

CEO Roadshow – EMEA region

The questions below were raised during the CEO roadshow for members residing in the EMEA region, which took place on 23 February 2021.

MEMBER VALUE

1. What is SAICA's strategy regarding 4IR, particularly for the professional assessments and exposure?

In the CEO's presentation at the start of the roadshow, he spoke about the CA2025 competency framework. The framework doesn't only focus on technical skills such as auditing, accounting and tax, but going forward we realise that we need to produce more rounded accountants who also have enabling competencies. We have identified four enabling competencies, one of which is digital acumen.

The framework for prospective chartered accountants, which includes a significant focus on digital acumen, has already been developed and universities are starting to implement this framework. Furthermore, it will also find its way into training programmes to ensure these skills are developed and assessed on the job.

SAICA is overseeing a work group that is currently in the process of determining how digital acumen can be assessed in an exam like the ITC.

In the post-qualification space, it is important to note that members need to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning and development. SAICA offers various events with a strong focus on digital acumen as well as regular articles in the ASA magazine to help equip members for the future world of work.

However, attending a one-day course or reading an article may not be enough, which is why SAICA also created short learning courses with the University of Johannesburg and Wits University. These courses include 4IR for accountants; Enhancing Block Chain and the Internet of Value; as well as AI perspectives for accountants. You can find more information by following the link to the [CA2025 website](#) and clicking on 'Online learning programmes'.

We will continue working with universities to develop more short courses that can assist members in upskilling themselves for the future.

Members can find more information on the competency framework [here](#).

2. What is the position of SAICA regarding mandatory audit firm rotation (MAFR) and when will members be consulted on this matter again?

The reality around the MAFR rule is that it has been prescribed by the IRBA and it is set to come into effect on 1 April 2023. In terms of when SAICA is going to consult with members on this, the answer is that SAICA is currently consulting with stakeholders on Audit Reform. It is no secret that the auditing profession, both locally and internationally, has come under critical scrutiny because of the corporate failures that have had a significant economic impact and have resulted in the public questioning the role of external auditors.

An interesting development around this matter is that the South Africa Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni, indicated in the 2020 budget speech that he is appointing an independent panel of experts to review practices in the auditing profession. The SAICA Audit Reform project is aimed at coordinating the SAICA initiatives to rebuild trust in the auditing profession. An Auditing Reform working group has been established internally, and we meet on a regular basis to touch base in terms of the progress we make on this important matter. Key stakeholder groups have also been identified and have been engaged in terms of the context of the project in an effort to establish their views around the current crisis that we find ourselves in as well as the way forward. These stakeholders include audit firms, regulators and business groups.

One of the themes that is emerging from these consultations relates to the effectiveness of MAFR and whether this will address the challenges of independence, market concentration as well as transformation. SAICA is currently finalising the terms of reference for this project which will be submitted to National Treasury with the aim of guiding the process and reviewing the practices in the auditing profession. The outcome of this action will determine the next steps and will probably lead to further member consultation.

Members are encouraged to monitor SAICA communication for more information on this matter.

3. The IRBA is strategically and organisationally on a back foot. What are SAICA's thoughts and learnings in this regard and the impact on members?

SAICA will continue to collaborate with other stakeholders and decision-makers in support of finding an efficient resolution of the leadership of IRBA as we view the regulator's role as critical in rebuilding the public's trust in the auditing profession. SAICA continues to support its members who are Registered Auditors with any matters relevant to IRBA.

SAICA is also committed to supporting the IRBA caretakers Mrs Nonkululeko Gobodo and Mr Roy Andersen as well as the IRBA in any way required to ensure the ongoing stability of the organisation to restore and safeguard the reputation of the auditing profession.

4. I recently tried to file my tax return on SARS' e-filing platform. It is embarrassing that a recognised tax-collecting agency like SARS cannot comprehend basic changes like Adobe Flash removal. In a time where SARS is missing billions of rand in taxes from individuals and corporates, this adds fuel to the fire and points to incompetence at the highest level. What is SAICA doing about this? In my opinion, if SAICA members are in leadership positions at SARS (which I would expect), this surely is a huge neglect of their responsibilities and perhaps also evident of lack of training and development.

