

Accounting bodies do about-face on jobs for foreign students

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The two major accounting bodies have acknowledged foreign students find it hard to get work. **Photo: Louie Douvis**

Edmund Tadros

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The major accounting bodies have, for the first time, publicly acknowledged the difficulties international - accounting graduates have in finding professional work in Australia.

In an about-face, CPA Australia and Chartered Accountants ANZ now say the difficulties of overseas graduates have finding jobs are "well understood", and they have "a number of programs in place at the local, state and federal level, and through universities around Australia aimed at supporting international students".

The acknowledgement comes after the accounting bodies told the federal government last year of a shortage of accountants as part of a successful review to keep the occupation on the Skilled Occupation List (SOL), which is a list of in-demand occupations.

It is understood the change in stance will form part of a joint submission from the accounting bodies to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection next week.

Federal Labor member Kelvin Thomson said the "Coalition government should remove accounting from the Skilled Occupation List".

"The government should also review the overseas student sector in conjunction with migrant worker programs, to cut the links that have developed between permanent residency, revenue-raising dependency by education providers, and reduced employment opportunities for young Australian graduates".

List reviewed next year

The federal government said it would review the list early next year.

"Based on [the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency's] recommendation, a reduced ceiling of approximately 5000 places, or 3 per cent of the domestic workforce, has been set for Accountants in 2014-15," said a spokesman for the assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Michaelia Cash.

"The government will again review the SOL in early 2015," the spokesman said.

Despite [repeated reports](#) this year highlighting the [reluctance of local employers to hire overseas graduates](#), and the offshoring of low-level jobs by firms, the accounting bodies have stuck to a line that accountants would “rank among the most highly sought after occupations over the short, medium and longer term”.

Yet on Monday, in response to questions about a [Deakin University report](#) outlining the difficulties international students had getting work in Australia, the accounting bodies responded they had been “actively involved” in helping the graduates since 2007.

“Our Skilled Migrant Internship Program: Accounting was established in 2007-08 and is designed to familiarise participants with the norms and values in the Australian workplace as well as the Australian employment market and workplace culture,” a joint statement read.

Communication a key focus

“A key focus is teaching participants how to communicate effectively and professionally with colleagues, - managers and clients.”

The Deakin report showed those programs had been ineffective, with international graduates still finding it extremely difficult to get professional work in Australia, despite having qualifications in areas of supposed skills shortages.

International accounting students are a cash cow for universities, making up a record 79 per cent of the 17,600 enrolled postgraduate students in 2013, and about 55 per cent of the more than 25,400 enrolled undergraduate - students.

The Deakin study found those international students expected to get work experience in Australia as part of their study experience.

The Australian Financial Review

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