

Accounting @ Unisa

A guide to preparing for
career opportunities



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The information in this publication is correct as of 30 November 2025. Visit the Unisa Counselling and Career Development [downloads page](#) to check for updates.

Please check the Unisa qualifications webpage (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications>) regularly for updates related to available qualifications and the admission requirements to study.

How will this brochure help you?

- It will provide you with some insight into what studying accounting involves.
- It will help you explore career opportunities and work environments related to accounting.
- It will help you gain more information about the skills needed in the field of accounting.
- It will assist you with finding relevant qualifications offered by Unisa.

What problems do you want to solve

“Don’t ask kids what they want to be when they grow up but what problems they want to solve. This changes the conversation from who do I want to work for, to what do I need to learn to be able to do that.”

Jaime Casap, Google Global Education Evangelist

One way to think about your career is by focusing on the **problems you care about**, not only on job titles. This shifts the question from “*What do I want to become?*” to “*What do I want to contribute?*”

Activity

1. Write down some problems or challenges you care about — in your family, community, South Africa, Africa, or the world.
2. Think about how you might contribute to solving them.
3. Ask: *What skills or knowledge would I need to prepare myself for that role?*

Example: You may want to contribute to improving financial transparency and sustainability in organisations and public institutions. Think about the different individuals who can play a

role in addressing this challenge: accountants, auditors, financial managers, internal controls specialists, compliance officers, and policymakers.

As an accountant, you may ensure accurate financial reporting and responsible use of resources. An auditor might identify risks, prevent fraud, and promote accountability. A financial manager could support strategic decision-making by analysing financial data and planning for long-term sustainability. Compliance officers help organisations meet regulatory and ethical standards, while policymakers rely on reliable financial information to design sound economic and governance frameworks.

Together, these roles show that strengthening financial systems is not only about numbers, but about trust, accountability, and economic stability — and that a background in accounting equips you to make a meaningful contribution to ethical organisations and sustainable economic growth.

Understanding accounting

Before you start: Why choose accounting?

Before considering pursuing this field of study, here are some basic questions you can ask yourself:

- Why are you interested in studying accounting?
- Where does your interest come from?
- Where are you hoping to be in five years? In ten years?
- What opportunities are you hoping to prepare for by completing a qualification in this field?

What is accounting?

Primarily, you enjoy working with numbers and money. You, therefore, chose to explore the field of accounting sciences as a possible career. There are the following broad categories in the field of accounting sciences, namely:

- financial accounting
- management accounting

- auditing (including internal auditing)
- taxation

Accounting professionals may choose to pursue training that includes academic and practical training in order to affiliate with a professional accounting body. It is important that you consider the professional designation you wish to prepare for when choosing your field of study, as well as professional experiences. Most potential employers and clients would view professional registration with an accounting body as an indication that the accounting professional has acquired the skills and knowledge needed to perform his or her tasks as an accountant.

Your professional designation will also determine the type of tasks you can perform. For example, a registered auditor (RA) must be a Chartered Accountant (CA(SA)) and also have met additional Independent Regulatory Board for Auditors (IRBA) requirements.

Accounting Professional Bodies

Professional bodies in South Africa include:

Accounting and Auditing

- South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA): www.saica.co.za
- Independent Regulatory Board of Auditors (IRBA): www.irba.co.za
- Southern African Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA): www.icsa.org.uk/about-us/our-governance/south-africa
- The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA): <https://www.accaglobal.com/africa/en.html>
- Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA): www.cimaglobal.com
- South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA): www.saipa.co.za
- South African Institute of Business Accountants (SAIBA): www.saiba.org.za
- Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB): www.icb.org.za
- Institute of Administration and Commerce (IACSA): www.iacsa.co.za

Internal auditing

- Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA): www.iiasa.org.za

Taxation

- Register as a tax practitioner with SARS:
<http://www.sars.gov.za/ClientSegments/Tax-Practitioners/Pages/Register-as-a-tax-practitioner.aspx>
- South African Institute for Tax Professionals:
http://www.thesait.org.za/?page=membership_overview

Further reading

- [Overview of accounting professional designations in South Africa](#)

Skills needed for a career in accounting

- Attention to detail
- Comfortable to work with numbers
- Good planning and organisational skills
- Communication skills (accountant and bookkeepers)
- Information management skills
- Integrity and ethical awareness
- Computer skills
- Analytical skills
- Supervisory skills
- Stress tolerance

Opportunities in accounting

The following section contains more detailed information about chartered accounting, professional accounting, management accounting, auditing (including internal, external, and forensic), and taxation.

