

South African Institute of Professional Accountants

6 April 2017

Post-grad qualification to bolster public sector financial management

The South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA) and The School of Government at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) have launched a post-graduate qualification in public sector financial management aimed specifically at senior managers and chief financial officers (CFOs) at municipal and public sector departments in South Africa.

The chief motivation for introducing the qualification, according to Professor Rashied Small, SAIPA's Executive: Education, Training and Membership, is to raise the levels of financial management and control at town council level. "We have found that senior managers and chief financial officers, in many cases are either too focused on their management role, or on their role as accounting officers, without having the skills to combine the two so as to benefit their organisations," he said.

The year-long qualification will instill financial skills and competencies in those working in municipalities who come from a management background, and it will look to give those whose background is in finance, the skills to manage processes and to think strategically.

Skills Swop

"Students should have either accounting/finance or public administration degrees as an entry requirement and the curriculum they follow will be shaped by which of the two fields they come from," Small explains.

The course content is based on four pillars: policy development; economics; financial management; and reporting, Small explains. "The course will have a strong practical orientation. The content will be linked to the workplace and the assignments and evaluations will relate to real, on-the-job situations."

The roll out of the qualification has been a national one and the idea is to run week-long blocks of theoretical teaching, followed by three week periods of application on-the-job, with assignments based on real-world issues.

"We will be sending the lecturers to the students rather than bringing the students to the Western Cape," Small explains. "They will gather in central venues around the country for a week of lectures and then return to their municipal offices for three weeks of implementing what was learned."

On completion of the course they will receive a Post-Graduate Diploma in Public Finance, but more importantly, they will qualify to write SAIPA's professional examination and begin the process of obtaining the institute's designation of Professional Accountant (SA), with a specialisation in public sector finance.

Professional Evaluation

“In 18 months’ time a professional designation will be required for any person to be appointed as a CFO in the public service,” Small said. “This qualification will help those who want to apply for those positions.”

The university will be the training provider, with SAIPA’s contribution being the access to its professional evaluation examination at the end. “Our members will also be involved in some of the teaching, and we will act as moderators for the evaluation processes,” Small added.

Applicants can contact the School of Government: Mr AD Roman - aroman@uwc.ac.za and it has also been marketed at municipalities around the country. Small warns, however, that the first class has been greatly over-subscribed. “We will be taking in 40 graduates in the second semester and we have over 400 applicants,” he said.

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