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The following excellent article was penned by Paddy Hartdegen for [Property24.com](#). We thank both Paddy and Property24.com for granting us permission to republish it.

Our politicians and our government officials lie to us. Let's not beat about the bush here: spin doctoring is just a euphemism for lying and we get a lot of lying all the time.

Last week there was an angry response from the Dr Lindiwe Sisulu's spokesperson and I don't want to resurrect that debate – I've said all I've got to say about it.

But one of the comments did infuriate me. It came from a person called Lus, who lives in Ivory Park and who wrote: "I don't care which houses you're talking about on your sudden list, spokesperson, all the houses built by your boss in Ivory Park next to Midrand, where I live, are falling down in this rain. . .".

The important thing here is not that some contractor was given the contract to erect those houses. The important thing is that the people who did the work were just not qualified to do it.

Why?

Because there are no apprenticeships left in the building industry. And yet there are millions of unqualified or under-qualified school-leavers who are sitting around doing nothing because they are unemployed and unemployable.

And why is that you might ask?

Because our education system has failed the students of South Africa so badly.

This country urgently needs skills and yet the government, with whatever justification they had at the time, cancelled apprenticeship training, introduced Sector Education and Training Authorities, set up a National Qualifications Framework and, finally, through the education department, dumbed down the education system.

Here is the conundrum: we need to build millions of houses and supply all the services that go with those houses, such as roads, sewerage, water, electricity and so forth, and yet we don't have the skills to do so.

And we cannot train sufficient numbers of people because they lack the basic education to be trained in engineering or as technicians or technologists.

So I think that what we need to do is put all those unemployed youngsters to work, first as apprentices and then as artisans and finally as true craftsmen and women.

That way they can earn a decent living.

But what does our government do? It leaves them sitting at home doing nothing.

They are incapable of getting a university education and literally unemployable because they have no skills nor experience.

Ideally we need to see some action from our politicians and that action must start with our education system. On the one hand, the Department of Education tells us that there is nothing wrong with the education system in South Africa.

At the same time, the acting director general of education, Bobby Soobrayan, tells members of Parliament's portfolio committee on basic education that many school teachers could not pass the tests they set for their

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pupils.

And nothing is wrong with our education system?

In 1975 there were more than 30,000 apprentices in training in SA and, over the years, many of these youngsters have moved up within the corporate world to hold positions of power and responsibility today. I know because many of them are my age and I have seen them moving up these ladders.

Today there are less than 3,000 apprentices being trained across all disciplines in this country. Worse still, the average age of any practicing artisan is now 55 and we have nobody to replace them.

And yet, we have millions of youngsters sitting on the streets with nothing to do.

They cannot get into a university, they don't have the necessary qualifications to meet the entrance criteria and even if they did, they are so ill-prepared that they would probably fail anyway.

In fact, Soobrayan referred to a document prepared by the Department of Education that indicated that only 38% of Grade Six pupils are currently functioning at the required level of literacy, while only 35% of them are functioning at the required level in mathematics.

And yet the same education department says there's nothing wrong with our schooling. In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study published last year, South Africa came stone last out of the 50 countries that participated in the study.

The worst performing countries were Lebanon, the Philippines, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, Ghana and in last place, South Africa.

And there are still thousands of children throughout the country being trained by the very same teachers who cannot even pass the examinations they set for their pupils.

It is a shocking state of affairs and one that needs some urgent attention because, more than anything else, South Africa needs to have engineers, technicians, technologists and most importantly artisans if it wants to grow and sustain its economic growth.

I really do believe that it is up to government and industry to work together and reintroduce proper apprenticeship training in South Africa.

That means that young school-leavers would be indentured, in a formal contract, for a fixed period and would gain on-the-job training along with theoretical training done by Technikons around the country.

Let's forget about trying to dumb down our universities so that they have to accept ill-prepared students who cannot cope with the basic mathematics and science syllabuses that are required as part of the engineering curricula.

Let's put together a Marshall Plan for skills training in this country and do so in a way that allows all those unemployed and unemployable young folk on the streets to start gaining the skills that we need to build this country.

And I'm talking about skills such as bricklaying, carpentry, tiling, roofing, painting and plastering. I'm talking about electricians and plumbers who can do the actual work that is needed when any new house is being built.

I don't care if it's a million rand mansion or a low-income 40sqm home. The skills must be there to build them.

No wonder Lus in Ivory Park is so upset. He or she lives in a house that is simply not up to standard and that's because the people who built it don't have the basic building skills required to do a decent job.

Why?

Because they haven't been apprenticed, are not artisans and are not craftsmen either.

This, while we have millions of young, capable and able people moping around the streets, despondent, depressed and despairing because they cannot get a job and they cannot get any training either.

That's the true legacy that our teachers have given us.

And that's something that must change now.

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