Chartered Accounting

How do I become a Chartered Accountant?

The journey towards a CA (SA) professional qualification includes three major steps. These are: (1) obtaining the necessary university qualifications, (2) completing a learnership programme, and (3) completing two final professional examinations administered by SAICA.

Unisa offers the following SAICA-endorsed qualifications:

- Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Financial Accounting (98302)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting Sciences (98231)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Accounting Sciences (98255) (serving as the second year of the two-year CTA programme, with direct entry to students qualifying for the one-year CTA programme [refer to www.unisa.ac.za/cas/cta]. All five modules linked to this qualification must be completed in one academic year to meet the admission requirements of SAICA's first professional examination as described below.

The College of Accounting Sciences also offers a bridging diploma (Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences [98320 – Stream 1 / CTA]) for candidates who have not completed a SAICA-endorsed BCom degree, who wish to enter the CTA programme.

A learnership programme should be completed with a registered training office and will range between three and five years, depending on academic progress.

The final two steps on your pathway to becoming a CA(SA) are to pass two Qualifying Examinations, namely the Initial Test of Competence (ITC) and the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). To qualify for entry to the ITC, a candidate must have completed a CTA. To qualify for entry to the APC, a candidate must have passed the ITC, completed a minimum of 20 months of a registered training contract, and completed a professional programme with a registered provider.

Further reading

- [The CA\(SA\) roadmap through Unisa](#)

What does a Chartered Accountant do?

Chartered Accountants are well represented at the senior management level and in the boardrooms of most large South African companies. Chartered Accountants work in all industries and in several business fields. Areas of specialisation include:

- Accounting and External Reporting
- Auditing and Assurance
- Management Decision Making and Control
- Financial Management
- Taxation
- Strategy, Risk Management and Governance
- Forensic Auditing
- Management Consulting
- Corporate Finance
- Financial Planning

Further reading

- [South African Institute of Chartered Accountants](#)

Professional Accounting

What does a Professional Accountant do?

Some of the services offered by a Professional Accountant are as follows:

- accounting and tax-related services,
- business advisors to SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) offering tailored advice on business challenges and creating opportunities for business success for their clients,
- estate planning,
- secretarial work for companies,
- business rescue,
- personal finance (compiling personal budgets, advice on tax insurance and investments); and

- forensic consulting (Expertise in the analysis of systems and accounting information).

How do I become a Professional Accountant?

1. Enrol for the Bachelor of Accounting Sciences degree offered by Unisa.
2. In addition, the following practical component must be fulfilled:
 - a. Practical supervised training or experience of at least three years at a SAIPA recognised training office;
 - b. *or* six years of relevant verifiable experience;
 - c. *or* a completed training programme from another accredited professional accounting body such as SAICA.
3. Thereafter, there is a SAIPA Professional Evaluation, which consists of a three-hour examination offered twice yearly covering Financial Accounting, Auditing, Taxation, Commercial Law, Management Accounting and Practice Management.

Further reading

- [South African Institute of Professional Accountants](#)
- [Becoming a Professional Accountant](#)

Management Accounting

What does a management accountant do?

Management accountants gather and communicate both financial and non-financial information to the organisational management and thereby assist them to make better decisions and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing operations.

In recognition of the ever-changing business environment, the study of management accounting comprises cost accumulation, constructing accounting information for decision making, including strategy and risk management, performance measurement, and particular emphasis on environmental focus and ethical behaviour. A qualification in management accounting provides a host of exciting career options in the business world.

Unisa qualifications provide successful students with an opportunity to become a member of the Institute of Chartered Management Accountants (CIMA), and thereby obtain an internationally recognised professional qualification. This institute is the largest independent

professional accounting body in the world, based in the United Kingdom, that offers training for a qualification in Management Accounting and related business accounting subjects.

