



Police clash with students at protests in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 4 October.

SIPHWE SIBEKO/REUTERS

university closed, funding is going unspent, causing international study visas and bursaries for master's and doctoral students to expire with research not yet complete.

University administrators are in a bind. Steadily rising fees have enraged students, who connect the issue to the social and racial disadvantage that persists two decades after the end of apartheid. But higher-education institutions say that they rely on those fees to make up for declining government subsidies. "It's a crisis we are all facing," Moll says. "But it's something

that the universities themselves cannot do a lot about. We've become the battleground between the government and the youth."

Academics are also worried that, in the longer term, the violence could damage universities' reputations — which could put off foreign students and international collaborators, even at institutions that have not otherwise been affected by the protests. "I'm concerned that if we don't resolve this within a reasonable timescale, we'll be seen as dysfunctional, even if it's not true," says Don

Cowan, director of the University of Pretoria's Genomics Research Institute.

Researchers are also concerned at the prospect of falling budgets as the government — struggling with a combination of the student crisis, the country's worst drought in decades and slow economic growth — looks to trim other areas of spending. The South African Medical Research Council, for example, has been given a 7% budget cut for the year 2017–18, says council head Glenda Gray.

For now, undergraduates are the main concern: universities across the country are holding emergency meetings, general assemblies and peace accords in a desperate bid to keep the academic year alive. "We are now reaching the 'point of no return' in terms of saving the academic year," said UCT vice-chancellor Max Price in a notice to students and staff last week. ■

CLARIFICATION

The News Feature 'The troubled minds of migrants' (Nature 538, 158-160; 2016) stated that the Berlin-based clearing centre was opened by psychiatrist Malek Bajbouj of the Charité university hospital. The centre is actually run jointly by his and two other psychiatric departments of the hospital.