

# Forum on Higher Education

Workshop C:

Workforce Planning & Skills Shortages

Associate Professor Beverley Jackling  
School of Accounting and Law  
RMIT University  
Melbourne

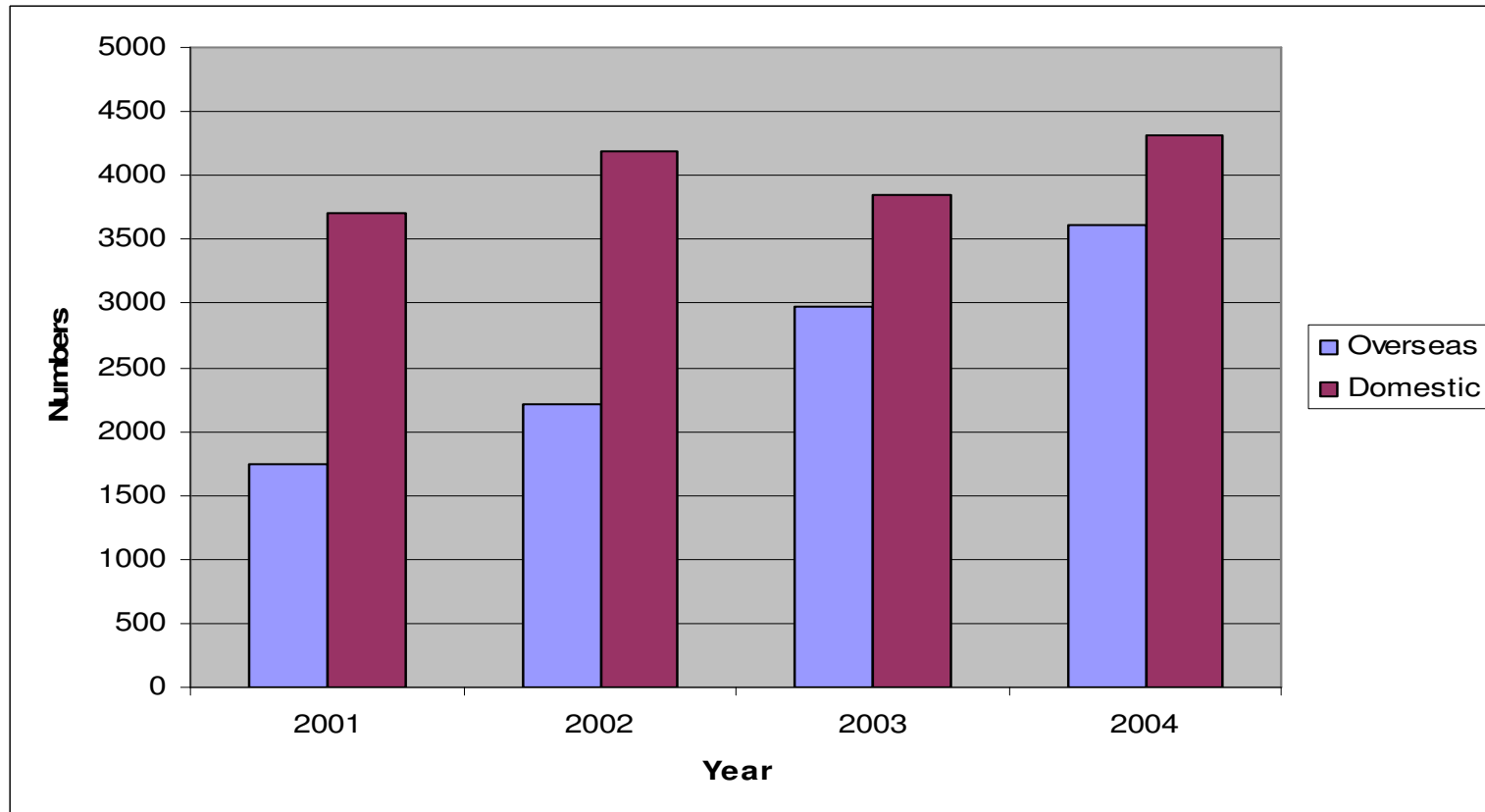
# Identifying skill shortages in the business education sector

## **Profiling graduate accountants**

- The supply (quantity) of graduates
- The quality of preparation of graduates
  - Graduate perceptions
  - Employer perceptions
- The way forward

