

Students shut down colleges to demand better governance

By [Michelle Gumede](#)

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Over-enrolment has led to a standoff between students, colleges and the government, Higher Education and Training deputy director-general Firoz Patel said on Monday, 23 January 2017.



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Seven colleges out of a national total of 50 were fully closed and six partially closed in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, said Patel.

The South African Further Education and Training Student Association called for a shutdown of all 50 colleges until students' demands were met.

In an interview, Patel, who is in charge of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, said the sector had insufficient funding for infrastructure and equipment due to over-enrolment and Treasury budgetary constraints.

"We have funding to cover 440,000 students and colleges have enrolled 710,535," he said.

Of the 440,000, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) will cover about 210,000 for the balance of fees.

Asked about lecturers' qualifications, Patel said: "Yes, lecturers must have qualifications. However, due to the shift towards artisan training, qualified artisans who do not have teaching qualifications are used due to the over-enrolment."

The department aims to enrol 1.2-million students in TVET colleges by 2019-20. However, it can barely keep up with their running costs.

Patel said that, on average, a TVET college needed R3m a month to cover running costs, excluding staff salaries.

South African Further Education and Training Student Association president Yonke Twani, whose organisation is at the fore of a call to shut down colleges, said government funds were poorly administered, an issue students wanted to have addressed urgently. "NSFAS is collapsing," he said.

In some cases students had received their textbook and accommodation allowances only in September, Twani said.

Students had also complained about the delay in releasing results, with some waiting two years to get their certificates after finishing their studies. This, they said, hampered their efforts to find work.

Twani said the students had received support from some parents, lecturers, managers and college council members.

National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union spokesman Khaya Xaba said an urgent intervention was needed because TVET colleges were being run like "spaza shops".

"We need to instill a culture of good governance," said Xaba. The situation was alarming as TVET colleges played a critical role in beefing up artisan numbers in the country.

He pointed out that even in the build-up to the World Cup, SA had to hire external artisans to work on the infrastructure.

Source: Business Day

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