

INSIGHTS

HIGHER EDUCATION

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Transformation — profession making strides

● *UJ candidates' results affirm it as a leading institution in accounting education in SA, writes Penny Haw*

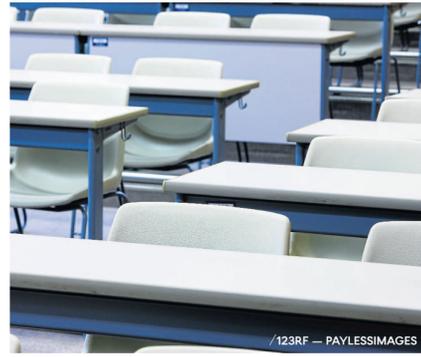
Released in August, the results of the June 2018 Initial Test of Competence (ITC) of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica) saw a further 634 candidates joining the 2.220 candidates who passed the ITC in January 2018. This brings the Certificate in the Theory of Accounting (CTA) cohort pass rate for this year's ITC exams to 87.7%. In addition, 61% of the successful candidates are black, further contributing towards Saica's transformation objectives. The ITC is the first of two professional examinations that candidates (Chartered Accountants) are required to pass to register with Saica as CAs, and the result tables



Prof Ben Marx ... growth.

compare the performance of all universities offering Saica accredited degrees. "With an overall pass rate of 87.7% over both of this year's ITC sittings, this year's CTA

cohort has exceeded Saica's expectations. We are proud as it illustrates just how seriously candidates applied themselves," says senior executive professional development at Saica, Mandi Olivier. Among the universities participating in the June exams was the University of Johannesburg (UJ), whose results affirm its position as a leading institution in accounting education in SA. UJ candidates achieved an overall pass rate of 93.2% for the 2018 cohort, compared to the national pass rate of 87.7%. According to head of the Department of Accountancy at UJ, Professor Ben Marx, this means the university contributed to the growth of the accounting profession with a total of 304 students passing the Saica ITC



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exams in 2018. It also represents the largest number of successful candidates of all residential universities. An important objective of the Saica examination process is that it is representative of the demographics of the population



Mandi Olivier ... ambitious.

in terms of the numbers of candidates writing and that it achieves equivalent pass rates across all race groups. "The 2018 ITC results illustrate the vast strides that the chartered accountancy profession is making in achieving its ambitious transformation objectives," says Olivier. "With 1135 of the 2018 ITC passes attributed to African candidates, this is the first time the number of passes for African candidates has exceeded the number of passes for white candidates." But, as Saica's senior executive for transformation and growth Gugu Makhanya points out, the success in this regard is not the institute's alone. "Many of the African and Coloured candidates who were successful in the June ITC sitting passed thanks to the Thuthuka

ITC Repeat Programme, which is an initiative Saica runs with the help of funding from the Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority," she says. The Thuthuka ITC Repeat Programme supports black candidates who previously failed the ITC by inviting them to participate in six weeks of full-time lectures, tutorials and assessments in the weeks leading up to the ITC June exam. The programme also includes mentoring and coaching. Most of the candidates are trainees in full-time employment and are given time off by their employers to attend this highly focused programme, which was this year provided nationwide by UJ.

AFRICAN PASSES In addition to its involvement in the Thuthuka Programme, UJ is one of the primary contributors of African candidates. The university has 167 successful African candidates passing the Saica ITC exams in 2018. This, says Marx, is the highest number of African candidates of all residential universities in SA and contributes 15% of all African passes in the 2018 ITC. "UJ celebrates the success of its candidates in the 2018 Saica ITC," he says. "The results are testimony to the success of the UJ CTA programme and we are proud of the confirmation of UJ as the leader in transforming the accounting profession in line with the national imperatives of addressing skills shortage and nation building."