SAICA can only support SARS, however we cannot take responsibility for any operational failures or internal challenges there may be at SARS.

Should SAICA members work in leadership positions at SARS and not fulfil their duties as prescribed by the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct, they should be reported. It cannot be reasonably expected that SAICA should automatically know which members are not fulfilling their duties appropriately. The onus is on every member to report any wrongdoing they may be aware of and SAICA will subsequently investigate all complaints made against members.

SAICA is engaged in a project where we are trying to assist SARS in rebuilding its resources capacity that has been eroded in recent years.

5. How is SAICA supporting members who are working abroad? How are they creating awareness and lobbying for businesses abroad to understand the value SAICA members can bring to their organisations? Whilst I get invited to attend webinars for personal training, I have no idea what SAICA leadership are doing to promote SAICA members in the global market.

SAICA is a founding member of the Chartered Accountants Worldwide (CAW) organisation which aims to promote the CA designation on an international level.

One of CAW's five main objectives is to strengthen the consistency and recognition of the CA brand and to promote the unique selling points of the value of the CA designation on a global basis. CAW has an [active website](#) and social media presence, and their objective from 2020 going forward is to position chartered accountants as difference makers across the world. To do this, they use the resources from the 14 member institutes of CAW to showcase that chartered accountants create value.

CAW also introduced a global network identifier logo for all CAs who are part of the CAW network. Members can [download this logo](#) and use it on their social media profiles and business signatures to show that they form part of a global network.

In addition, SAICA maintains membership of and is an active participant in global organisations to ensure continued relevance and maintenance of standards including:

- The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC)
- The Global Accounting Alliance (GAA)

Further information on the activities of these bodies is available on page 32 and 33 of the [2019 Annual Integrated Report](#).

6. How do we benchmark against the UK, Europe, Australia, and American designations?

SAICA prides itself on the fact that the CA(SA) designation compares with the best in the world. Judging by the work we've done through the CA2025 programme to ensure our CAs(SA) are fit for the future, as well as our reciprocity agreements with international accountancy bodies and our work with IFAC, we undoubtedly compare favourably against the world's best.

Our engagements with international accountancy bodies and international education directors are ongoing, which means we do not have a set time of assessing the CA(SA) qualification against world standards, as it is a continuous process.

Looking at SAICA's ITC and APC examinations and from a pre-qualification point of view, we no doubt offer a designation that is of an international standard.

7. Some members suffer from mental health issues due to work pressure, unemployment, financial strain, etc. Does SAICA have programmes in place to assist members with mental health issues?

SAICA launched a [COVID-19 outreach campaign](#) in 2020, during which we realised that many individuals were struggling with mental and emotional health, including financial strain and general stress and anxiety which had been exacerbated by the onset of the global pandemic.

In response, SAICA hosted a *Leadership in a time of crisis* webcast series to assist members with the significant changes and challenges they were facing due to the pandemic. Members who missed out on this series can catch up on the valuable content we shared by [following this link](#).

Furthermore, we also received feedback that our trainees have been struggling during the pandemic, particularly with mental health challenges. In response, SAICA has run several sessions with training offices to ensure they were giving the necessary support to their trainees. We also took all our trainee initiatives online, particularly Trainee Tuesdays, which enable us to engage directly with trainees and put us in a much better position to assist and support them.

Going forward, SAICA plans to run a series of podcasts and webcasts which will have a wellness check-in focus and will cover topics like creating happiness in challenging times, why emotional intelligence is important for success, etc. This series will be free for all members. We encourage members to keep an eye on SAICA communication for more information in this regard.

8. I would like to know how SAICA is educating the marketplace about the fact that fees are increasing due to the costs of compliance with the additional requirements that members are required to meet.

As part of SAICA's Audit Reform programme, we are in a process of doing comprehensive research on how to manage the concept of an 'expectation gap' which the auditing profession seems to be going through at the moment. Members can read more about the Audit Reform project on [page 50 of the March 2021 Accountancy SA magazine](#).