How do I become a management accountant?

Unisa offers the following CIMA-endorsed qualification: Postgraduate Diploma in Management Accounting (98205).

Further reading

- [Obtaining a professional qualification with Unisa and CIMA](#)
- [AICPA and CIMA website](#)

Auditing

The following broad categories are related to auditing:

- External auditing
- Forensic auditing
- Internal auditing

External auditing

In terms of the *Auditing Profession Act No. 26 of 2005* an audit is defined as the examination of, in accordance with prescribed or applicable auditing standards:

- Financial statements with the objective of expressing an opinion as to their fairness or compliance with an identified financial reporting framework and any applicable statutory requirements; or
- Financial and other information, prepared in accordance with suitable criteria, with the objective of expressing an opinion on the financial and other information.

External auditing is, therefore, an independent and objective assurance service that is designed to add value to the business of its clients. An external auditor identifies risks associated with a business and responds to such risks by designing and performing audit procedures to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to base the audit opinion on.

Further reading

- [Unisa Department of Auditing Fields of Study](#)

Forensic auditing

Forensic auditors are investigators of legal and financial documents who are hired to look into possible suspicions of fraudulent activity within a company or are hired by a company that may just want to prevent fraudulent activities from occurring. They also provide services in areas such as accounting, damages, analysis of data, valuation, and general consulting.

Forensic auditors have also been used in divorces, bankruptcy, insurance claims, personal injury claims, fraudulent claims, construction, royalty audits, and anti-money laundering by investigating financial records. Many forensic accountants work closely with law enforcement personnel and lawyers during investigations and often appear as expert witnesses during trials.

Further reading

- [Unisa Forensic Auditing](#)

Internal auditing

Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes.

An internal auditor analyses and evaluates all activities, controls and governance processes concerned with the operations of an organisation, reports to executive management on audit findings and submits proposals for improvements.

Unisa offers the following two qualification paths:

Option 1:

- Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Internal Auditing
- Postgraduate Diploma in Internal Auditing

Option 2:

- Diploma in Accounting Sciences
- Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences
- Postgraduate Diploma in Internal Auditing

Further reading

- [Unisa Internal Auditing](#)
- [Institute of Internal Auditors](#)

Taxation

All individuals who provide advice to others about tax-related matters or complete tax returns for others need to be registered as tax practitioners with the South African Revenue Service (SARS). To register as a tax practitioner with SARS, you need to belong to a professional body recognised by SARS, have the minimum qualifications and experience as required by this body, not have criminal convictions, and participate in continuous professional development activities as per the professional body.

Further reading

- [Register as a tax practitioner \(SARS\)](#)
- [South African Institute of Tax Professionals](#)

Exploring and researching careers

Making informed career decisions means going beyond what you already know. Career research helps you explore opportunities in accounting, understand what employers are looking for, and identify the steps you can take to prepare yourself.

Try this:

Here are some simple activities to help you explore opportunities in accounting. Choose 2–3 to start with:

1. **Online search**
Search “career in accounting South Africa” or “entry-level jobs related to accounting” and make a list of the qualifications and skills mentioned.
2. **Occupational information websites**
Visit the South African Department of Higher Education and Training’s [National Career Advice Portal](#). Search for specific job titles (for example, accountant or auditor) and read about work activities, skills, and job outlook.
3. **Job search portals**
Check portals like [Indeed](#), [Career Junction](#) or [PNet](#). Type in specific job titles and see which employers are currently hiring and the requirements.
4. **LinkedIn**
[Search for Unisa alumni](#) who studied accounting and see where they work now. What career paths do they follow?
5. **AI tools**
Use ChatGPT or Google Gemini to ask: “What are emerging careers in accounting in South Africa?” Compare the results with what you see on job portals.
6. **Talk to others**
Set up an informal chat with someone working in the field or at an organisation you are interested in to learn more about their career journey and daily work.
7. **Attend a careers fair**
When Unisa or professional organisations host career fairs, look for employers related to accounting. Prepare 2–3 questions to ask them about entry routes into the profession.
8. **Join a professional organisation**
Many professional bodies offer student registration categories to enable those who are still studying towards a qualification in the field to join and receive specific benefits such as training, development and networking opportunities. The professional bodies’ websites are also valuable sources of information, should you wish to do research related to specific occupations. Many professional websites also list practitioners or organisations in the field and allow you to identify individuals whom you could contact for further conversations about your career.
9. **Volunteering**
Look for volunteering or vacation work opportunities. Note the skills you develop through these experiences.

