



Source: 'My Career' - Sydney Morning Herald

by Anthony Anderson

## Fine with figures: Accounting graduates are in demand

The number of accounting courses in Australia is almost as broad as the careers available to the field's graduates.

Numerous private and TAFE colleges in Australia have both diploma and advanced diploma courses in accounting. Then there are the universities with degrees in business, commerce and economics that major in accounting, as well as postgraduate qualifications up to masters level. On top of this are the designations conferred by the major accounting bodies – the Institute of Chartered Accountants, CPA Australia and the National Institute of Accountants.

### Firms are aggressively recruiting on campuses and offering an increasing number of cadetship places.

Jobs available to accounting graduates include accountant, finance clerk, loans officer, business banking officer, auditor, research analyst, credit analyst and management trainee. These junior positions can ultimately lead today's graduates to senior positions such chief executive, chief financial officer, general manager, research director, senior partner, senior business banker, fund manager and professor.

The good news for accounting graduates is that a skills shortage is biting hard, so jobs are abundant. Sheena Frenkel, general manager of the chartered accountant program at the Institute of Chartered Accountants, says there is a "war for talent" going on.

She says firms are aggressively recruiting on campuses and are providing an increasing number of cadetship places as well as "achiever experiences", where undergraduates are offered employment during university holidays.

"These sorts of arrangements allow students to get hands-on business experience and thus start becoming hard-wired for the business environment they will be entering," Frenkel says. Students geared for the market when they graduate is exactly what today's employers want.

Ann Johns is the director of education at CPA Australia, Australia's largest accounting body, with about 110,000 members. CPA runs postgraduate programs which, combined with practical experience, lead to membership of the organisation. Johns says the CPA program provides plenty of flexibility. The course can be delivered online via distance education and even be completed while a candidate is working overseas. In addition there are a number of elective subjects, so candidates can tailor their course towards a particular specialization that may interest them. According to Johns, the latest emerging specialist area is forensic accounting.

Owen Firth, who runs the specialist financial recruitment firm FinanceMark, says the market for graduates with accounting skills is incredibly buoyant. "We are seeing strong demand from employers across the board, from the accounting profession, to commerce, to government," Firth says. With accountants still listed on the Department of Immigration's Migrant Occupation Demand List, this situation looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

### Owen Firth, Chief Executive

After receiving a bachelor of economics majoring in accounting from Macquarie University, Owen Firth took the traditional route into the accounting profession by accepting a role with the giant firm Price Waterhouse.

While there, he completed a program to become a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants. This background proved ideal for what was to come.

Firth says he never saw himself as a career accountant but understood the training he received was an ideal launch pad for a career in business.

After Price Waterhouse, he spent several years working as a financial controller with an IT hardware and services company. During this time he also completed an MBA from the Australian Graduate School of Management.

By 1999, Firth was ready to become an entrepreneur. In that year he launched FinanceMark, a recruitment consulting firm specialising in finance and accounting. He drew on his accounting background to build the business on a number of unique principles, including having it staffed and run by accountants.

FinanceMark's consistent growth, was recently recognised when it was named number 26 in the 2005 BRW list of Australia's fastest growing start-up companies.