One must also remember that there is a Competition Act in South Africa that determines or influences the pricing on behalf of the profession. SAICA therefore needs to tread carefully and ensure that our efforts are not disrespectful towards the Competition Act, which will result in investigation and sanction on the profession by the Competition Commission.

RELEVANCE AND REPUTATION

9. Considering the corporate failures led by CAs(SA) as masterminds of fraud and corruption and given the recent governance failures at the IRBA, do you think the prestige of the CA(SA) designation is still intact? If not what will it take for its recovery?

SAICA takes the perception and reputation of the profession seriously, which is why we have continued to implement a consolidated Trust Reconstruction plan for 2021. This plan is a continuation of the Trust Reconstruction plan that was rolled out throughout 2018, 2019 and 2020. Part of this plan includes positive promotion of SAICA and its designations in the marketplace.

In 2020, the SAICA CEO met with various media editors and senior journalists to ensure that SAICA's work and approach to rebuilding trust in the profession was properly communicated. SAICA achieved a total of 1725 external media exposures in 2020, of which 92 exposures were negative, meaning that the 1633 positive exposures far outweigh the negative.

In 2021, the Trust Reconstruction plan will mostly focus on key initiatives which are underpinned by the SAICA strategy and the current media landscape. The key initiatives include, among others, an Audit Reform plan, an Integrated Ethics plan, as well as a plan to professionalise the public sector. We will continue building our media relationships to ensure SAICA is represented fairly in the marketplace.

Furthermore, SAICA monitors, on an annual basis, the impact of external market factors as well as the effect of its own brand reputation management on the reputation of the CA(SA) designation using independent brand research conducted by Ask Afrika among business decision makers across all sectors of the business market in South Africa.

The lead indicators and lag measures to monitor the market standing of our designations are:

- **Lead Indicators:**
 - Spontaneous Awareness
 - Preference in employers
 - Net promoter score (NPS) (NPS is the rating of respondents to encourage their children to become a CA(SA))
- **Lag measures:**
 - Trust Index
 - Admiration Index

The performance of these lead indicators and lag measures from 2017 before any alleged malfeasance and 2020 and these criteria have moved as follows since 2017:

Criteria	2017	2018	2019	2020	Target 2025
Spontaneous awareness	86%	85%	87%	90%	90%
Preference in employees	72%	68%	67%	74%	75%
Net promoter score	45%	28%	36%	37%	45%
Trust Index	Not measured	75%	80%	84%	85%
Admiration Index	76%	66%	68%	68%	75%

What these criteria illustrate are that from 2017 to 2018 when all the negative publicity started occurring, all the indicators, except awareness, have declined. Since 2019 the lead indicators have recovered as a result of SAICA's Trust Reconstruction Strategy which constitutes our brand reputation management activities.

The important lead indicators have risen since 2018 despite ongoing historical and new negative publicity.

The lag measure that has not indicated satisfactory growth in the last two years is the admiration index which is arguably the most important measure of the standing of the CA(SA) brand among business decision makers.

This is because the historical and new negative publicity still impacts on the CA(SA) designation's admiration measure despite the positive trend in the other lead indicators.

SAICA is confident that over time the CA(SA) brand admiration will improve due to its trust reform promotion activities. This will however be slow or static while new negative publicity continues to surface on an ongoing basis.

Therefore, SAICA believes that the perception of the CA(SA) brand is improving and is not as dire as members may believe. SAICA will continue to pro-actively manage the reputation of the CA(SA) designation. It is also important for members to be positive about their designation, as members are the most powerful drivers of the CA(SA) designation's positive brand reputation.

In summary, SAICA must also ensure our members can deal with the ethical situations they may face and that members are properly supported and those who bring the profession into disrepute need to be held to account. Secondly, we must create a positive perception of the institute and the CA(SA) designation in the marketplace, by ensuring the role the profession plays in society and the fact that SAICA members are true difference makers in the South African economy, is communicated effectively and that the positive promotion will always outweigh the negative publicity.

10. What plans are in place to meet out harsher sanctions, not just suspension, for members who contravene the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct? In essence, what is being put in place to deter transgressions and to restore trust in the CA(SA) professional designation?

