

Pathway to the Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) designation

Aspiring senior financial executive can follow various pathways to obtain the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA). Following these pathways will ensure that the required competencies are met to be awarded the designation.

The Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) designation is ideally suited to persons that are already occupying a CFO level position within a listed company, state owned company, large government department or large private company environment. These companies are likely to have a Public Interest Score (as measured in the Companies Act, 2008) of more than 100 points.

Option 1: Graduate route

1. Register as a SABA member
2. Obtain a National Diploma in Accountancy or a B Com Degree
3. Obtain 2 years' relevant work experience in the finance/accounting department
4. Complete the assessment for the designation Business Accountant (SA)
5. Obtain another 2 years' relevant work experience in a role as financial accountant working in the finance/accounting department
6. Complete the assessment for the designation Certified Business Accountant (SA)
7. Obtain another 8 – 10 years' experience in a senior financial management position and work experience comparable to that of a CFO level
8. Complete the assessment for the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA)

Option 2: Professional body route

1. Obtain a qualification and experience related to the following professions e.g. chartered level accountant (CA, CIMA, ACCA), chartered director (IOD), chartered marketer (CIM), law (LSSA), business (MBA), engineering (Engineering societies), or analyst/consulting (CFA). Typical experience will be obtained over a 2 – 3-year

period.

2. Obtain relevant work experience in chosen professional field (4 years)
3. Obtain a professional designation in your chosen professional field
4. Obtain an MBA-level qualification and start working with the finance/accounting department
5. Obtain a senior financial management position and work experience comparable to that of a CFO level (4 years)
6. Complete the assessment for the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA)

Option 3: Recognition of Experience

1. Obtain relevant work experience in chosen professional field (10 years)
2. Attend numerous in-house or short courses relevant to job function
3. Obtain a senior financial management position and work experience comparable to that of a CFO level (4 years)
4. Complete the assessment for the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA)

An aspiring senior financial executive's career typically develops alongside the following routes:

Route 1:

Starting as an entry-level accountant, moving up to chief accountant, accounting manager, group financial manager and then Cert. Fin. Officer (SA).

Route 2:

Starting as an auditor, financial analyst, investment banker, tax advisor, business system analyst or financial consultant moving up to chief accountant, accounting manager, group financial manager and then Cert. Fin. Officer (SA).

Route 3:

Entry-level financial or other position and work their way up to a CFO level position within the same company without completing any graduate program.

● Building a Solid Foundation – Academic Achievement

The standard qualification to obtain the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) is a Masters level degree in Financial Management, Business Administration or Accounting. However, RPL will be applied to persons that have an unrelated or part qualification but have obtained leadership experience or obtained skills through volunteer experience and working with a mentor. Ideally the qualifications required to obtain the Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) designation will be obtained in the following order:

- B Com
- B Com Honours
- Masters in Business Administration with specialisation in Finance

● Building a Solid Foundation – Workplace Experience

Candidates should obtain eight to 10 years' experience in a managerial or senior position. Workplace experience typically includes:

- Develop the company's strategic plan or goals together with the CEO, Board of Directors and other executives.
- Develop and implement financial strategies and monitor their performance.
- Manage/Oversee the company's or organizations financial departments (i.e. human resources, accounting, investments, taxes, legal, loan, budgeting, equity and debt financing, payroll, etc.).
- Facilitate benefits packages to be the most cost-effective as possible.
- Help lead the company or organization through acquisitions or mergers.

- Ensure all necessary financial information is filed or reported according to regulations.
- Report the company's or organization's financial status to the Board of Directors and other relevant parties.
- Direct all relevant risk management procedures (such as preparing for audits, insurance coverage, forecasting, legal issues and reporting and preventing financial risks).
- Acting as a liaison between the company or organization and banks, investors and other financial entities as well as financial services that have been outsourced.

Competency Assessment

Competency assessment takes the form of an examination of experience, sponsor confirmation and a peer review process. The competency assessment is linked to the agreed competency framework. The candidate must demonstrate how the competencies were met by completing an examination by experience. This examination must be supported by a verification from a sponsor. In addition, each applicant is subject to a verbal assessment performed by a committee consisting of senior financial executive peers. Applicant have right to request an additional verbal assessment if they do not agree with the initial outcome. A separate committee will be appointed independently.

The competency assessment is appropriate for CFOs that operate in either the private or public sector.

