

Thuthuka and KZN Provincial Treasury: A study in success

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An exciting partnership between the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Treasury has had far-reaching results, entrenching a culture of accountability in the department while creating opportunities for the province's youth.



Earlier this year, Lindelani Sigubudu took up a position as manager in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Treasury. It's an achievement that comes after three years of hard work and lots of learning – all of which Lindelani considers immensely valuable. "As one of the first three trainees to join the KZN treasury's training programme, the experience was both challenging and exciting. I acquired so many skills as a member of the Trainee Accounting Programme, and was exposed to frameworks I'd never seen before. I also learnt the power of emotional intelligence, and the importance of being able to work with different individuals whose qualifications are different to your own. I have come to understand the value of being humble at all times; a lesson I learnt through some of my supervisors who may not have a Chartered Accountancy qualification, but who enjoy a wealth of knowledge and experience that they never hesitated to share with me. Taking part in the programme also taught me to remain open minded, and to focus on the positives when you find yourself in a difficult situation." All told, says Lindelani, the programme didn't merely equip him with the skills to work in the public sector. It also set him up for his life as a chartered accountant (CA(SA)).

Lindelani's success story is a happy by product of a project which, according to the Treasury's Madhavi Bhaw, has made tremendous inroads in addressing the scarcity of qualified accountants in KwaZulu-Natal. She explains that the department's collaboration with SAICA's Thuthuka Bursary Fund came about due to the provincial audit outcomes, which revealed the need to enhance provincial financial management. "The partnership was developed around the dual aims of creating our own specialised pool of professional CAs(SA), which would address the mismanagement of public funds and strengthen financial management at both provincial and local government level, while also addressing the profession's barriers to transformation."

With this in mind, 72 students were selected to receive funding and take part in the project (with financial assistance provided from the first year until the Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting). Bhaw points out that this is a significant number, which posed a challenge for the Treasury: “We had to identify where each would be placed for training after they completed their academic studies.” This is how the KZN Treasury came to become a SAICA accredited Training Office in 2015, while Thuthuka committed to ensuring that trainees who exceeded the department’s capacity were placed among participating partners. Added to this, candidates are accepted into a management programme in the public sector. “This furthers our goal of fostering CAs(SA) who will continue their service within government.”

Bhaw notes that the trainee pass rate exceeds 70% - a considerable achievement, but only one of several highlights achieved by the programme. “The KZN Provincial Treasury is one of the first offices of its nature to become an accredited SAICA training office outside of public practice,” she says – a status of which she is justifiably proud, particularly as the department received a 1-rating when it underwent re-accreditation. “The process wasn’t without challenges,” she admits. “However, the support of various institutions and our collaboration with offices across both the private and public sectors granted us insight into what was required of us, and allowed us access to a web of information that created the basis of our success story.”

The heroes of that story are undoubtedly the three recently qualified trainees who joined the Treasury in 2015. Bhaw says that the trainees who received funding were relieved of the financial pressure often experienced by people studying towards this profession. Added to this, they have benefited from enjoying access to Thuthuka’s offerings, which has helped to boost their experience. “Students who went on to join the KZN Provincial Treasury Training Office have been given a chance to strive towards a career within the public service, and they now understand that our intention is to build an ethical base for government. Moreover, they have a chance to play an active role in making a difference in the public sector.”

This sentiment is echoed by Thuthuka trainee, Lidia Mabaso. “This experience has completely changed my perspective of the public sector. I entered the department with the same prejudices as most South Africans, believing that government is a corrupt entity with individuals who are simply not sufficiently competent to do their work. However, I know better now. I have met and worked with smart, talented, competent and hardworking individuals who strive to ensure that there is transformation in the lives of citizens.

“I have learnt so much about the dynamics of government, and the potential I have to improve our citizens’ lives by delivering on the promises made by government,” she continues.

Beyond the skills that she acquired, Lidia says that one of the most important things she learnt is to accept and walk her own path. “I have learnt not to let other people’s aspirations, goals and dreams influence the vision for my life. I decided to take a different path to becoming a CA(SA) when I joined KZN Treasury. A lot of people around me had doubts about the programme and were worried about the work exposure and the type of CA that I would become, but I’ve come to realise that the biggest challenges bring the greatest rewards. I am proud to be a government trained Chartered Accountant. I am proud to know that I am in a position to make a difference in the lives of so many people. I am glad that I was brave and took this path less travelled. We are the first of our kind, the first to be trained to work and make a difference in the public sector and this is exciting.”

Ntokozo Qwabe, who also qualified recently, is similarly enthusiastic. “The programme equipped me with the tools to become a broader view professional, especially since rotating through various departments and tasks presented lots of fresh challenges and meant that I learnt a lot.” In fact, says Ntokozo, the programme developed his skills as a global thinker, and has prepared him to take on new challenges.

Bhaw has the last word: “This partnership has opened opportunities for trainees and qualified CAs(SA) to engage with institutions that would not necessarily attract employees with the high skill levels that are associated with the profession. It allows young people to filter through to unconventional training sites, catering for those who are passionate about the public sector and allowing individuals to train within the field and understand financial management from the foundational level, which was not easily available previously. These projects assist in creating a new type of CA(SA), one that has deep roots within the public service, instilling the ethical prescript that is ingrained within the profession and ensuring that it is enforced

in a sector that requires it now more than ever.”

About SAICA

SAICA, South Africa’s pre-eminent accountancy body, is widely recognised as one of the world’s leading accounting institutes. The Institute provides a wide range of support services to more than 46 000 members and associates who are chartered accountants [CAs(SA)], as well as associate general accountants (AGAs(SA)) and accounting technicians (ATs(SA)), who hold positions as CEOs, MDs, board directors, business owners, chief financial officers, auditors and leaders in every sphere of commerce and industry, and who play a significant role in the nation’s highly dynamic business sector and economic development.

About the Thuthuka Bursary Fund and Education Upliftment Project:

One of SAICA’s prime goals is to contribute towards strengthening the country’s economy by playing a significant and leading role in transformation and skills development. The Thuthuka Education Upliftment Project, a pioneering initiative to promote transformation in the profession, was launched in the Eastern Cape in 2002 and has grown into a national project.

Thuthuka’s objective is to transform the demographics of the profession to reflect those of the country in terms of race and gender, and provide educational support to African learners and students for the benefit of the profession, while simultaneously helping to uplift communities. Therefore, SAICA prides itself in leading the chartered accountancy profession as a socially responsible driver of business and skills development by supporting and encouraging enterprise development initiatives.

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