



It's not easy for aspirant chartered accountants. To qualify as a CA in SA you need to complete four years at university, two qualifying examinations, a professional programme as well as three years practical work experience.

'This country's CA qualification is considered among the best in the world, due to the rigour of the process itself,' says Mandi Olivier, senior executive for Professional Development at South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica).

The CA programmes at 15 universities across SA are all accredited by Saica. In 2010, a total of 1 978 out of 3 110 candidates passed the annual board exam – a 64% pass rate across these Saica-accredited universities.

Alex van der Watt, who heads up the Accounting Department at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), welcomes the exacting standards. 'It's a demanding course and the standard is very high. But because of that, the CA qualification from South Africa is ranked among the best in the world, and our students are sought after.'

UJ is one of the leading universities in SA for accounting education, and boasted a pass rate of 89% for the CA board exam last year, with 430 graduates. 'It's much higher than the average, and we're happy about the rate,' says Van der Watt. 'We aim for between 85 and 90%. You don't want more than that, as the exam is then too easy.'

Stellenbosch University, Wits, the University of Pretoria and UCT have been the leading CA-producing universities over the last five years and have posted higher than average results. It is Saica that ensures universities maintain high standards. The programmes need to meet Saica's requirements across all levels of learning and teaching, and all

accounting departments at Saica-accredited universities have to complete an annual self-evaluation. Representatives from the organisation visit the universities once in a five-year cycle to ensure that they are sticking to the standards.

Despite all these measures, there are some challenges. The chairman of Moore Stephens Chartered Accountants, Charles Reid, says it's often difficult to get students to translate the theory they've learnt into practice. 'The sheer volume of material that needs to be covered by the universities has grown to such an extent that the practical application of the material can only

really be properly dealt with once students commence their training contracts,' he says.

Willem van der Post, a partner and national recruitment leader at Deloitte & Touche, suggests that case study-based learning should be introduced into the course curriculum. 'Very often we find that students are fantastically prepared on a technical level, but that they lack the exposure and experience to turn that technical excellence into value for our clients. Brilliant book knowledge, but still inexperienced in the problem-solving thinking space.'

While there is a gap between theory and practice, universities are trying to produce students who are leaders and managers, as well as being excellent on the auditing side. ➔



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MANDI OLIVIER
SENIOR EXECUTIVE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SAICA