For more detailed steps and extra activities, see our [Career Research brochure](#).

Preparing while you study

Many students believe that a degree will lead directly to a specific job. In reality, your career path is shaped by more than your major. It is also about the **skills you build, the experiences you gain, and how you prepare along the way**. While you study, there are many things you can do to get ready for opportunities.

Your degree is one part of your career journey. By building skills, gaining experience, keeping a portfolio, and investing in your confidence, you'll be better prepared for opportunities during and after your studies.

Develop your transferable skills

Your studies give you subject knowledge and valuable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, working independently, and adapting to new situations. Reflect on what you're learning and practise explaining these skills in ways that employers will understand.

Activity

- List three skills you've strengthened this year and one example of how you've used each.
- List three skills you intend to strengthen and how you plan on doing so.

Build a career portfolio

A portfolio helps you keep track of your achievements, experiences, and goals. Include your skills, certificates, volunteering, work experience, and career ideas. Over time, this will become a powerful tool for applications and interviews.

Useful resource

- [Unisa Career Portfolio](#)

Gain experience (volunteering or part-time work)

Getting experience outside your coursework helps you explore fields of interest, build networks, and develop workplace skills. Volunteering is especially valuable when done responsibly and with respect for the community.

Think about

- Which organisations could benefit from your skills?
- What could you gain in return (skills, networks, insights)?
- How will this experience link to your career goals?

Enhance your employability

Employability means your ability to get, keep, and grow in fulfilling work. Today's careers are flexible: people change jobs and industries often, and success can mean many different things. You can boost your employability by:

- Managing your personal brand (how others see your professionalism).
- Developing job search skills (CVs, cover letters, interviews, networking).
- Exploring flexible career paths and lifelong learning opportunities.

Useful resources

- [Unisa Prepare for Job Opportunities](#)
- [Counselling and Career Development YouTube channel](#)
- [PNet Grad Pack](#)
- [GradNext](#)

Grow your self-confidence

Believing in your ability to succeed is just as important as skills and knowledge. Low self-confidence can hold you back from studying effectively, applying for opportunities, or connecting with others.

Ways to strengthen your confidence:

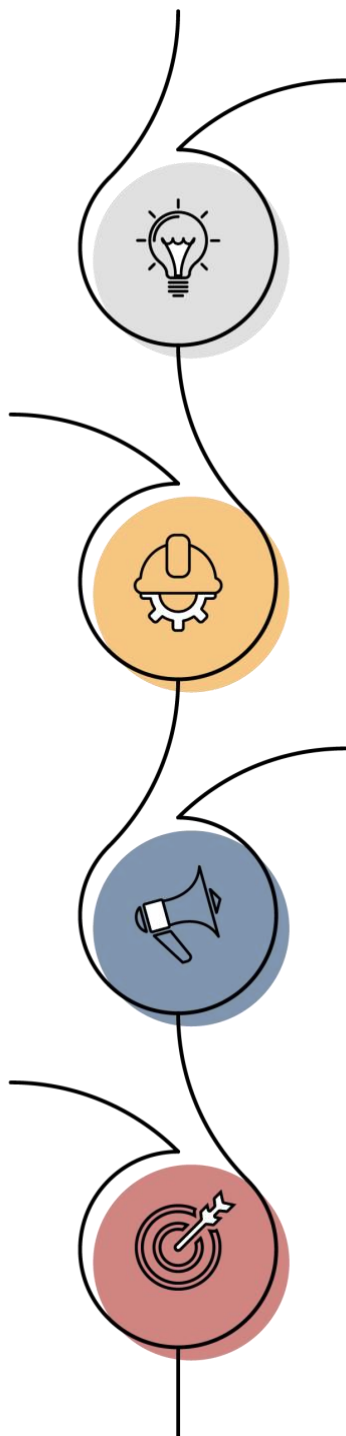
- Focus on your strengths and successes.
- Ask for help when needed: it's a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Practise self-talk that encourages growth instead of fear.

