

People with accounting skills are in high demand across the Australian labour market. Experienced accountants with recognised qualifications are quickly finding employment. Potential employees are interviewing employers, rather than employers interviewing employees.

The APS has a lot to offer prospective employees. Research suggests that accounting staff are enticed and engaged by meaningful work, development opportunities and work-life balance. Moreover, the APS competes well for accounting staff in terms of remuneration up to EL levels.

The Australian Public Service Commission has been working with agencies to identify and overcome perceived barriers to recruiting accountants into the APS.

1 Conduct an efficient recruitment process

In today's market, it is imperative for agencies to run well-planned and efficient recruitment exercises. We risk losing good candidates if recruitment processes are too slow.

Agencies have considerable flexibility in developing their recruitment strategies. There is little reason, even when using a 'standard' approach, for a recruitment exercise to exceed 3 to 4 weeks, including advertising. In fact, if you have a well-planned exercise, the time between conducting an interview and making an offer can be as little as one day.

Pointers

- Define the role. Focus on work design. Is the structure correct? Do you need an 'accountant'? Can the role be performed virtually?
- Attract a strong field by clearly articulating the benefits of working in the role and the agency. If you don't know, ask your team.
- Consider how best to attract private-sector candidates (e.g. recruitment based on CV rather than selection criteria).

- Focus your advertising where it will have the greatest impact (e.g. *APSJobs* website, online, professional journals, and university bulletins/websites).
- If you have an ongoing need, search regularly for prospective staff rather than waiting for a specific vacancy.

The Australian Public Service Commission has developed the *Get it Right* recruitment kit for managers [www.apsc.gov.au] which provides better practice guidance on recruiting employees in the APS. Your agency may also have the electronic tool on your intranet.

2 'Grow your own' strategies

Evidence suggests that the number of enrolments in accounting and related courses within Australian universities is simply not enough to meet demand.

Some current employees may be ready to take that next step into the role. Explore options for developing those employees.

Many tertiary institutions offer programmes for those interested in developing their finance and accounting skills. In fact, some professional associations and universities are broadening entry requirements and offering bridging courses for those who want to establish a career in accounting.

You might also like to give consideration to cross-agency sharing of resources.

Pointers

- Talk to HR. Explore traineeship, cadetship or graduate recruitment options.
- Consider how to support recent graduates (e.g. by helping them progress through their CPA/CA accreditation).

3 Genuinely assess required security clearances

The time spent obtaining security clearances for new accountants is often extensive and can result in losing qualified staff.

You may be able to separate parts of the role that are at a lower security classification so that the candidate can start promptly while the full clearance is finalised. The risk associated with this approach is that the clearance may not be approved (clearly communicate this to potential candidates).

The Australian Government *Protective Security Manual* (PSM) sets out the minimum requirements for agencies in relation to security policy.

The PSM also allows agencies to grant ‘provisional access’ for a maximum of two months while security clearances are being finalised. You will need to speak to your agency’s security adviser if you are considering using this provision.

The PSM is an official document and is accessed on a need-to-know basis only. Your agency will have a copy of the manual as well as your own policy in relation to security.

4 Engaging non-Australian citizens

While the *Public Service Act 1999* indicates a general expectation that people engaged as APS employees will be Australian citizens, agency heads may waive the citizenship requirement and engage non-citizens as either ongoing or non-ongoing employees.

A decision to employ a non-citizen must take account of the requirements of the *Migration Act 1958*, including ensuring that the person has the appropriate visa and work rights.

Recognition of qualifications

Non-Australian citizens are likely to have qualifications from overseas institutions. It is essential that in maintaining the quality of professional accountants in the APS, these qualifications are recognised in Australia.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship's Skill Matching Database [www.immi.gov.au/skills] contains the qualification and employment data of 7500 skilled prospective migrants whose skills have been recognised for migration purposes.

Information on the assessment process for overseas accounting qualifications is available from the Australian Skills Recognition Information (ASRI) website [www.immi.gov.au/asri/] and the websites of CPA Australia [www.cpaaustralia.com.au], the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia [www.charteredaccountants.com.au] and the National Institute of Accountants [www.nia.org.au].

Security Clearances

Generally, a security clearance can only be provided to an Australian citizen. However in exceptional circumstances, agency heads may waive the citizenship requirement. Speak to your agency's security adviser if you are considering using this provision.

Pointers

- Information on citizenship requirements can be gained from the Commission's *Conditions of Engagement* booklet [www.apsc.gov.au].
- Publications produced by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) cover topics such as employer-sponsored visa classes, checking the work entitlements of migrants and visitors and employers' obligations. See www.immi.gov.au for detailed information.
- Agencies can lodge vacancies on the Australian Jobsearch website [www.jobsearch.gov.au] for matching to potential migrants with recognised qualifications. See www.immi.gov.au for the current Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL).

5 The APS Community of Accountants

Much work is being done to raise the profile of the accounting profession within the APS in order to attract qualified candidates.

Sponsored by the Department of Finance and Administration, the Australian National Audit Office and professional accounting associations, the APS Community of Accountants network was established in June 2006.

The Community provides topical information and networking opportunities for those in the APS holding accounting and finance roles and, through visits to universities, is strongly encouraging graduates to consider the APS as a viable career path.

Informative webpages to attract accountants to the APS are being developed by the Department of Finance [www.finance.gov.au] and are expected to be available around mid-2007.

6 APS-wide accountancy recruitment campaign

Commencing in July 2007, the Australian Public Service Commission is coordinating an APS-wide rolling recruitment campaign for experienced finance and accounting staff.

For more information or to be involved please contact financejobs@apsc.gov.au



COMMON APS RECRUITMENT MYTHS

- You must have a vacant position, you can't recruit to a level
- You can't recruit non-Australian citizens into the APS
- You can't obtain security clearances for non-Australian citizens
- You can only advertise in the Gazette and mainstream press
- You must advertise a vacancy for two weeks
- You can't personally contact people and invite them to apply
- There must be an interview
- All applicants must be interviewed
- Reports must be written on all interviewees
- The selection team must get a referee report for every applicant
- You can only use written references

See *Get it Right—A recruitment kit for managers* and *MAC7 Reducing Red Tape in the APS* for more information on these myths and better practice recruitment [www.apsc.gov.au]

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

APSjobs employment website

[www.apsjobs.gov.au]

Recruitment in the APS context

Public Service Act 1999

Get it Right—A recruitment kit for managers

Ongoing Employment—recruitment and related issues

[www.apsc.gov.au]

Visa/Citizenship requirements

Conditions of Engagement

[www.apsc.gov.au]

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)

[www.immi.gov.au]

Recognition of qualifications

Australian Skills Recognition Information (ASRI)

[www.immi.gov.au/asri]

Certified Practising Accountants of Australia

[www.cpaaustralia.com.au]

Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia

[www.charteredaccountants.com.au]

National Institute of Accountants

[www.nia.org.au]

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