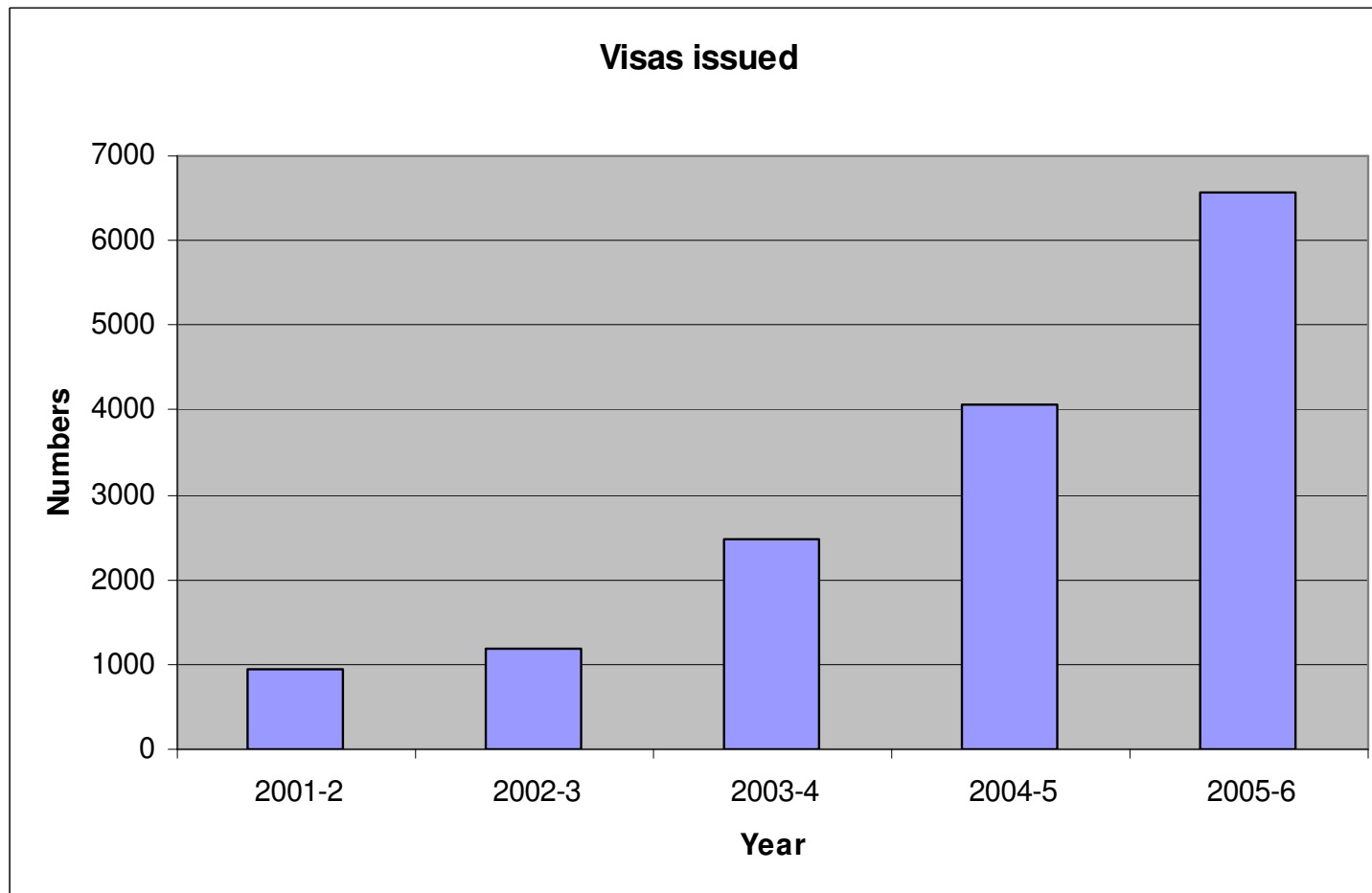
- The demand for accountants in Australia is strong. But demand not matched by equivalent growth in the supply of domestic accounting graduates from Australian universities
- Increased reliance on migrant accountants to meet employer requirements.

# Supply of accounting graduates - domestic and overseas students



Source: Birrell, 2006 *The Changing Face of the Accounting Profession in Australia* p. 4