Remember: confidence grows with action. The more you try, the more you'll believe in yourself.

Your roadmap to success

Embarking on a career journey while studying can feel exciting and overwhelming. This roadmap will guide you year by year, helping you to stay intentional, informed, and adaptable.

Careers are rarely straight lines. Think of this roadmap as a flexible guide: you can move between stages depending on your opportunities and goals.



Year 1: Explore and build foundations

- Reflect on your interests, strengths, and career goals.
- Research career paths linked to your qualification.
- Plan your modules and think about postgraduate options.
- Identify key employability skills to develop.
- Create a basic CV and LinkedIn profile.
- Join a student or professional organisation.

Year 2: Grow and gain experience

- Focus on excelling in your studies.
- Apply for internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer work.
- Attend workshops, webinars, or conferences.
- Gain certifications (if relevant).
- Expand your professional network.
- Update your CV and portfolio with new experiences.

Year 3: Refine and specialise

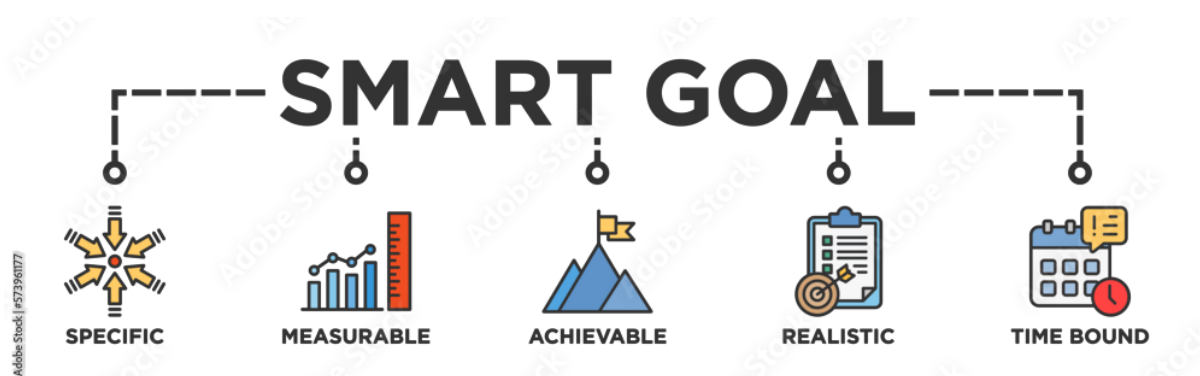
- Revisit your career goals and explore specialisations.
- Connect with alumni and seek mentorship.
- Strengthen your professional presence (LinkedIn, portfolio, personal website).
- Practise with mock interviews and improve communication skills.
- Contribute to professional discussions online or at events.

Final Year: Launch your career

- Start an intentional job search (LinkedIn, job boards, company websites).
- Tailor your CV and cover letters for each application.
- Practise interviews and refine your elevator pitch.
- Attend career fairs and networking events.
- Evaluate and negotiate job offers with guidance from mentors.
- Commit to lifelong learning and professional development.

My career learning plan: Next steps

Your next step is to plan how you will get the information that you still need to make optimal career decisions. Use SMART goals to help you plan your career research.



S – Specific: What exactly do I want to find out?

M – Measurable: How will I know I've done it?

A – Achievable: Can I realistically do this step?

R – Relevant: Does this help me make better career decisions?

T – Time-bound: By when will I do it?

What career questions do I still need answers to?

My career question	What steps will I take?	By when?	Who/what can help me?	Done?	What's next?
E.g. What jobs can I do with an accounting qualification?	Search LinkedIn profiles of Unisa accounting graduates	15 Oct	LinkedIn, Alumni page	Yes	Connect with 3 alumni

Career planning is not about having all the answers right now. It is about staying curious, setting small goals, and building momentum.

