

Failed matrics cost South Africa's economy billions of rand

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Parliamentarians must prioritise efforts to help failed matriculants, or risk further economic failures, a skills expert says. Read more...

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Failed matriculants and university students are costing taxpayers billions of rands each year and the economic and moral costs need to be urgently addressed by parliament, the CEO of two of South Africa's top skills training organisations said today in Johannesburg.

Liza van Wyk, CEO of AstroTech and BizTech, said: "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."

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.

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 R1,3 billion a year in terms of the amount of government subsidy wasted by a failure rate of approximately 20% of enrolled students or roughly 125,000 students that fail each year at South African tertiary education institutions.

Those rates have worsened in the past six years.

Around 35% and 40% of students that enroll at tertiary institutions drop out before completing their studies.

This percentage compares unfavourably with an internationally acceptable rate of about 10%.

Liza van Wyk said that adding half a million failed matriculants, to the millions already without work on South Africa's streets will further ignite crime, deepen poverty and the diseases associated with it.

"The cholera epidemic is rampaging through Zimbabwe and assuming a foothold here because of poor sanitation and water maintenance in Zimbabwe and here.

"Instead of university being pushed as the only way for ambitious young people to direct themselves, government should be considering widespread apprenticeship programmes of the sort that the Nationalist Party government used to boost white employment in the late 1940's post Second World War South Africa and which boosted growth and infrastructure here.

"Learnerships have given tax breaks to many companies but not resulted in sufficient new jobs for



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young people.

"Many learnerships are not being conducted in a way that meaningfully create skills and many young people have not been coached at school or home of the importance of seizing advantages when offered any work experience.

"Employees should not just wait to be taught, they too should constantly seek new ways of learning from colleagues and offer to do extra work."

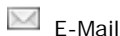
She said that soft skills were not taught in enough homes or schools and resulted in job applicants being penalised, "too many interviews are not informed by cultural sensitivity. Young black people still get penalised for not looking interviewers in the eye — when in many black cultural groups it is disrespectful for a younger person to look an older person in the eye. A person who slouches in their chair or has a limp handshake, or who mumbles is unlikely to be employed and yet too few schools, tertiary institutions or parents are teaching young people the simple manners and grooming necessary to get a job".

Parliament resumes early this year as politicians debate the sacking of former National Prosecuting head, Vusi Pikoli and prepare for elections — but Van Wyk says parliamentarians need to focus on a growing group of young people with scant future prospects.

She said: "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".

Van Wyk observed that with 2009 being an election year, "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".

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