

Accountant (General) Management Accountant Taxation Accountant	Australia
ANZSCO Code: 2211-11,12,13	March 2009
Labour market rating	Accountant (General): No Shortage Management Accountant: Recruitment Difficulty Taxation Accountant: Recruitment Difficulty
Comment: <i>Although there has been an increase in the number of accountants seeking employment and there were multiple qualified applicants per vacancy, some employers who were recruiting for highly experienced, senior or specialist positions experienced some difficulty recruiting.</i>	

Occupational demand

Demand for accountants is driven by activity levels across all industries as well as regulatory changes and structures. The global recession and resultant slowdown in the Australian economy has led to a significant easing in demand for accountants, with indications from employer contacts and from media reports that staff are being laid off and some firms are delaying recruitment.

Prior to late 2008, demand for accountants was growing strongly. ABS Census data show employment across accounting specialisations increased between 2001 and 2006 with employment of general accountants up by 15 per cent, management accountants by 17 per cent and taxation accountants by 15 per cent. More recent Labour Force Survey data for accountants suggest that in the year to November 2008, employment increased by 4.8 per cent, to 164 400.

The recent fall in demand for accountants and auditors is reflected in the DEEWR Skilled Vacancies Index which decreased by almost 50 per cent in the 12 months to March 2009.

Occupational supply

Entry into to the accounting professions is generally through a bachelor degree, with a number of courses providing appropriate subjects, including disciplines such as business, commerce and accountancy.

Because of the range of degrees which can potentially provide entry to the accounting profession, it is difficult to estimate the number of graduates who could provide new supply to the occupation. Accountants do not require registration but the majority of employers surveyed were seeking accountants who had membership of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants or the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship data show entry to this occupation via skilled migration is significant. In 2007-08 there was a net gain of 3100 people who identified themselves as accountants, up from 2400 in 2006-07. Over the five years to 2007-08 the net gain averaged around 3050 accountants per annum.

Employer and industry comments/current labour market.

Accountant (General)

A survey of employers who had recently advertised was undertaken for this report. Employers filled 75 per cent of vacancies within six weeks of advertising. Employers reported receiving an average of 36 applications per vacancy, nearly all from degree qualified applicants, with 6.1 applicants per vacancy being considered by employers to be suitable per position. Slightly less than 20 per cent of employers did not receive any applications from candidates they considered to be suitable. Feedback from employers indicated the majority of unfilled vacancies were due to applicants lacking sufficient Australian experience, although a number could not be filled because the successful applicants had accepted other offers of employment or they were filled outside the timeframe for the survey period. A small number of vacancies were withdrawn by employers due to the economic downturn.

The main reasons employers found applicants to be unsuitable were applicants not having sufficient experience or specialised skills required for the advertised vacancies. Many employers also found

applicants to be unsuitable because they had poor communication or presentation skills. Vacancies in areas of accounting which continue to have strong demand, such as insolvency, proved more difficult to fill, as did positions requiring more than three years experience.

Commonly, recruitment company representatives and employers noted the number of accountants seeking work has increased significantly over the last few months, but some suggested the quality of candidates has not. Many recruitment companies commented that large numbers of clients had withdrawn accounting vacancies and the number of available jobs had decreased. Due to the easing in demand, some employers considered the current climate an opportunity to boost numbers of highly skilled and experienced staff, with many indicating they rejected applicants who lacked significant experience.

Some employers commented that big accounting firms, which have the resources to do so, are employing accountants who have specialised skills in areas of current strong demand, such as insolvency or business recovery.

Comments from employers and recruitment company representatives suggest there are currently a greater number of graduates seeking employment than usual. This is attributed to a large number of graduate placements being deferred or cancelled due to the economic downturn. Some contacts suggested this contributes both to the higher number of candidates looking for work and also to the possible reduction in the quality of candidates as graduates have less ability to gain workplace experience.

Management Accountant

Nationally, 60 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. On average, 36 applications were received per vacancy, with 1.6 applicants considered by employers to be suitable. Typically, vacancies for management accountants were for senior professionals who have CA/CPA qualifications and several years experience. When vacancies were not filled it was usually because employers sought candidates with high levels of experience, knowledge or qualifications. Several vacancies were for positions requiring industry-specific knowledge, such as manufacturing, and prior industry related experience was required for these roles. Employers commented that it is currently difficult to find senior accountants as firms and companies are likely to retain highly skilled and experienced staff during the economic downturn.

Each vacancy attracted in excess of five applicants with the vast majority attracting in excess of 30, most of whom held accounting qualifications. Most unsuitable applicants were qualified accountants, but they lacked the particular experience or skill set sought by employers.

Taxation Accountant

Nationally, employers filled 44 per cent of vacancies within six weeks of advertising. An average of 19 applications was received for each vacancy, with 2.1 applicants per vacancy being considered by employers to be suitable for their advertised positions. The main reason for applicants being considered to be unsuitable was lack of work experience within an Australian taxation framework. A consensus amongst employers was that the quality of candidates had decreased in recent months and it was very difficult to find staff with experience working in the Australian market. Employer contacts indicated that a significant number of applicants, while qualified, were either returning to the Australian labour market from overseas or were graduates who had not yet gained employment experience. They also suggested a number of positions have been cancelled because of the economic slowdown. Employer comments indicated that applicants who would have been acceptable to employers in 2008, are no longer competitive, with employers now seeking higher levels of skill and experience.

Labour market outlook

It is difficult to predict how economic factors will influence the labour market for accountants over the next six months.