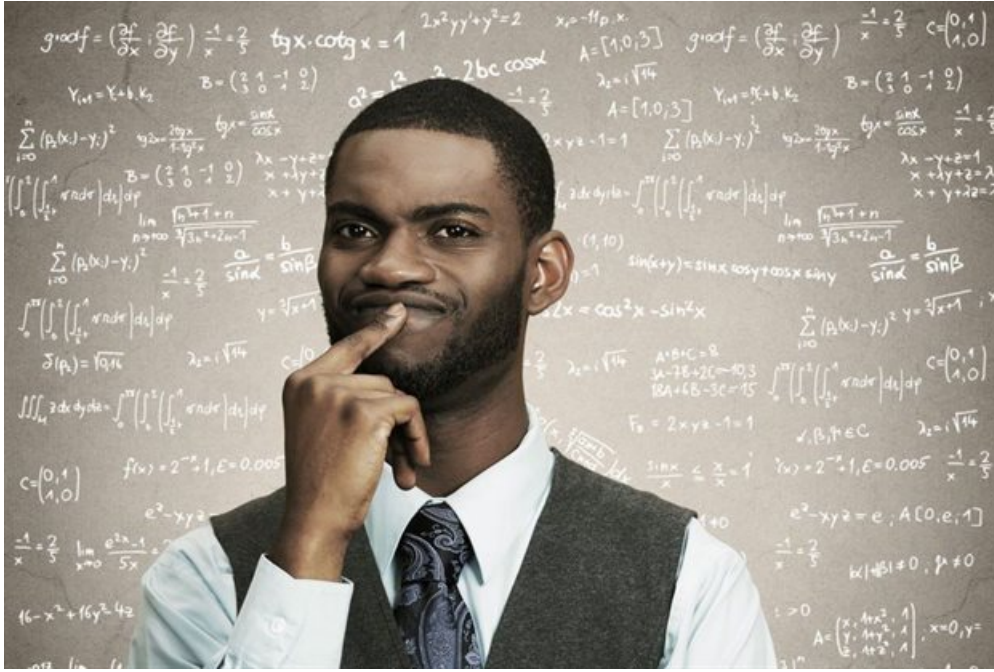


# Why closing SA's adult education gap has never been more important

In a pre-Covid-19 South Africa, the tough economic climate already made the job-hunting process more competitive and challenging than ever before.



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According to figures released by the South African Graduate Employers Association (SAGEA) just prior to the crisis, local job seekers were up against 92 other people for every vacancy they applied for. This figure was significantly higher than it was in previous years. But there is now a risk that this situation could worsen amid a severe global and local recession.

There will be businesses that will be looking to contain costs by cutting staff or implementing hiring freezes during this period. However, for other businesses that are still lucky enough to navigate through these tough times intact, this could also serve as a time to upskill staff to be better prepared for when the recovery happens. In a country where only two-thirds of South Africans have a matric, one simple way that businesses can upskill their staff is by ensuring that they complete this educational milestone.

## What a matric means

A matric qualification doesn't only demonstrate an individual's familiarity with specific subjects. It also points to the acquisition of more intangible – but equally important – skills. If you have a matric, you've shown your ability to think critically and creatively, to solve problems, and to work under pressure. As a result, you're more likely to be able to keep up with workplaces that are introducing new technology, shifting their working practices, and asking their employees to adapt and innovate.

A matric is also a necessary launchpad to future study and ongoing professional success. Without it, employees who have the potential to progress into increasingly skilled and technical positions find themselves hindered. The wide-angle view of this scenario is that, the more employees are unable to make headway in their careers, the more the companies they work for are similarly bound. A business is only as successful as the people it employs.

Of course, expanding this perspective once again points to the larger societal and macroeconomic benefits of having an educated and professional workforce. Like the businesses within them, nations with low levels of education are unlikely to grow and prosper economically.

## **How employers can help**

South Africa continues to bear the brunt of an education system that for decades failed the overwhelming majority of its population. Many men and women already employed still don't have a matric, and therefore don't qualify for any other educational and career opportunities they might be interested in pursuing.

Fortunately, corporate South Africa has stepped up to the plate, offering employees the chance to complete some or all of the subjects required to obtain their matric through third-party, online programmes, which can be completed from home during a time of self-isolation.

The benefits of this approach are numerous. Employers are able to observe the potential inherent in their employees, and to advance the careers of those who show ability and ambition. There are also tangible benefits in terms of the B-BBEE Scorecard. Providing a matric qualification to employees counts as a bursary under the scorecard and comes with the attending points. And employees, in turn, are given the opportunity to rewrite their futures.

The more flexible programmes available allow individuals to pursue the number of subjects at the correct level they require in order to obtain their matric. When content is primarily available online, this allows users to work independently.

The result is a growing number of employees who are able to do the work required of them in the first instance, and to push themselves into ever increasingly senior positions thereafter. In an economically fragile country, a matric qualification has the potential not only to transform the lives of ordinary South Africans, but the success of individual businesses and the country's collective future, too.

This is critical because when this crisis does eventually pass, we will all need more skilled people than ever before to help us chart the way forward.

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