Study opportunities at Unisa

Undergraduate qualifications

Higher Certificate

- [Higher Certificate in Accounting Sciences \(98201\)](#)

Diploma

- [Diploma in Accounting Sciences \(98200\)](#)

Advanced diploma

- [Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences Certificate in The Theory of Accounting \(Revised Curriculum 2020\) \(98230 - CT1\)](#)
- [Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences Financial Accounting \(98230 - FAC\)](#)
- [Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences Internal Auditing \(98230 - AUI\)](#)
- [Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences Management Accounting \(Revised Curriculum 2020\) \(98230 - MA1\)](#)
- [Advanced Diploma in Accounting Sciences Taxation \(98230 - TAX\)](#)

Bachelor degrees

- [Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Financial Accounting \(Revised Curriculum 2020\) \(98302 - FA1\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Internal Auditing Internal Auditing \(98303 - AUI\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Management Accounting \(Revised Curriculum 2020\) \(98304 - MA1\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Accounting Sciences in Taxation \(98318 - TAX\)](#)

If you do not meet the admission requirements for the undergraduate qualifications in the College of Accounting Sciences, then you will need to explore the option of applying for a [relevant Higher Certificate](#). Completing a relevant Higher Certificate programme will enable you to meet the requirements for a diploma or degree.

Visit the Unisa website at <http://www.unisa.ac.za/qualifications> for more information about the admission requirements for these degrees.

Postgraduate qualifications

Postgraduate diplomas

- [Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting Sciences \(98231\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Accounting Sciences \(98255\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Financial Accounting \(98233\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Forensic Auditing \(98234\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Internal Auditing \(98207\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Management Accounting \(98205\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Taxation \(98256\)](#)

Honours Degrees

- [Bachelor of Accounting Sciences Honours in Management Accounting \(98354\)](#)

Master's and PhD

Master's Degrees

- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Auditing\) \(98656 - AUE\)](#)
- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Financial Accounting\) \(98656 - FAC\)](#)
- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Financial Governance\) \(98656 - GOV\)](#)

- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Financial Intelligence\) \(98656 - INT\)](#)
- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Management Accounting\) \(98656 - MAC\)](#)
- [Master of Accounting Sciences \(Taxation\) \(98656 - TAX\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Auditing \(98587 - AUE\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Accounting \(98587 - FAC\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Governance \(98587 - GOV\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Intelligence \(98587 - INT\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Management Accounting \(98587 - MAC\)](#)
- [Master of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Taxation \(98587 - TAX\)](#)

Doctoral degrees

- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Auditing \(90026 - AUE\)](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Accounting \(90026 - FAC\)](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Governance \(90026 - GOV\)](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Financial Intelligence \(90026 - INT\)](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Management Accounting \(90026 - MAC\)](#)
- [Doctor of Philosophy in Accounting Sciences Taxation \(90026 - TAX\)](#)

Read more about the Research Focus Areas [here](#).

Counselling and career development services at Unisa

The Unisa Directorate for Counselling and Career Development offers career, academic, and personal counselling services to Unisa students and the broader community. You can talk to a counsellor about:

- **Career decisions.** I am not sure which career path to follow; I don't know which qualification would be best; I want to change my career direction...
- **Career information.** How can I find out more about a career in ...
- **Employability.** How do I market myself to employers? How can I look for work? How can I compile an effective CV? How do I go about networking with others? How do I put together my career portfolio? How can I meet potential employers? How can I improve my interview skills?)
- **My studies at Unisa.** How can I get started with my studies? How do I plan my studies? How can I study more effectively? I don't feel motivated to continue with my studies... I feel worried about preparing for/ writing the exams. I failed my exams – what now? I need to improve my reading/ writing/ numeracy skills
- **Personal issues and mental health.** How can I have better relationships with others? How can I cope more effectively with issues that impact my studies?

Contact us

- Send an email to counselling@unisa.ac.za.
- Make an appointment to see a counsellor:
 - [In-person at a Unisa Centre](#)
 - [Online \(on MS Teams\)](#)

Further self-help resources for career, academic and personal development

Our website: www.unisa.ac.za/counselling

Our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/unisacareers