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CEO urges MPs to fix education failures

Luphert Chilwane

General Reporter

MATRIC and university failures were costing billions of rands each year and the country's legislators needed to act urgently, the CEO of two skills training organisations said yesterday.

Liza van Wyk, CEO of AstroTech and BizTech, said in a statement that Parliament needed to address the challenge of about 500000 pupils who had failed matric in the past two years. These pupils had slim prospects in a globalising world where learning was the key to competitive advantage.

She said MPs had to prioritise efforts to help matriculants who had failed, or run the risk of economic failures.

Van Wyk said failure at schools and universities, coupled with exceptionally high dropout rates, were costing the tax payer billions in wasted tuition. The country was also threatened with low skills levels and SA with deepening poverty.

"In 2002, two academics at the University of Pretoria's department of financial management, DG Gouws and HP Wolmarans, calculated that university failures cost the South African taxpayer a staggering R1,3bn a year in terms of government subsidies wasted by a failure rate of approximately 20% of enrolled students," Van Wyk said.

"Roughly 125000 students fail each year at South African tertiary education institutions. Those rates have worsened in the past six years.

"About 35%-40% of students that enrol at tertiary institutions drop out before completing their studies. This percentage compares unfavourably with an internationally acceptable rate of about 10%", Van Wyk said.

She urged the government to consider a widespread apprenticeship programme that would boost economic growth.

"Learnerships have given tax breaks to many companies, but have not resulted in sufficient new jobs for young people," she said.

This year was an election year, Van Wyk said, and "we need politicians to offer fewer problems and more carefully developed plans to improve the quality of teachers and tutors, boost apprenticeships and create meaningful employment".

She said there had been persistent changes in the education system in the past two decades with a steady "dumbing down" that saw pupils leave school with poor English comprehension and scant financial literacy.

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