

South African Institute of Professional Accountants
21 June 2017

Professional accounting gains more qualified individuals – Project Achiever plays central role

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The local accountancy industry has gained 271 new professional accountants, following the South African Institute of Professional Accountants' (SAIPA's) professional evaluation (PE) exam that was written in May by 363 qualifying candidates, of which 235 or almost 65% were black.

Out of the black candidates, 163 passed, which equates to just over 69%.

This translates to a 75% overall pass rate, this year the focus shifted to assessing the competence and business knowledge rather than the technical knowledge.

The top ten

Three of the national top ten candidates were participants in SAIPA's competency-based training programme called Project Achiever, while seven were SAIPA trainees:

Cheryl Smith - Midrand
Crushaan Pieterse - Cape Town
Janus Joubert - Pretoria
Gerda Leone Bear- Midrand
MinolenGovender - Midrand
Hilda Afonso - Midrand
Sannelie Peens - North West
Bianca Treiber - Cape Town
Khatija Khan - Durban
Verna De Bod - Cape Town

The quality and competence of the candidates should be revered, as they demonstrated the ability of providing simple, but technically sound solutions for integrated and complex business scenarios. Congratulations to the successful candidates, and for those who did not, I want to emphasise that the lessons you have learnt form part of the road to success.

Transformation

Project Achiever is considered to be at the root of the increase in the pass rate of the professional evaluation exam. Geared towards advancing transformation in the professional accounting industry, the programme is a joint initiative by SAIPA and the Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (Fasset). The programme yield four candidates in the top 10 for the May 2017 exam, including the 2nd best candidates

To date, four groups have attended the Project Achiever program, totaling 577 candidates achieving pass rates between 74% and 89%.

The importance of competency-based training in the work environment

Many professionals will agree that there is a big difference between academic learning and successfully applying the knowledge in the work environment.

Competency-based training, which is the foundation of Project Achiever, is developed to assist candidates with the integration of academic knowledge with the softer skills required to build a successful career where the market require “thinking professional accountants”.

These skills include communication (both written and verbal), problem solving skills, and critical thinking. Soft skills are not generally focused on during academic programmes, but they are crucial in the workplace.

SAIPA’s competency-based training programmes

The Project Achiever programme involves training on Saturdays over a period of 12 weeks prior to the professional evaluation exam.

For students who don’t have access to the major centres where face-to-face training is provided, an online version of the Project Achiever training programme was launched earlier this year.

The training is not subject-based, focussing instead on guiding the candidates in scenarios where they should apply their knowledge in an integrated manner to come up with the best possible solutions to business problems. Candidates will be guided in how to use the required soft skills like communication with clients, colleagues, and employers, decision making, team-working skills, creativity and problem solving skills and time management.

In addition to the competency-based training, the candidates are also provided with guidance in exam technique. In the past, this was only provided in the face-to-face sessions, but webinars will be integrated into the online course to provide online candidates with the same assistance to pass the professional evaluation exam.

Objectives of SAIPA’s competency-based training

The competency-based training’s most important objective is to ensure the candidates are competent to perform the duties and responsibilities of professional accountant in terms of international benchmarks.

The training aims to develop the applicants to apply their academic knowledge, not rigidly, but in a manner that enables them to come up with solutions to problems they might have to deal with in their coming career.

The training also aims to teach candidates how to work effectively in multi-disciplinary teams.

Career prospects for candidates

Although all candidates are employed when they come onto the programme, their success in job offers and promotions are significant because of the soft skills and cognitive skills developed during the programme.

Some examples are (a) candidates being promoted to Deputy Director posts in the public sector; (b) candidates receiving employment offers where their salaries are tripled; (c) candidates being promoted to senior positions in accounting practices; (d) candidates being offered junior partnerships in practices; (e) candidates successfully establishing their own practices.

ENDS

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