# Supply of accounting graduates - international students



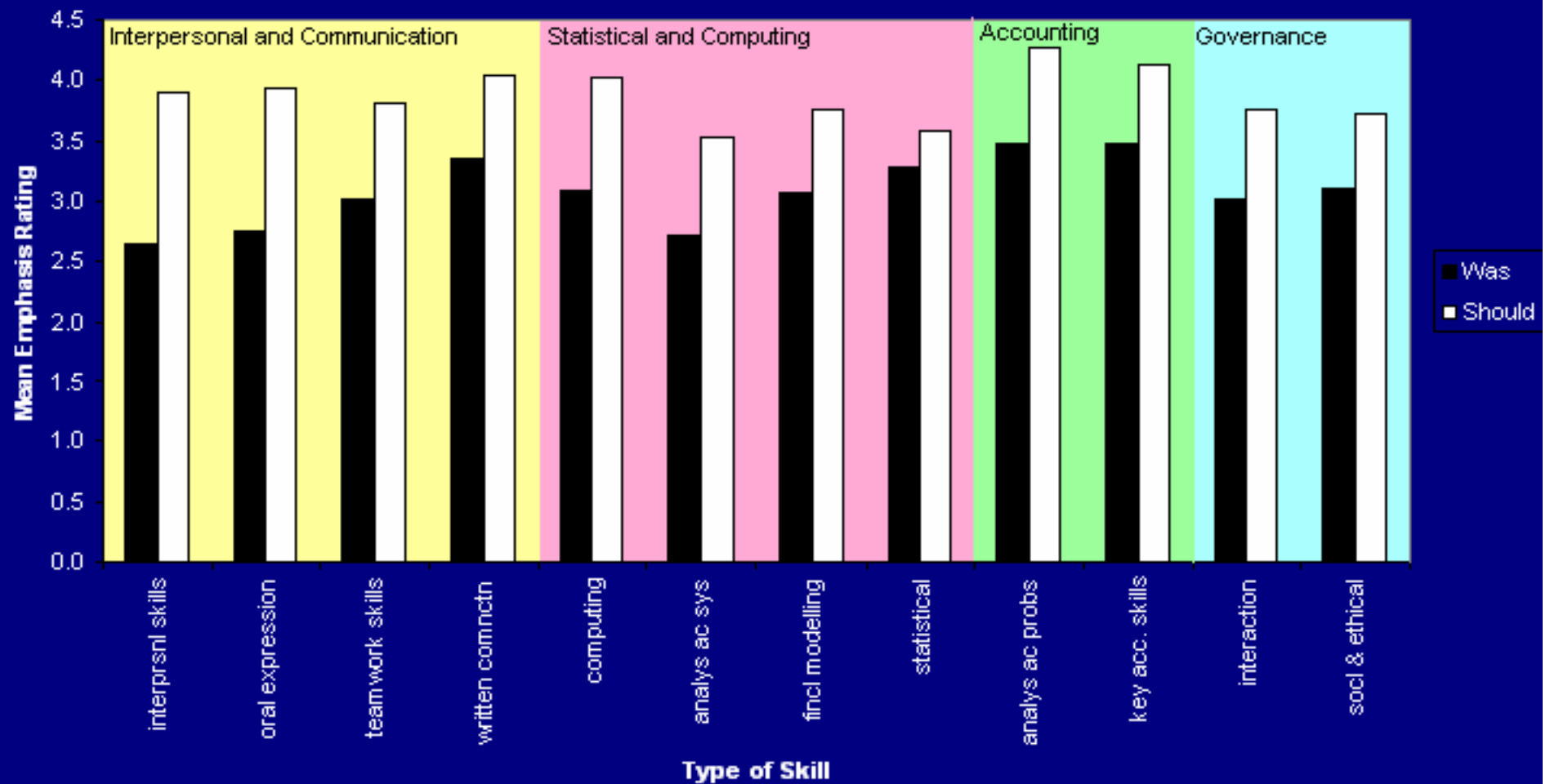
Source, Birrell, 2006 *The Changing Face of the Accounting Profession in Australia* p.5

## Workforce planning – addressing skills requirements, quality of graduates

- Global business environment
    - Change from score keeper role
    - Transferable technical skills
    - Generic, ethical and lifelong learning skills
  - Why a diversity of skills required?
    - Help solve diversity of business challenges
- The expectation gap: graduate skills versus skills expectation of employers

# Generic and technical skills – graduate perceptions

Figure 1. Emphasis on Skills: Was Given vs Should Have Been Given



# Employer skill requirements

- Team skills
- Verbal communication
- Interpersonal skills – motivation, enthusiasm
- Written communication

# Addressing the skills expectation gap

- Need for a broad-based general education together with specialised professional education
- Employers - technical skills presumed, generic skills the more illusive quality for employability
- Four year degrees versus postgraduate specialisations

# Meeting the expectation gap – addressing the skill shortage

## **Should universities be committed to developing generic skills?**

- Cranmer (2006) suggests academic efforts to teach generic skills produce ‘at best mixed results’
- Increase employment-based training and work experience

# Workforce planning – some thoughts

- Should university education be less focused on detailed technical skill development?
- Is a broader based education appropriate? – achieved via way courses delivered, greater interaction to enhance generic and business skills
- Resource implications –
  - staff/student ratios
  - contact hours