

## Human Rights Day – Education for All

Human Rights Day reminds us of the freedoms protected in South Africa's Bill of Rights, including the fundamental right to education. Since the adoption of our democratic constitution in 1994, efforts have been made to uphold this right, yet many South Africans still face barriers to quality education. Even before this, in 1976, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recognized education as a cornerstone of human development. Yet, despite these commitments, access to quality education remains a barrier to success for many South Africans today.

The latest statistics from the Department of Higher Education reveal that, in 2023, nearly a third of South Africa's population was unemployed. They also show that improved equitable access to post-school education and training opportunities can increase the chances of the unemployed to secure better employment opportunities. The education and training industry exists to address this very need, and in doing so, thousands of organisations and millions of individuals have received a second chance at securing their futures.

At Optimi Workplace, we have spent years empowering businesses in both public and private sectors by upskilling their workforces and communities. Many businesses in South Africa struggle with low staff retention and high turnover due to a lack of the necessary skills to compete in a dynamic economy. **One of the most effective ways to bridge this skills gap is through Adult Education and Training (AET).**

### What is AET?

AET is an outcomes-based programme that aims to provide basic learning tools, knowledge and skills, and a nationally recognised qualification. It provides individuals who were unable to finish secondary school foundational English and Maths literacy and is a pre-requisite for adult matric.

### How does AET empower individuals and organisations?

#### Second chances

Nearly 30% of South Africa's workforce has not completed secondary school (source: DHET) and can therefore lack the skills to advance their careers. Optimi Workplace's AET programme allows individuals to attain literacy and numeracy skills, in an environment that incorporates their timetable. In doing so, we are helping to restore dignity and hope to those pursuing a better future.

#### Productivity & retention

By empowering their workforce through education and training, organisations equip employees with the necessary skills to perform their jobs more effectively, leading to higher quality work and increased output. Employers who invest in skills development

attain consistency and growth within their staff complement. By making employees feel valued, they are more likely to be engaged and stay with the company, reducing turnover costs and improving overall productivity.

The well-known phrase, 'change is the only constant' is more relevant in today's world than it has ever been. The economy is volatile, industries are dynamic, and no organisation can survive without staying ahead of current industry skills requirements. By upskilling your workforce, you are not only empowering your employees but their families and the larger society. The rippling effect expands to addressing the national issue of illiteracy in South Africa.

This Human Rights Day, let's honour the vision of our constitution: equal rights and opportunities for all South Africans. By investing in education and training, we can build a stronger, more sustainable economy together.

*"Each one, teach one!"*