

Funding gap at crowded colleges 'set to widen'

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Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges are underfunded because of overenrolment and the Treasury projects the funding gap will widen by 2020.



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In a developing economy, the technical skills offered by these colleges are critical to growth.

The government wants colleges to become the cornerstone of higher learning and take over from universities in meeting industrial needs, but resources are scarce.

In response to questions in Parliament on Wednesday, Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande said that TVET colleges were funded at 57% of the required 80% due to overenrolment.

Public TVET colleges are subsidised by the state.

About R9.6m was earmarked for TVETs in the financial year 2017-18 but R23.8m was required.

TVET funding for 2018-19 faces an R18.5m shortfall, which will grow to R19.5m in 2019-20.

The white paper for post-school education and training proposes increasing enrolment at colleges from about 700,000 to 2.5-million by 2030 to ease pressure on universities.

But overcrowding takes its toll on infrastructure.

President of Labtech International Steven McKee said training at TVET colleges had to correlate with a country's stage of development.

Because SA had a mixed economy, which combined agriculture and investment, technical skills were critical.

TVETs offer courses in fields such as agriculture; arts and culture; business, commerce and management; education, training and development; engineering, manufacturing and technology services; and construction.

The department reported in June that three colleges had received grants ranging from R20m to R60m for the upgrading, renovation and refurbishment of student residence infrastructure and class renovations.

Students have also been frustrated by overcrowding.

Before the academic year started, students at colleges in Tshwane, the Eastern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal staged shutdowns, citing funding, resources, infrastructure and unqualified lecturers as some of the problems.

South African Further Education and Training Student Association secretary-general Nomazizi Mzizi said the situation remained the same, seven months later.

"Why does the government prioritise universities over colleges?" Mzizi asked.

Source: Business Day

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