

Get the tools to manage all of challenges life throws at you - both inside and outside of the classroom

By [Gareth Olivier](#), issued by [Milpark Education](#)

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Many students who sign up for a postgraduate diploma do so because they want to get the technical skills they need to succeed in their chosen career, but at Milpark we will give you so much more. We recognise that you may also need emotional and psychological tools, as well as tips on how to manage family and financial commitments, to get you over the finish line.



Rohwan Naidoo thought that by the time he was 25, he would be a qualified Chartered Accountant and well on the way to being established in the world. Instead, he found himself struggling to pass The South African Institute of Chartered Accounting (SAICA) Initial Test of Competence (ITC). After failing six times, a despondent Rohwan contemplated giving up on his studies. “I was beaten to the core, with absolutely no confidence in anything that I did. I felt inadequate and incapable of standing in the same room with my colleagues – I felt inferior to everyone,” he recalls.

Rohwan isn't the only accounting student struggling to realise his professional goals. According to SAICA, there has been an alarming decline in the number of South African students passing competency tests. The organisation ordered a probe into the situation in 2021. Yet, chartered accountants are in high demand on the job market. In a country where youth unemployment is 66 percent, it seems obvious that more must be done to equip aspiring young CAs with the tools for success. But Rohwan's story reveals the complexity of the situation. Although he was academically bright – a top matriculant in his district with seven distinctions – the obstacles he faced in his tertiary studies were not just about his scholarship. To set him up for success he needed holistic support that reached beyond the academic to touch on all of life's variables.

Student wellbeing is at an all-time low in South African universities

Research shows that financial strain and emotional stress are all too common in South African universities. Many students are also working full-time and have relatives or children to look after. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has made matters worse. A global study in 2020 showed that 76 percent of students said they found it difficult to maintain their

wellbeing. In 2021, 30 percent of South African students revealed they had thought about suicide over the past year. Research shows that students with mental health problems are twice as likely to drop out.

It is not surprising then that student wellbeing was a major topic at the recent AMBA & BGA Global Conference held in Portugal. The event gathers business schools and leaders from around the world to share insights and important developments around business education and the future of work. A keynote presentation by Karen Spens, Rector of the Hanken School of Economics, focused on student and staff wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. She emphasised that student wellness has never been more threatened than it has been over the past two years and that vulnerable students are often the hardest hit.

Making learning more accessible and more supported

This fear has been echoed by SAICA, which in its 2020 Accounting Teaching and Learning Journal, called on institutions to find ways to make education more accessible and consider the multiplicity of challenges students are facing. The role of online education to address education gaps, can be particularly powerful, argues SAICA, highlighting courses such as Milpark Education's CA Connect, which offers the only fully online Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting (PGDA) recognised by Institute.

A key advantage of online education over traditional institutions is that it can provide access to group and individual study habit data, which allows for crucial insight into student behaviour. If a student has been offline for a week, for example, staff can be alerted to see if they need support. If a student has watched the same video several times over, it might mean they are battling to understand a concept. Having counsellors and psychologists who can contact students also helps keep students motivated and on track.

This was certainly the case for Rohwan who enrolled with CA Connect as a last resort. He admitted he was terrified to face the ITC again but quickly got back on track toward his dream of becoming a CA. "I was in a different cognitive space this time round. The course lecturers had so much faith in me and the other students," he says.

Fellow student Cwaka Jumba, who had also been stuck in a holding pattern, in his case unable to move past the postgraduate diploma to sit the ITC, agrees that overcoming mental blocks was key in breaking the deadlock. "It was all about unlocking the knowledge that was already there and having the confidence to control my emotions at the time when the exam had to be written."

A degree from Milpark can open doors

After completing Milpark's Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting, Cwaka and Rowhan passed SAICA ITC's without a hitch. It's an increasingly common pattern: SAICA's ITC statistics report shows that Milpark Education – thanks to its expanded focus on student support – is currently the fourth largest contributor to successful ITC candidates and is on a growth trajectory that is unmatched by other institutions. In time, this could set Milpark up to become the biggest provider of South African chartered accountants in the future.

The evidence and the feedback we get from students is crystal clear: if they are better equipped to manage the many factors that influence and impact on their higher education journey – including mental health, financial wellbeing, and other family commitments – they have more time to focus more fully on their education. As a result, educators all over the world are arguing for institutions to focus on expanding the support they provide students.

Following one 2021 study that examined the impact of the hybrid learning systems adopted during the pandemic, several South African academics have emphasised what is at stake: "A country like South Africa cannot afford to ignore the impact of the pandemic on higher education, especially on students' health and wellbeing. South Africa's comparative and competitive edge is locked in the youth, especially university students. They are a critical mass in 'building the capability of the state to play a developmental, transformative role', according to the National Development Plan 2030."

Tertiary institutions must prioritise student wellbeing and resilience if they are going to stay relevant in this brave new world of learning. It's perhaps at the heart of institutional strategy and academic success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gareth Olivier is the founder and head of CA Connect at Milpark Education.

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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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