

# From listening to leading: Milpark's responsive approach to education

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Being a higher education student in a country that has been called the most unequal country in the world is not easy. For millions of students in South Africa, the challenge is not only to obtain financial funding to further their studies, but to find a way of surviving while they are studying and possibly supporting family members too. This is no mean feat considering that unemployment and especially youth unemployment in South Africa is staggeringly high at 60% according to most recent numbers.



Milpark Education CEO Andrew Horsfall says listening to students over the years has given the leaders at the institution a valuable insight into what students need. "South African students definitely have the potential to succeed, what they are lacking is support and help in unlocking their capabilities."

Milpark Education recently revised its mission and strategic intent to reflect more tangibly what is happening at the company. This means showing how the move towards prioritising the student experience is embracing a more holistic understanding of what education is. It is a process that has been taking place for some time at the company. But the new branding is a stake in the ground, Horsfall believes. "It shows a shift in belief and attitude and that is reflected in a different tone and a high level of intentionality in how we go about communicating it. We are giving words to what we believe in, which will strengthen us as we focus our direction."

Each school within Milpark has their own approach tailored to their specific field of industry, but the brand message is overarching: We've got you. You've got this. So far, this emphasis has shown encouraging results with Milpark Education recently becoming the largest provider of chartered accountants (CAs(SA)) to the country.

Milpark Education has been doing online education since 2015. During the pandemic, the institution was able to move all students into the virtual environment almost seamlessly and online assessments were instituted. After the pandemic restrictions were lifted, Milpark Education decided that due to the success of the online delivery, all contact learning would be ended and replaced with purely an online offering.

High academic standards are paired with flexible study arrangements and schedules, more accommodating payment options and more accessible academic programmes. Asynchronous material is presented in the form of videos and online lectures, group chats and team sessions that take place virtually. For students, there is also a heightened community element, in which students engage with each other online as well as on special platforms geared towards the students.

Horsfall says lecturers and faculty are aware of the enormous strain that students in South Africa are under. "To be able to learn, you must be brave because you are genuinely opening and expanding your mind. But you can't be brave if you are unsupported and riddled with doubt about your academic potential."

Milpark's holistic support services includes a mentorship programme, which have been very successful. Edna Machivene, who did a postgraduate degree in accounting (PGDA) at CA Connect, incorporated in the School of Professional Accounting at Milpark Education reveals: "Studying is not only about academics, so it helps to have someone to talk to and someone that has also gone through the same struggles and still conquered," she says.

“I think we forget sometimes that the business world is composed of people who are also trying to get the basics right. In SA, this amounts to good leadership, ethical and morally sound business principles, figuring out how to be diverse and inclusive and enabling in our workplaces. This is our focus. Providing students with the kind of educational experience that becomes an evolution of thought and professional advancement,” Horsfall adds.

He wants prospective and current Milpark students to know that as their needs change, Milpark changes too, and is there to support them. “Milpark is not only there for you in the beginning of the academic journey, but literally every step of the way. You are not alone in this at any point, we are there, with you.”

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Milpark Education was established in 1997, becoming one of the first private providers of higher management education in South Africa. Milpark services the higher education needs of various corporate entities as well as public students, through the qualification offerings of four schools: the School of Professional Accounting (incorporating CA Connect), the Business School; the School of Commerce; and the School of Financial Services. It currently offers 23 accredited programmes in higher education.

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