

The skills shortage in South Africa has always been chronic. It goes through periods of becoming more acute and then returns to being chronic.

This is the assessment of leading sharp-end observer, Annette Kinnear, Managing Director of DAV Recruitment, author of 'Your Career, Your Life', and hailed as a "superb leader and astute business woman."

Currently South Africa has an acute shortage of highly qualified financial people, and among hard skills areas such as mechanical and electrical engineering, says Kinnear.

"The key for any company is to be open to forming a position around talent rather than trying to find talent and then squeeze them into a position. I think a lot of companies are awakening to this."

DAV is its 35th year, the last 11 as part of Adcorp Holdings. Its founder Ingrid Kast is still CEO, and sector excellence awards arrive at its Joburg headquarters with the regularity of executive CVs: among the latest, 'Best Recruitment Consultancy for Specialised Skills' and 'Best Training Programme in SA.'

With Gauteng accounting for 75 percent of national GDP, Johannesburg is seen as the natural head office location. "This is where recruitment is really happening, and so our main focus is here," says Kinnear, 48.

130 work here with another 30 in its Cape Town Office. When Kinnear joined in 1988 there were five employees, since when "we have grown organically, adding new divisions and expanding staff with year on year growth."

Her own contribution is described by Ingrid Kast as "20 extraordinary years", leaving "a

lasting legacy that has been instrumental in making our company what it is today."

Kinnear says DAV is a recruitment consultancy that tries to lead in terms of excellence in the service of its clients and candidates. "At all times we serve them and not ourselves.

"Now that may sound ideological but this is what we have always pursued and as a result we have become very successful. But we don't chase success, we concentrate on trying to do the right thing."

DAV is influential in executive search, the financial market, IT and engineering. There is a specialist division in foreign language speakers - notably the German market - and a strong office support division for the placement of secretaries, PAs and clerical positions.

"One of our advantages is that we have a very strong core of people, senior consultants and team leaders. Our industry, because it is so competitive, is notorious for large staff turnover."

"If South Africa doesn't get serious about education and skills development all the gains in the 16 years since democracy will go down the tube"

Within the recruitment sector, says Kinnear, for every four people that join and grow through the first two months of training and working at the desk, typically only one remains. "In our company it's the other way round - out of four, three remain."

In house training is a major key here. "This has always been our strength and goes back to our CEO Ingrid Kast. Training is fundamental to our success.

"We are constantly monitoring other countries in the industry for whatever is good, new and excellent. We have access to very good material which makes our training very interesting, and we bring trainers to us and