In June 2020, SAICA adopted a new disciplinary code which was introduced to improve the disciplinary process, and to contribute to deterring wrongdoing in two ways:

- The improvements include a shorter route to get to a hearing at the disciplinary committee, and the publication of disciplinary outcomes with reference to mentioning of name of a member.
- The new SAICA Board also agreed that SAICA shouldn't be paying for all these hearings and therefore we have introduced mechanisms which make it possible for SAICA to claim back all costs incurred from those individuals who have been found guilty, once their hearings have been concluded.

In 2020 SAICA received 476 complaints against members, which represents about 1% of the total membership base. Of these complaints, 40 cases were dismissed by the Professional Conduct Committee. Of the matters heard at Disciplinary Committee level, 25% were related to integrity breaches; a further 25% were related to not acting with the necessary competence and due care; and 12% were related to not acting objectively.

Members can be assured that SAICA investigates all allegations against individual members. If members believe they can add value or support to SAICA's disciplinary processes, they can kindly get in touch with the CEO by sending an email to saica@saica.co.za.

Regarding the plans to restore trust in the designation, kindly refer to the answer to question 9 above.

11. What is SAICA doing for members in consultant businesses, who were allegedly involved in corrupt dealings but found not guilty?

As a matter of course, SAICA investigates all allegations against individual members. The initial investigation phase, in which SAICA gathers factual evidence, testimony and conducts relevant due diligence, is confidential. In the interest of procedural fairness and as prescribed in the SAICA by-laws, SAICA does not comment publicly, in the media or on social media, on any member who is the subject of an investigation during this phase, unless otherwise provided for under the SAICA By-laws. This protects the reputation of the individual members involved (who may well be innocent) and also safeguards third parties who may be mentioned in a complaint but who have no opportunity, as non-members of SAICA, to explain themselves during the institute's disciplinary process.

The outcomes of all disciplinary hearings are published on [SAICA's governance website](#), including those where members were found not guilty.

12. How does SAICA support governmental institutions to get rid of corruption? We see Steinhoff, Tongaat Hulett, Gupta-related scandals, VBS, Eskom, Bosasa... What powers does SAICA have to investigate these matters? I believe it's time that institutions like SAICA to take leadership and set an example of how to get rid of corruption. I felt SAICA was caught off guard by all these scandals and had no urgency to investigate and take steps against corrupt accountants.

SAICA believes it has a positive role to play in the fight against corruption. Although SAICA supports the NPA, the Zondo Commission, SARS and other institutions like these (through technical resources support and through sharing evidence we may have on individuals they are also investigating), it is important to remember that SAICA is not a prosecuting authority. SAICA is a member organisation, which means we only have jurisdiction over SAICA members and therefore cannot investigate firms.

The IRBA deals with the regulation and discipline of firms and according to the SAICA by-laws, where a CA(SA) is also a Registered Auditor and therefore a member of the IRBA, the IRBA must first undertake its investigation and disciplinary process.

SAICA takes all allegations or revelations relating to potential misconduct extremely seriously. We monitor the media (including social media) daily and SAICA initiates investigations into member conduct either after receiving a complaint or because we have decided, based on the information available to us, that a potential breach of the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct may have occurred. SAICA follows due process and investigates all cases without fear or favour.

It is also important to note that the SAICA disciplinary process remains a legal process and therefore must comply with the requirements of the national legal framework as it is subject to judicial review as part of this system. This requires that SAICA must frame all the charges against members clearly and that charges must be based on well-established facts. SAICA needs to give proper notice of hearings and allow ample time for preparation and representation. We need to present evidence that complies with evidentiary requirements and allow the defendants to do so as well. We need to have the hearings overseen by competent panels who are available when defendants and their representatives are. After a finding is made, we need to provide an opportunity for defendants to prepare and make submissions regarding appropriate sanctions and in the end provide reasons for all findings. Complete minutes must be kept of all of these proceedings.

Considering all of this, it is clear that every case managed by SAICA is potentially complex and time consuming. It is also expensive and for that reason, the new By-laws have extensive cost recovery provisions to avoid members in good standing carrying the costs for those bringing the profession into disrepute.

