

# Learning curve

Concerned about the new regulatory examinations? Are there parts of your job that you need to brush up on? The Sanlam Distribution Academy is a great resource – and it's just a phone call away.

**Natie Botha**, financial adviser of South Vaal, had been working as a financial adviser for two years when he was told to report to the Sanlam Distribution Academy for a Wealth Management exam preparation course.

'When I arrived at the Academy with six colleagues from Vanderbijlpark none of us knew what to expect,' Natie remembers. 'Our trainer, Stella Arthur, was amazing. I think the biggest thing she taught me was how to use a financial calculator. Before the course I didn't even own one,' Natie admits. 'Now I am able to take one out in front of a client with confidence and do calculations myself instead of just relying on the computer. It gives me a lot more credibility, especially with clients who are financially savvy.'

The course wasn't just about calculators, though. 'We worked

hard for those five days,' Natie laughs, 'and so did Stella. Whenever she didn't know the answer to a question she'd find out and get back to us before the end of the day.' How did the exam go? 'It wasn't easy,' says Natie, 'but all of us passed! That never would have happened without Stella's help.'

Natie is just one of many members of Sanlam's Distribution arm who have attended a course at the Academy.

## Where it all began

It's hard to put an exact date on the Academy's inception, says **Erich Henning**, who has been a trainer at the Academy since 1991. 'Sanlam has always had a training department, but I think we first called it the Sanlam Distribution Academy in the mid-'90s.'

Things were very different in the early days. 'In 2001,'

remembers Erich, 'we had 100 trainers and an annual budget of R100 million. These days we have 23 trainers and an annual budget of about R30 million.' The amazing thing is that Erich likes it more now. 'We're much better these days, we're much more efficient. We've invested in our people and it's paid off.'

'The Academy has five training centres,' explains **Venesia van Rooyen**, the Academy's operations manager. 'Three are permanently manned (Bellville, Durban and Midrand), while trainers use the other two in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth when there is a demand.'

'We offer all our courses at all our centres to reduce travelling costs.'

The Academy's primary business is to provide short courses that complement the formal training paths for each segment of Sanlam's Distribution arm. It offers training for financial planners, administrative staff and managers.

In addition to these courses, the Academy often has to run exam preparation courses as dictated by the FAIS Act.

Erich says the best thing about working at the Academy is the fact that one is able to achieve immediate results.

'You see it in the students' eyes,' he says. 'Some might not want to be there, but suddenly

something changes and you can see they are learning.'

## Best in business

The year ahead is going to be frantic. 'In addition to our normal courses,' says **André Cilliers**, head of the Distribution Academy, 'we are responsible for the ongoing SanFin training. It has to be delivered to all 2 000 advisers and their PAs in this calendar year. And that's

## 'Another goal for all who work at the Academy is to keep the budget unchanged.'

not to mention preparing advisers for their RE and Wealth Management exams.' SanFin is the internal needs-analysis tool that is replacing S.net, while the exams are government requirements for all financial advisers who are registered with the Financial Services Board.


Being so busy doesn't daunt André, but he is aware that it puts trainers under a lot of pressure to deliver excellent courses week after week. He is confident they can do it: 'It's not official,' he says, 'but we

are regarded as the best in the business.' The fact that many other financial institutions send their staff to the Academy speaks volumes, and this is backed up by the glowing report INSETA gave the Academy's Wealth Management exam preparation programme.

## Client-centricity

Erich is visibly excited about the future, although he is also insistent that the academy must stick to the values that have got it to where it is today. 'Our ultimate goal,' he says, 'is to have satisfied Sanlam clients throughout the country. We can help achieve this by enabling our salespeople to be as successful as possible while maintaining a suitable level of professionalism, of course.'

'We've conducted some international training courses for Sanlam subsidiaries in Kenya, Uganda, Botswana and India,' Erich continues, 'and hope to do more in future.' Another goal is to keep the budget unchanged. 'Amazingly, it hasn't changed over the past five years,' says André, 'and we don't want it to change any time soon.'

Asked about the Academy's vision, André keeps it simple: 'We want to continue to be the leader in providing professional learning solutions in financial services.' Who could argue with that? 

## The Academy in figures

Number of training rooms in SA: **12**

Total number of staff: **42**

Average number of students per day: **100**

Total training days in 2012: **28 169**

Budget for 2013: **R32 127 680**

Pass rate for all regulatory exams: **over 90% (100% for key individuals)**

Distribution Academy pass rate for Wealth Management exam: **56% (industry average is 36%)**



Financial adviser **Natie Botha** is an Academy alumnus, and **Erich Henning** has been a trainer at the Academy since the early '90s.

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**Venesia van Rooyen**, operations manager, and **André Cilliers**, head of the Distribution Academy.



Another challenge on the horizon for all financial services providers is the implementation of the new **Treating Customers Fairly (TCF)** policy, as called for by the Financial Services Board.

André had the following to say about how he thinks it will impact the Academy: 'The exact nature of TCF and its date of implementation are still to be decided, but I would imagine that in the future all our courses will have to include the principles of TCF. In addition, it might be prudent to run short courses for management, who could then see that TCF is implemented successfully in their departments.'