

# Managing the expectations of young CAs



By [Graham Paulsen](#)

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Many newly qualified chartered accountants confidently enter the job market buoyed by reports that there is an urgent need for their skills, only to find that the reality is vastly different.

Whilst the reported shortage of 5,000 qualified CA(SA)s in South Africa raises expectations, the numbers don't differentiate between public and private sector jobs, levels of experience and industry-specific shortages and it's understandable that job seekers are baffled when their career aspirations aren't fulfilled immediately.

My advice to candidates is not to put too much value on the numbers and to be realistic. Job seekers need to adjust their expectations and their strategies according to the market realities.

A CA(SA) qualification remains outstanding and it most definitely paves the way for career opportunities, but it isn't a guarantee of an immediate job offer in an industry of choice. For many newly qualified CAs, irrespective of race, the job search can take considerable time. Exceptions are rare. Candidates who qualify cum laude in undergraduate studies, who pass their board exams on the first attempt and who achieve a top 10 ranking will be in high demand, but for the rest, patience is required.

## Private sector, more challenging

It's important to understand that 50% of jobs available are in the public sector, a large number are in audit firms and slightly less on offer in private companies. Clearly, anyone wanting to start their career in the private sector will face a much more challenging journey than if they considered other avenues.

Furthermore, a free market will always have a conflict of preference and companies would rather employ people who have had experience in their particular industry. For example, candidates who complete their articles with one of the big four accounting firms may be at an advantage if their team has serviced multiple clients from a single industry (such as financial services or mining). Their industry-specific experience will give them the upper hand when it comes to competing for a position in a bank or a mining house.

Many young accountants also fall into the trap of staying too long at their audit firm. Commercial experience early on in a candidate's career, can be a significant differentiator in the search for a job.

The job scenario is not all doom and gloom however. There are positions available - and candidates who have a clear career strategy, who start their search early and who are patient will be rewarded.

There are numerous resources available to newly qualified CAs, and a professional recruitment agency can be invaluable when it comes to market knowledge and managing expectations. A specialist consultant can also help with career planning and importantly, will be there not to burst the bubble, but to advise on the realities of the job search and to help avoid disappointment.

## ABOUT GRAHAM PAULSEN

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