Furthermore, SAICA managed to act against individuals by suspending, and in some cases excluding, them from membership several months before these individuals were arrested or had to appear before the Zondo Commission.

I am confident that SAICA will be in the best possible position to improve on turnaround times going forward and we will continue to report on this to allow members to judge for themselves.

13. Why does SAICA as an organisation not speak out and take a stronger stance against government fraud and corruption in South Africa.

In 2020, the SAICA CEO commented extensively in the media on the need to professionalise the public sector as well as to communicate to both the members and the media what is expected of SAICA members from a Professional Code of Conduct perspective.

In 2021, SAICA will continue advocating for qualified, competent and ethical individuals within both the public and private sectors through various SAICA strategic projects, which include:

- A consolidated Trust Reconstruction programme which includes the Integrated Ethics Project, Audit Reform project, and a Governance in business and combined assurance program;
- A government assistance and public sector professionalisation programme which is aimed at improving public sector audit outcomes.

In addition, SAICA also called for higher qualifications and skills levels for key municipal finance posts when the Auditor General South Africa released the 2018-19 audit outcomes for local government in July 2020 and have since had numerous meetings with key stakeholders in local government to address these concerns.

SAICA is also currently making submissions to the “National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service”.

Another way in which SAICA is working towards improving financial skills in the public sector is through our Accounting Technicians [AT(SA)] designation. Currently we have 57 accredited training providers, 26 (46%) of which are public training institutions including TVET Colleges, Universities of Technology and comprehensive universities. SAICA's AT(SA) department have worked with 59 national, provincial and municipal offices across the country to deliver the AT(SA) qualifications to 5 811 public sector employees.

Furthermore, SAICA, through and in collaboration with the Wiseman Nkhulu Trust's Unite 4 Mzansi™ initiative, is working to mobilise civil society to work together to identify, understand and prevent corruption in both the private and public sectors, through policy reform, finding solutions, and education to actionable ways to overcome South Africa's prolific culture of corruption and state capture. To this end Unite 4 Mzansi™, through research done by the University of Stellenbosch, has developed several case studies to help students, members of the business community and civil society develop an understanding of ethics, corporate malfeasance, state capture, and what we need to do to ensure this is not the norm in our nation. In 2021 Unite 4 Mzansi™ will begin sharing these case studies with the public via various engagements including interviews, thought leadership pieces and events with our Unite 4 Mzansi™ advocates including Prof Wiseman Nkhulu, Prof Thuli Madonsela, Bonang Mohale, Busisiwe Mavuso and other prominent business leaders. This work will continue throughout 2021 and beyond.

SAICA encourages members to read forthcoming SAICA communication in this regard.

14. What is SAICA doing about the ethical issues the profession is currently engulfed by? What sort of programmes are in place to remind and ensure that members prioritise ethics as they are the cornerstone for the profession?

In 2021, SAICA's Trust Reconstruction plan, which is a continuation of plans that were implemented from 2018-2020, will mostly focus on key initiatives which are underpinned by the SAICA strategy and the current media landscape. The key initiatives include, among others, an Audit Reform plan, an Integrated Ethics plan, as well as a plan to professionalise the public sector. We will continue building our media relationships to ensure SAICA is represented fairly in the marketplace.

The Integrated Ethics plan is specifically aimed at coordinating all the ethics initiatives that are underway across SAICA to consolidate our ethics agenda and ultimately do a gap analysis to help us identify gaps in the profession. The goal of this plan is to promote a sustainable ethics culture in the profession to assist with restoring trust in the profession.

The Integrated Ethics plan also recognises that ethics is achieved through a combination of professional ethics, personal ethics, and business ethics. This plan applies to the entire journey of a chartered accountant's development. It includes a pre-qualification approach where the professional development team in partnership with the educational institutes ensure ethics is addressed in academic programmes. SAICA's professional development team also work with training offices in support of their responsibility to equip trainees with ethical competency. From a post-qualification perspective, SAICA delivers CPD offerings and other ethical tools which

ensure ethics is appropriately emphasised in the continuous development of qualified members.

