other close relationship not based on merit” (Drexel University, 2014). Many of the positions advertised through the ACA Career Resource Centre required counselling qualifications or closely related qualifications (Allied Health qualifications). For counselling roles that were open to other professions, registered counsellors will experience an increased level of competition and may need to define their position in the marketplace to overcome potential professional nepotism.

Additionally, new roles and position titles are created every day. Many of the roles listed on the previous page did not exist two, five or ten years ago (Cawsey, 1995) (Huber, 1992). The only thing permanent is change, so the saying goes.

As a registered counsellor gains professional experience in the marketplace, they will naturally become more competitive and competent through the passage of time (Ronald & Hundert, 2002).

Conclusion

Counselling in Australia is a broad and diverse industry, with registered counsellors providing services all across the country in many different niches that are hard to imagine. For students of counselling currently completing their studies, attempting to navigate the diversity of roles can be quite difficult.

The data collected provide sound proof that there are indeed many different opportunities for registered counsellors in Australia. The information gathered throughout this study demonstrates that registered counsellors have had the potential to compete for at least 1,735 counselling/counselling focused positions. Throughout this study, there was a positive increase in total amount of positions available per month.



International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
Volume 3, Issue 3, Special Edition: Mental Health, December, 2017

The ACA Career Resource Centre has demonstrated that there are numerous counselling positions available to registered counsellors. The ACA Career Resource Centre acted as a central repository for counselling and counselling related positions. While appropriate employment opportunities are highly competitive in Australia, there are many opportunities for registered counsellors to take advantage of, no matter the level of qualification.



References

- Augustine, A. (2014). How to Tap Into the Hidden Job Market. *Ladders*, 1-3.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Labour Force, Australia, July 2017*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2015*. *Australian Statistics*, 1-28.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Labour Force Commentary May 2016*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, May 2017*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Australian Counselling Association. (2016). *Scope of Practice for Registered Counsellors*. Newmarket: ACA Inc.
- Australian Government - Department of Employment. (2015). *Industry Employment Projections*. Canberra: Australian Government.
- Australian Government. (2017). *Australian Labour Market Update - January 2017*. Canberra: Department of Employment.
- Australian Taxation Office. (2016). *Salary and wage occupation codes 2016*. Australian Taxation Office - Guide for Tax Agents, 2 - 25.
- Cawsey, T. F. (1995). The Portfolio Career as a Response to a Changing Job Market. *Journal of Career Planning & Employment*, 41-46.
- Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR). (2015). *The 30 day tipping point*. *Indeed*, 2 - 7.
- Chamberlain, D. A. (2015). *Why Is Hiring Taking Longer? New Insights from Glassdoor Data*. Mill Valley, California: Glassdoor.
- Commonwealth of Australia, Treasurer and Minister of Finance. (2016). *Budget 2016-2017*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Drexel University. (2014). *NEPOTISM/EMPLOYMENT OF RELATIVES & CONSENSUAL AMOROUS RELATIONSHIPS*. Philadelphia: ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES OF DREXEL UNIVERSITY.
- Grant, A. M., Berg, J. M., & Cable, D. M. (2014). Job Titles as Identity Badges: How Self-Reflective Titles Can Reduce Emotional Exhaustion. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1201-1255.



- Huber, B. J. (1992). The Changing Job Market. In B. J. Huber, The Changing Job Market (pp. 59-73).
New York City: Modern Language Association.
- Ronald, M. E., & Hundert, M. E. (2002). Defining and Assessing Professional Competence. JAMA,
226-235.
- Seek Australia. (2016). Seek Employment Trends: February 2016. Insights and Resources - Seek, 1- 4.
- Wright, A. (2005). The Imagineering Field Guide to Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World. New
York: Disney Editions.

ⁱ Author Affiliation

Thomas Parker

Australian Counselling Association

E: tom@theaca.net.au

P:: +61 432 697 086

orcid.org/0000-0003-1713-1464

Correspondence to:

Thomas Parker

Australian Counselling Association

E: tom@theaca.net.au

P:: +61 432 697 086