

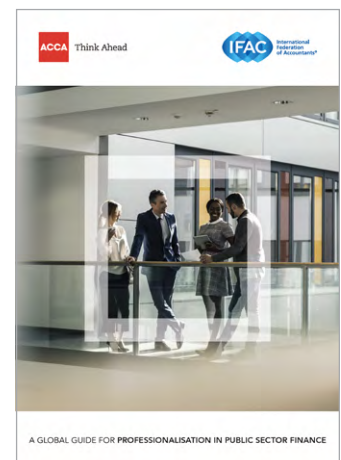


The public sector is the biggest sector in the global economy and often the biggest employer. The scope of the public sector is very broad and includes national governments, regional (state, provincial, territorial) governments, local (city, town) governments and related governmental entities (agencies, boards, commissions and enterprises), as well as sub sectors such as health and education.

To address these shortages, help drive effective public financial management (PFM), and respond to future needs of the public sector, there is an important need and opportunity for the accountancy profession to:

- **Expand public sector accountant membership within professional accountancy organizations (PAOs).**
- **Increase professionalisation in public sector finance.**
 - IFAC and ACCA published [A Global Guide for Professionalisation in Public Sector Finance](#) which highlights the benefits of professionalisation and showcases country case studies along the journey to professionalisation.
 - [Apprenticeship schemes](#), and [accounting technician qualification](#) routes are key to professionalising those already working in the public sector, as well as attracting people into the sector.
- **Consider future learning and development needs and highlight the career paths in public finance.**
 - Developing soft skills is a key priority for public finance roles, particularly influencing skills in more senior roles.
 - The concept of [chief value officers](#) is highly relevant in a public sector context where an understanding of the impact of public spending on social value and other outcomes is crucial to inform policies that address systemic, and connected issues such as climate, inequality, access to education, access to healthcare, and poverty. Public sector accountants already use sophisticated models of decision appraisal.
 - With developments in [sustainability reporting in the public sector](#), accountants can have a role in supporting, particularly in terms of methodology and processes to ensure confidence in sustainability information.

Given the scale and complexity of public finances, competing demands on public resources, and the need for transparency and accountability for the management of public funds, the demand for finance and accounting professionals is high. However, many jurisdictions at central and local government levels experience difficulties in finding suitable candidates with the right skills for finance and accounting positions.



- **Help fight corruption**
 - Government spending can be vulnerable to corruption, and in jurisdictions with high levels of government corruption, individuals can face intimidation and threats for speaking out.
 - PAOs have an important role in driving anti-corruption initiatives and supporting their members in difficult situations.
 - Public sector capacity building is one of the key actions included in [IFAC's Action Plan for Fighting Corruption and Economic Crime](#).



CASE STUDY

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (SAICA)

Milton Segal, Executive Director of Standards, and Natasha Soopal, Executive, Ethics Standards and Public Sector, presented at IFAC's Professional Accountants in Business Advisory Group meeting to share insights on SAICA's activities in the public sector both in terms of member support and its broader advocacy role, including to enhance the marketability of public sector accounting careers.

Why does SAICA focus on the public sector?

SAICA's constitution sets out its purpose to act in the public interest, and to contribute to economic and social advancement of South Africa. Engaging with, and growing the number of members who work in, the public sector is important to enable better decisions and allocation of public resources, and to have a wider impact on society. SAICA supports the public sector from both a member interest perspective and in the broader public interest.

ABOUT SAICA

- More than 50,000 members and associates
- Objectives include to:
 - Promote the interests of SAICA members and associates.
 - Support the development of the South African economy and society.
- Three designations offered:
 - Chartered Accountant CA(SA)
 - Associate General Accountant AGA(SA)
 - Accounting Technician AT(SA)

MEMBER INTEREST

- Member support
 - Technical support, training, and events
 - Member portal for technical public sector queries
- Advocating on behalf of members
 - For example, advocacy with government to support those facing intimidation threats, and to create an enabling environment for professionalisation
- Promoting marketability of members
 - Showcasing the value of member competencies
 - Helping to attract talent into the public sector
 - Highlighting career mobility opportunities and different career paths

PUBLIC INTEREST

- Support economic reform
- Promote [professionalisation](#) of the public sector including promoting training officers
- Improve public financial management
- Advocating for fit-for-purpose legislation and financial reporting standards

SAICA's mandate to support the public interest is written into its constitution

Paragraph 4.1. of SAICA's Constitution states "The principal purpose and object of the Institute is to promote the common interests of Members and Associates and the public interest by enhancing the relevance, values, competence and influence of Members and Associates in South Africa and abroad, and to contribute to economic and social development in South Africa.

BENEFITS

PAO



- (a) Increased membership within the public service
- (b) PAO seen as key stakeholder within the public service for policy and legislation reforms
- (c) Member interests elevated

PUBLIC INTEREST



Profession contributing to:

- (a) Economic reforms
- (b) Improvement in financial reporting, compliance, and governance
- (c) Professionalisation
- (d) Sound audit methodology in line with international standards



Attracting talent and growing membership in the public sector

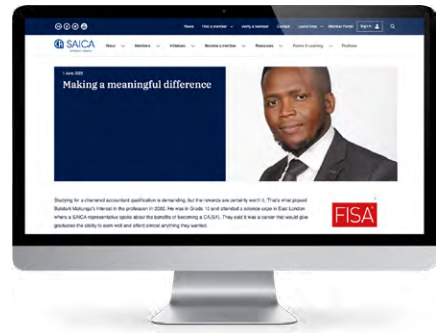
SAICA's approach to attracting talent and growing membership in the public sector has evolved over the years and includes the following:

- **Accrediting public sector training offices**, which can train prospective SAICA members and associates, and give them the opportunity to apply their technical knowledge in a practical work environment.
 - The largest public sector training office in South Africa is the Auditor General of South Africa, which employs CAs and hires the most public sector trainees, helping to grow a pipeline of accountants who train and often remain in the sector.
- **Updating the academic programme to include public sector related topics** in the curriculum, recognizing that the public sector impacts everyone, therefore it is essential for all members to have an understanding and awareness of the public sector.
- **Advocating for a professionalised public sector**, for example:
 - SAICA's input into the government's development of [*A National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service*](#), through
 - A formal [submission letter from SAICA](#)
 - SAICA's CEO, Freeman Nomvalo being [appointed to a task team](#) advising the government on matters pertaining to the professionalisation of the public service, serving specifically on the public finance and audit stream of the task team.