SAICA works with a host of stakeholders to coordinate these efforts and to ensure maximum impact. Partners include the GIBS Ethics Institute which is assisting us with ethics surveys and training for trainees, as well as The Ethics Institute which is helping us to develop and implement educational behavioral initiatives.

Members can also visit the dedicated [SAICA Ethics website](#) which we created to serve as a hub for ethics resources. October 2020 was dedicated to Ethics with a series of [webcasts](#) delivered to members free of charge. SAICA plans to do a second instalment of these Ethics webinars in October 2021.

This year, SAICA will also be presenting a series of case studies that are aimed at demonstrating how ethical principles can be applied. The Integrated Ethics plan contains a communications plan which is focused on publishing ethics features and ethics thought leadership in Accountancy SA magazine and external media.

In early 2021, the SAICA Board also adopted the changes to the International Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the IESBA Code) made by the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA) and changes to the Independent Regulatory Board of Auditors Code of Professional Conduct (IRBA Code) made by the IRBA in 2020, thereby aligning the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct (SAICA Code) to both the IESBA Code and the IRBA Code. The updated [SAICA Code](#) is available on the SAICA website.

We encourage members to monitor SAICA communication for more information on the institute's Ethics initiatives.

TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH

15. Are you happy with the transformation plans at SAICA? If not, what are you planning to change? The pass rate for Africans is still worrying.

SAICA takes transformation seriously and therefore it is also one of the four main pillars in the SAICA strategy.

SAICA is still drawing many young aspiring chartered accountants into our Thuthuka Bursary Fund. The biggest issue we as a profession should really be concerned about is the declining number of black students choosing Mathematics as a subject and even more concerning is the declining number of black students who are getting 60% or more in Mathematics. To combat this concern, SAICA does many learner engagement sessions to explain the importance of choosing Mathematics and working hard to achieve the minimum of 60%.

Since SAICA's Transformation initiatives were mainly started around the year 2002 through the introduction of the Thuthuka programme, the success of the transformation initiatives is measured by the changes in the demographics of members under the age of 35. This is because

there is not much that can be done around transforming the inherited membership, in other words, the older members of the profession. Therefore, the true impact of SAICA's combined transformation initiatives is best represented by looking at how the membership base of CAs(SA) under 35 years old has changed since SAICA's transformation projects began in 2002. Details of SAICA's transformation successes are included in the [Nation Building Impact Report](#).

SAICA is promoting the development of African and Coloured CAs(SA) through the Thuthuka Education Upliftment (TEUF) Board. We have several initiatives in this regard from a school, university, and right up to trainee level. We also engage with key stakeholders such as ABASA and AWCA in this regard.

SAICA will continue conversations on this matter with our relevant stakeholders and will work tirelessly to ensure the membership base reflects the demographics of South Africa.

16. What is the root cause of APC results being low for black students and relatively high for other races? Is this matter of any concern to SAICA and what is done about it?

The difference in pass rates within different racial groups remain a key concern for SAICA. Thus, over the last two years, SAICA has embarked on various initiatives to investigate the cause of this.

To this end, SAICA:

- Met with all the professional programme providers, key stakeholders like ABASA, AWCA and the IRBA, as well as the universities in an effort to determine the reason for the differing pass rates.
- Distributed surveys to APC and ITC students in order to find out more about their experiences and perspectives.

This investigation revealed that there is no single root cause to blame for the difference in pass rates, that there are multiple issues including exposure for African candidates, especially those living in rural areas or smaller towns and training not being at the level it should be.

As transformation and growth sits as a key pillar in SAICA's strategy, SAICA continues to engage with all stakeholders in an effort to improve the pass rate of African students, which include:

- Identifying which universities had not performed well according to the ITC results and engaging with them to highlight issues that they had to focus on within the academic programme.
- Bringing in a service provider to develop a tool that identified key competencies that individual APC candidates are lacking from a training perspective. Since the tool provided a pre- and post-assessment, it revealed an improvement in competencies once candidates worked on acquiring these skills they lacked before using the tool.
- Developing case studies in collaboration with firms to help address the issue of industry exposure to assist candidates.