Holistic solutions for lifelong learning

With 2019 application deadlines for many of SA's institutions of higher learning looming, the subject of funding education is again on the minds of many. But, says Mala Suriah, chief marketing officer of finance and education fund management company Fundi, it's time to extend thinking about education and how to finance it beyond traditional models. According to Suriah, students not only want cost-effective, convenient and on-demand access to learning, but also to learning tools and associated support. Moreover, they want providers to simplify the education process. "Students of today need holistic solutions that extend beyond traditional funding all the way through assessments, internships and work opportunities," she says. "For SA

to disrupt the status quo, we need to rethink education and support the move towards a lifelong learning ecosystem." Suriah believes the current definition of what education is made up of is both outdated and limited, with outcomes typically dependent on factors outside a student's control. "This is especially seen in the case of students from disadvantaged communities where they don't have personal resources they can use to overcome barriers of access or quality, for example. Imagine what could and would change in this context if we replaced the current definition of education with lifelong learning?" This, argues Suriah, is especially true in the context of higher education, where educational technology "is democratising content and learning, and challenging current education business models". She believes taking an "ecosystem approach" is crucial if funders and educators are to meet the evolving needs of students and ensure that what and how they learn is relevant. Fundi offers finance and education loans, bursary administration and cashless digital devices for students. It aims to reduce administration hassles and increase productivity for students and institutions.



Mala Suriah ... tools and support.

'Language, academic success clearly linked'



There is a growing body of research that points to the role of language in student shortcomings at university. /123RF — ZIMMYTWS

In an address at the Language and Decolonisation Indaba hosted by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Bellville, Cape Town in August, director of the University of Pretoria's Unit for Academic Literacy, Prof Adelia Carstens, said that while discussion about decolonisation of the curriculum, including application of language, is often considered difficult, universities must stay engaged in the conversation. This, she said, is underpinned by studies that show that language and academic success are irrefutably linked. "There is a growing body of research that points to the role of language in student underperformance at university," she said. "However, this research does not seem to influence teaching practices. There is no pedagogy informing multilingual usage to support concept formation among students for whom English is an additional language." Carstens' presentation, entitled "The Language Question in Higher Education: Transformations in our Doing, Talking and Thinking", concluded that academics and students must be prepared to "experience discomfort, speak their truth, and expect and accept that solutions (to transformative action with regard language usage in higher education) often lies in the conversations themselves". Several South African universities, however, have already taken the issue of multilingualism beyond dialogue, including the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University. Led by Professor Mbulungeni Madiba at the Multilingualism Education

Project in the Centre for Higher Education Development, UCT's translanguaging project aims at bringing students' multilingual resources into the classroom. The idea, explains Madiba, is to use a multilingual strategy in teaching and learning, which means students don't need to use only one language in the journey to their degree. While English is the primary medium of instruction at the university, UCT encourages lecturers and tutors to provide "translanguaging spaces" that enable students to draw on their own languages whenever they can. For example, discussion can happen in different languages, and reporting back can happen in English.

SEVERAL SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THE ISSUE OF MULTILINGUALISM BEYOND DIALOGUE

"We see tutorials as spaces where we can allow students to draw on their own languages and discover among themselves. They can discuss concepts in the language in which they feel confident." The project has the support of UCT vice-chancellor Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng. "Given the hegemony of English, the choice that our [language] policy offers is a chimera. It's a false choice. We have little room for manoeuvre. And that's why we are talking about translanguaging; we are manoeuvring," she says.

Rhodes University's language policy has been in place for almost a decade and is regularly reviewed, says chair of the university's Language Committee, Professor Sam Naidu. In addition to observing the constitution, the policy, she says, aims to develop and promote respect for all languages used by South Africans and to foster the equal use of these languages at Rhodes University. "It also aims to raise awareness that SA is a multilingual country and that Rhodes University reflects this multilingual diversity," says Naidu. "Moreover, we want to promote multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage in a way that creates and fosters a supportive, inclusive and nondiscriminatory environment in which all members of the university can feel they belong." The language policy at Rhodes is predicated on several principles. These include to "accord equal esteem to all official provincial languages; ensure that language is not a barrier to equity of access, opportunity and success; promote multilingualism and further the intellectualisation of the nine official African languages of SA; and create the conditions for the use of particularly isiXhosa as a language of learning and teaching". But what does this mean at a practical level? According to Naidu, it means English may or may not be the language of learning and teaching in academic departments where languages other than English are taught as subjects, and other languages are used alongside English during tutorials.

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SAICA ITC

2018 results

- 93% Overall pass rate
- Largest number of successful candidates of all residential universities nationwide
- Largest number of African candidates of all residential universities nationwide
- Simon Basson – Number 1 position in South Africa
- Brett Black also placed in the Top 10

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