- **Profiling members in the public sector**, to promote career opportunities and showcase the work of public sector accountants and the difference they make. Examples include:

- [Making a meaningful difference | SAICA](#)
- [Driving the professionalisation of the public service - Garth Pretorius | SAICA](#)
- [From SA public sector to the world | SAICA](#)
- [Driven to help ensure a better life for all - Sandiso Gcwab | SAICA](#)
- [Making a difference in her community | SAICA](#)
- [Why numbers are important - Nyawa Dikwayo | SAICA](#)
- [Inspiration, hard work and someone to believe in him the secret to his CA\(SA\)'s success | SAICA](#)



SAICA members also occupy critical positions in the public sector, including the accountant general and auditor general, who are both professional accountants.

- **Public sector members as ambassadors** to help recruit other members into the sector and professionalise their workforce to increase the number of professionally qualified accountants. For example, a SAICA member who is a chief financial officer (CFO) at a municipality encourages staff in finance to take up SAICA designations.



Professionalisation of the public sector

SAICA offers three designations:

Chartered Accountant CA(SA)

Associate General Accountant
AGA(SA)

Accounting Technician AT(SA)



It is important to have professionals at all three of these levels. However, in many public sector organizations, often the CFO at the CA(SA) level is the only professionally qualified accountant in the finance function. There is therefore a need to build capacity at the AGA(SA) and AT(SA) levels to support the CFO, as well as offer a professional designation to those already working in public sector finance functions. Recognizing this, SAICA developed specific [accounting technician qualifications](#) for public sector and local government, the benefits of which include:

- Ensuring those working in public sector finance have the appropriate technical knowledge and skills to undertake the day-to-day practical work of accountancy and play a key operational role in producing reliable financial information.
- Promoting strong professional ethics in the public sector as accounting technicians must adhere to the same international standards and code of ethics as CA(SA) members.
- Encouraging continuous learning through continuing professional development (CPD) requirements.
- Helping with the retention of CA(SA) members, by ensuring they are better supported by a qualified team.
- Assisting the government on the professionalisation of the public sector with recognition of prior learning.

Career mobility

Following member concerns around career mobility for those trained in the public sector, SAICA undertook research to better understand the extent to which issues raised were a reality versus a perception.

The research found that:

- A negative perception does exist towards members working in the public sector including that they are inferior to those in the private sector or not seen as relevant in terms of skills and experience.
- Despite common misconceptions, there is a minimal difference in remuneration between members working in the public and private sectors.

SAICA priorities to address perception gaps include:

- Promoting that the DNA of professional accountants is the same regardless of the sector in which they train and work. All members are subject to the same competency framework and exams, and therefore have the competency to work within various sectors.
- Educating the market, for example recruiters and employers, to ensure they are aware of how professional accountants qualify, emphasizing that the process is the same across sectors.
- Implementation of a revolving job policy, where trainees in the public sector have exposure to the private sector at some point during their practical training (and vice versa).



Pathways to relevance

To encourage career mobility and flexibility, SAICA has developed a post qualification career mapping tool to assist members in identifying the skills and competencies needed across various career paths.

11 career paths have been identified and are defined by a current and future view to the roles and competencies that enable performance.

Access the tool here: [Pathways to Relevance | SAICA](#)

CAREER PATHS IDENTIFIED
YOUR PATH
11 CAREERS IDENTIFIED

11 Career Paths have been identified. These include finance and accounting experts, specialists, and other business experts that work within and outside the finance function. Each Career Path has been defined by a current and future view to the roles and competencies that enable performance. Select the career path most relevant to you.

- AUDITING AND ASSURANCE
- BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBER / EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE
- GENERAL MANAGER
- INNOVATING (ENTREPRENEUR)
- ACADEMIA
- INDUSTRY FOCUS: PUBLIC SECTOR
- CONSULTING SERVICES
- FINANCIAL MANAGER
- INDUSTRY FOCUS: BANKING
- INVESTMENT MANAGER
- TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL ENABLER



SAICA's key priorities

- Advocating for a conducive environment for members to work or operate in, and supporting members facing ethics and intimidation challenges
- Developing adequate support for members
- Managing the brand and perception of members in the public sector
- Consistent advocacy for an effective and efficient public service
- Ability to manage members' ethical challenges (media exposure, etc.)
- Ensuring sufficient exposure of members qualifying in the public sector

Ethics and intimidation

Support to members

- Providing ethics training and guidance
- Operating a member portal query system which allows members to obtain advice when they experience ethical dilemmas and threats

PAO role in whistleblowing

- SAICA has recently signed a partnership agreement with the non-profit organization, Whistleblower House, to support members who are whistleblowers (or considering to whistle blow) when they identify fraud and corruption and are experiencing the consequences of speaking out.



This was a presentation to the IFAC Professional Accountants in Business Advisory Group during their March 2023 meeting. For a full summary of the meeting, see the article: [The Five Opportunities Making Accountancy a Passport to Meaningful Careers in the Private and Public Sectors](#).