Despite these interventions, as a profession we need to be realistic about the unique COVID-19 challenges exam candidates had to deal with in 2020, which might influence the professional exam results this year.

17. Maths in basic education is the most important issue and block. This needs to be part of SAICA's focus. Possibly together with the other professions in SA.

SAICA's Thuthuka programme runs several school initiatives that not only promote the profession but also promote and provide academic support in mathematics. These initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- Sponsoring the South African Maths Foundation (SAMF) and sitting on their board where we partner with other stakeholders on the promotion of mathematics. Through the SAMF, we are able to reach over 100 000 learners annually.
- SAICA's annual provincial camps which are run by the best mathematics teachers. (Unfortunately due to COVID-19 we were unable to run these face-to-face camps in 2020). Thus, in 2021 one of our key initiatives will be to appoint these teachers to record lessons in some of the most difficult topics so that we can send those videos throughout South Africa. For learners who live in rural areas that battle with internet connectivity, SAICA is planning on hosting specific SAICA weekends where learners can sit in a classroom and watch these videos and interact with the topics.

18. Does SAICA collect any data on trainee accountants that completed articles to determine the kind of experience trainees are getting? What exactly does this data reflect?

SAICA collects data on trainee accountants in three ways. Firstly, we monitor and accredit training offices. We visit these offices on a risk-based approach and therefore some offices will be seen more regularly than others. During these visits, we'll interview trainees and ask them to complete questionnaires.

Secondly, since the national lockdown we have seen an increase in our direct engagements with trainees which are providing valuable direct feedback.

Thirdly, we also keep our eyes and ears open at non-SAICA events and forums where our trainees may be participating and raising their concerns.

Even though the data shows a wide variety of information, a few matters stand out. Firstly, trainees often feel that the day-to-day experience they have on the job impacts their overall wellbeing. This is a significant focus area for SAICA.

Secondly, we also look at the exposure the trainee is getting. We want to ensure that there are fair opportunities and exposure for all trainees within the training programme. Ultimately, the trainee exposure needs to tie in with the assessment process and some trainees may need more assistance with and support in their development than others.

Our data also shows that direct engagement between SAICA and trainees is the best approach to ensure they feel comfortable and supported, and it will therefore remain a focus going forward.

19. Audit firms still pay trainees low salaries which are not matching the cost of living. Furthermore, these salaries do not match the responsibility given to trainees who are handling audit files.

SAICA runs a salary survey every year and therefore we are aware that there are trainees who are not paid market-related salaries. SAICA has always taken the stance that we do not regulate salaries because there is an employer-employee relationship in place, and that is to be negotiated between the trainee and the employer. What we can do, however, is to educate students coming into the training programme on what they can negotiate around.

Trainees should be aware of the full cost a company incurs in order to run a training programme as well as the fact that they are agreeing to a learnership opportunity and are afforded ample study leave. Therefore, the salaries for trainees tend to be lower than expected.

However, if trainees feel they are treated unfairly, kindly get in contact with SAICA by sending an email to saica@saica.co.za and we can look at the training offices' employment contracts during our accreditation and monitoring interventions. SAICA will always be open and transparent in its feedback to training offices if we feel they are not providing appropriate support to their trainees.

ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

20. Is there a strategy in place to enhance the way SAICA assessors are assessed and considered assessors, because these are still done manually with no regard for the advancement in technology?

SAICA is in the process of developing an electronic assessment tool to coincide with the introduction of CA2025 into the training programme. This means that all training offices will be enabled to assess the trainees digitally. Once this is done our assessors will be able to load their portfolios of evidence directly on to the electronic assessment tool. This electronic tool will enhance our ability to gather data early and in real time.

21. What is the timeline for delivering SAICA's strategic initiatives?

SAICA's strategic initiatives do not have a set timeline for completion as these initiatives have a long-term approach and focus. The current SAICA strategy interventions span from 2021-2023, with some of the initiatives probably continuing after 2023.

All strategic initiatives are tracked and reported on every quarter to ensure they continue making an impact on the overall organisational strategy and that they are still fit for purpose. In addition, the strategic initiatives also reflect on the SAICA scorecard, which is assessed by the Board on an annual basis.

