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Failures costing SA billions

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Pretoria - Parliamentarians must prioritise efforts to help failed matriculants or risk further economic failures, the CEO of training organisation AstroTech & BizTech said on Monday.

"Parliament needs to urgently address the challenge of close to half a million matriculants who have failed in the past two years and who have scant future prospects in a rapidly globalising world where education is the key to competitive advantage," said Liza van Wyk.

She said failures in schools and universities coupled with exceptionally high drop-out rates were costing the tax-payer billions in wasted tuition and imperilling the economy with low skills and deepening poverty.

Citing a 2002 paper by the University of Pretoria's Daan Gouws and Hendrik Wolmarans, Van Wyk said university failures cost the taxpayer R1.3bn a year.

This was in terms of the amount of government subsidy wasted by a failure rate of approximately 20% of enrolled students or roughly 125 000 students at tertiary education institutions.

Van Wyk said these rates had worsened in the past six years and around 35% to 40% of students that enrolled in tertiary institutions had dropped out before completing their studies.

The internationally acceptable rate was that of about 10%.

She said that adding half a million failed matriculants, to the millions already without work would further ignite crime, deepen poverty and the diseases associated with it.

"Instead of university being pushed as the only way for ambitious young people to direct themselves, government should be considering widespread apprenticeship programmes."

Van Wyk said parliamentarians needed to focus on the growing group of young people with scant future prospects.

"There have been persistent changes in the education system over the last two decades with a steady dumbing down that sees people leave school with poor English comprehension and scant financial literacy," she said.

- Sapa