Competency Structure:

The framework assists potential applicants in developing the competencies necessary to obtain the designation Cert. Fin. Officer (SA). It is based in most part on the ICAO/Queen's University Collaborative Study, which incorporated a combination of prior literature and a comprehensive survey of financial executives. It begins with a list of 34 competencies structured within four general roles of a Cert. Fin. Officer (SA):

- **Steward:** Accounting, control, risk management and asset preservation are the province of the Steward. The Steward must ensure company compliance with financial reporting and control requirements. Information quality and control rationalization are top-of-mind issues for the Steward (8 competencies).
- **Operator:** Efficiency and service levels are the primary areas of focus for the Operator. The Operator must dynamically balance cost and service levels in delivering on the finance organization's responsibilities, and adapt finance's operating model as necessary. Talent management, offshoring and shared service decisions are often the key issues to be addressed. This role is oriented toward best practices of the finance function itself (9 competencies).
- **Catalyst:** The Catalyst is an agent for change, focused on establishing a value attitude throughout the organization. The Catalyst gains business alignment to identify, evaluate and execute strategies, and serves as a business partner to other decision makers including business unit leaders, the chief information officer, and sales and marketing leaders. The Catalyst establishes a structure of enterprise accountability directed toward results, drives enterprise execution and gains acceptance from business management as the organization's catalyst. This role is oriented toward best practices of the entire organization (9 competencies).
- **Strategist:** The Strategist is a director, focused on defining the future of the company to enhance business performance and shareholder value. The Strategist provides a financial perspective on innovation and profitable growth; leverages this perspective to improve risk- awareness, strategic decision-making and performance management integration; and translates the expectations of the capital markets into internal business imperatives. This role is oriented toward long-term, strategic issues, and is outwardly directed (8 competencies).

For each competency, the framework indicates *how* to develop each competency—through education, experience, or with the help of a mentor and provides additional detail about each competency, along with ways to develop that competency.

Competencies for the Steward Role

Steward role: Accounting, control, risk management and asset preservation are the province of the Steward. The Steward must ensure company compliance with financial reporting and control requirements. Information quality and control rationalization are top-of-mind issues for the Steward.		
Competency:	Description:	How to Develop (from those who have done it):
Working knowledge of risk management, budget, and forecasting tools	Risk management activities such as the use of monitoring, reporting, historical comparisons, evaluation tools, predictive analytics, risk-adjusted forecasts and process controls. Knowledge of budgeting and forecasting for units of an organization and the organization as a whole.	Experience in various jobs, trial by fire, discussions with vendors and other experts, university, formal education courses, industry seminars, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, self instruction through reading or computer assisted tools, learning from mentors.
Investment and credit risk knowledge	Knowledge of risks and returns for investments and credit (e.g. customer credit).	On the job experience, reading financial press, securities courses, interaction with other professionals and experts (such as treasury analysts or investment/commercial bankers), ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, learning from mentors.
Accounting knowledge (IFRS and taxation)	Up-to-date knowledge of IFRS and taxation in South Africa and all countries in which the company accesses capital markets.	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, public accounting experience, experience preparing financial statements, reading industry journals, discussions with auditors or lawyers.
External financial and regulatory reporting knowledge	Knowledge of regulatory reporting requirements in South Africa and other countries in which the organization does business. If the organization is cross-listed, must understand the requirements of relevant statutes. Knowledge of industry- specific requirements.	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, public accounting experience, experience preparing financial statements for listed companies, reading industry journals, CPE, discussions with auditors and company attorneys and regulators.
Understanding financial information systems and informational needs of decision makers	Thorough understanding of the informational needs of decision makers within the organization (from top level down through the organization). Overseeing a financial information system that is capable of producing useful information to meet those needs (e.g. budgeting, profitability of products, business units, and customer relationships)	Experience in general as well as in different industries, in an IS group; university and ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; lots of interactions with vendors, industry colleagues, IT and related experts; active listening to the needs of others; participation in special projects within the organization; self teaching; web searches.
Understanding of systems, processes, and internal controls over financial information	Ability to create or oversee IT systems, processes, and internal control policies and procedures to ensure high quality of information.	Experience in general as well as audit experience and implementing King3; university and ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; professional training and CPE; reading industry journals; discussions with auditors and IT specialists; learn from
Understanding the business environment	Understanding the environment in which the organization operates. This includes the industry, the regulatory environment, and economic environment, etc.	Experience and asking questions; visiting different business units within the company; reading (e.g. Business Week, Financial Mail); mentors can help significantly; listening well and being aware.
Fraud prevention, detection, investigation	Understanding of the types of fraud that can be committed within the organization and the conditions that often lead to fraud. Continuous monitoring of control systems to watch for weaknesses that could make committing fraud easier. Having a healthy scepticism to investigate possible fraud when red flags appear.	University and ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, public accounting, CPE, reading and/or learning about specific frauds, being aware and developing a sense for fraud risk, networking with others, working with mentors.

Competencies for the Operator Role

Operator role: Efficiency and service levels are the primary areas of focus for the Operator. The Operator must dynamically balance cost and service levels in delivering on the finance organization's responsibilities, and adapt finance's operating model as necessary. Talent management, offshoring and shared service decisions are often the key issues to be addressed. This role is oriented toward best practices of the finance function itself.		
Competency:	Description:	How to Develop (from those who have done it):
Staff planning	Branding the company as a career destination for finance professionals is critical for attracting top talent.	Formal education, public accounting experience, trial by fire, working with increasingly larger teams, courses and seminars, observing how others do this and learning from their mistakes, discussions with HR
Project management	Identifying, developing, and overseeing projects that create value and meet or exceed financial goals.	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, audit experience, being a member of project teams,
Staff management, mentoring, team building, and creating accountability	Manage staff not only for maximum performance, but also for advancement within the organization. Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) must provide their own future leaders with similar advancement opportunities, and give them room to excel, even beyond the realm of finance. Ability to manage a diverse staff with differing backgrounds,	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, audit and industry experience, observation and analysis of results, special training courses, peer review, help from HR, being an advisor for Junior Achievement, help from a good mentor.
Corporate finance	Develop sets of strategic measures that can be used to anticipate challenges and monitor progress	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; direct experience where possible (e.g. in M&A, financing activities, etc.); discussions with vendors, industry colleagues,
Treasury and investment management	Monitoring financing activities and adapting strategies and tactics to changes in debt and equity markets. Knowledge and use of financial instruments to gain the greatest risk/return on investments.	University, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; on the job experience; banking experience; discussions with the organization's treasurer, bankers, investment managers, industry colleagues; outsourcing the function and learning from
Mergers and acquisitions, strategic alliances	Ability to analyse potential M&A deals and strategic partnerships for strategic benefit.	Some coursework; try to get experience ("baptism by fire"), teamwork with lawyers and investment bankers.
Maximizing capital employed	Enhance value and service to the organization while holding down costs. Carry out cost-effective services without disruption. Outsourcing may be one alternative.	This competency appears more important for smaller and/or private organizations than large public ones. Develop through experience; discussions with industry colleagues, suppliers, mentors; if outsourcing, start small and learn from mistakes.
Achievement / results orientation	The Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) must be able to translate performance into results. Being responsive to the needs of the organization and meeting those needs using measures that are appropriate and understandable.	One can be developing this early through extra-curricular activities in school, setting and meeting deadlines and goals, choosing to become a professional accountant; combination of courses, experience, observation, and help from mentors.
Organizational and administration skills	Ability to organize and prioritize effectively. The Cert. Fin. Officer Is able to process large amounts of information within limited time constraints, and must identify situations in which digging into details is necessary versus remaining in an oversight position. Being organized oneself, the Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) is better able to function most effectively.	Starts with education but continues primarily through experience, audit experience, observation, executive education, help from mentors.

Competencies for the Catalyst Role

Catalyst role: The Catalyst is an agent for change, focused on establishing a value attitude throughout the organization. The Catalyst gains business alignment to identify, evaluate and execute strategies, and serves as a business partner to other decision makers including business unit leaders, the chief information officer, and sales and marketing leaders. The Catalyst establishes a structure of enterprise accountability directed toward results, drives enterprise execution and gains acceptance from business management as the organization's catalyst. This role is oriented toward best practices of the entire organization.		
Competency:	Description:	How to Develop (from those who have done it):
Leadership and influence	Inspiring and motivating others in the organization. Providing the necessary guidance and direction to meet and exceed organizational goals and objectives.	One can begin developing this competency early on through extra-curricular activities, student council, university courses, CPE or in-house courses, volunteer to lead teams, gain respect from decision makers by learning the business, observation, practice, and mentors.
Communication/presentation skills and executive presence	Ability to communicate effectively in writing and verbally, to connect with others, to persuade others, and to communicate complex information in an easy-to-understand manner. Ability to act appropriately for each occasion and with each audience. To be accessible to and respected by others at all levels in the organization.	University (including team projects in classes), ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience, presentation skills courses, media training, experience in sales or marketing, observation, practice, self learning and continuous improvement.
Corporate governance	Understanding elements of corporate governance and instituting best practices for creating a culture of excellence and ethical performance.	University and ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; specific courses; discussions with auditors and audit committee, professional advisors, investment bankers, lawyers; reading relevant publications; learning from the mistakes of others.
Negotiation	Ability to negotiate with others in both friendly and adverse circumstances. Being a good listener is an important element in negotiation. Ability to resolve conflict.	Formal courses, experience negotiating with suppliers or vendors, observation, practice.
Relationship building and collaboration	Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) s interacts widely with members of the entire organization. Networking with others, developing strong relationships, being a good team player and good collaborator. Being a good bridge-	Can start early in school, volunteering, on the job experience, observation, practice, feedback, strong mentors.
Personal integrity, ethics, ability to identify ethical dilemmas and make ethical decisions	Understanding motivations of oneself and others, and recognizing the very real possibility of unethical behaviour. Taking active and public steps to thwart misbehaviour and encourage ethical behaviour. Being a role model. Setting the "tone at the top". Having a social conscience.	Some argue this is innate – you either have integrity or you don't. Much of it is acquired early in life from parents. However, ethical dilemma identification and decision-making can be developed through courses, experience, observation of others (both "good" and "bad"), and practice. Mentors are quite helpful.
Change management and flexibility	Manage change with minimum disruption; being a positive change agent. Being flexible and assisting others within the organization to be the same.	Sponsoring and leading significant projects, or being a manager in a CA firm; read financial press; courses with correct timing (where it can be immediately applied to the job); observation.
Self awareness and insight	To be able to see one's own faults or mistakes and take responsibility for them. To assist others to do the same without doing so in a patronizing manner or with harsh criticism/blame.	Experience or courses with 360 degree feedback, personality testing, working with a mentor, observing those who are good or bad at it, continuous self-teaching and learning.
Persistence	Having the courage and resilience to persist in the face of adversity. Being passionate about one's work enables persistence.	To some extent, this is innate, but it can be further developed by working hard at school and thereafter, playing sports, getting feedback and help from mentors, ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and

Competencies for the Strategist Role

Strategist role: The Strategist is a director, focused on defining the future of the company to enhance business performance and shareholder value. The Strategist provides a financial perspective on innovation and profitable growth, leverages this perspective to improve risk-awareness, strategic decision-making and performance management integration, and translates the expectations of the capital markets into internal business imperatives. This role is oriented toward long-term, strategic issues, and is outwardly directed.		
Competency	Description:	How to Develop (from those who have done it):
Goal setting / visioning	The ability to develop visions that prompt buy-in from a wide range of organizational stakeholders. As well, the ability to align finance Function's priorities with business strategy and organizational goals. Being a forward thinker.	University and MBA; experience by trial and error, volunteering for committees dealing with vexing issues; in-house courses; setting goals for oneself, ensuring one's goals are congruous with those of the team and company; observation.
Strategic risk management	Understanding the "big picture," that is, how the environment could impact the organization both negatively and positively. Understanding how internal and external factors can interact to create or reduce risk.	University; experience from auditing, dealing with surprises; observation; personal research; strong mentors.
Strategic thinking and decision-making	The ability to take a holistic and futuristic perspective of the organization that recognizes the synergies and interdependencies between the different parts. This perspective is leveraged in the use of information to create strategies that enable growth. This ability uses innovation and creativity, and often involves thinking "outside the box".	Academic foundation built upon with experience; access to meetings of senior executives and board; studying the business environment; strong mentors; observation; practice.
Performance management integration	Performance management integration is a holistic approach that spans all the processes and technologies related to performance management, and consists of the integration of reporting and performance measurement, budget planning and forecasting, and organizational alignment. This includes the elimination or reduction of "non-value-added" activities, measuring financial performance, establishing efficiency metrics, measuring non-financial performance and measuring customer satisfaction.	Observation of and experience with implementing significant change in systems and processes, as well as meetings with senior executives and board; post-performance feedback; formal training to establish formats etc., but critical determination of milestones/metrics learned on the job; alignment of goals across the organization.
Critical thinking	The ability to make assertions based on sound logic and evidence. This consists of being able to distinguish between fact and opinion, ask questions, make detailed observations, and uncover assumptions. Make sound conclusions based on appropriate information.	University and ACCA, CIMA, CA, CFA, MBA, CBA (SA) training and experience; watching senior management debate critical issues; adopting a questioning attitude, curiosity, or distrust of "proven" solutions; trial and error; start practicing these early on.
Managing ambiguity	The ability to deal effectively with uncertain situations. This requires the ability to control one's anxiety levels so that a level of clarity in thinking is maintained in order that an accurate evaluation of the situation can be ascertained and an effective response made.	Keep an open mind and practice being comfortable with situations in which there is "no right answer"; experience--especially in multiple functions or organizations; mentoring; asking a lot of questions; observation; reading.
Dedication to continuous improvement	Having a desire to learn and to never be satisfied with current knowledge. Being inquisitive; taking every opportunity to learn new things and continually working on self-improvement. Self-motivated.	University should instill this; job experience; mentors; increasing one's own expectations, not being satisfied with status quo; self-improvement seminars; developing a win-win mentality; self-criticism.
Advocate / ambassador for the organization	As the #2 person in the organization, the Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) must represent the organization to the outside world. This includes networking with shareholders, analysts, suppliers, customers, and the public at large. The Cert. Fin. Officer (SA) must have a keen sense of when and how to best portray both positive and negative information about the organization.	Experience; mentors; volunteering to speak at industry seminars, investor forums, in front of clients, Chambers of Commerce; believing in what you are doing; observing great corporate leaders; practice.

