

# Incidence of qualification fraud remains high

According to Managed Integrity Evaluation (MIE) research, misrepresentation and fraud of qualifications remains high and that a candidate's qualification(s) is the most likely aspect to contain discrepancies, when compared to other background screening checks.



Michelle Baron-Williamson, CEO of Managed Integrity Evaluation (MIE)

“When undertaking background checks of candidates on behalf of a client, in some cases we have found that a candidate has misrepresented their credentials because they feel they are one or a few credits shy of obtaining their qualification. However, we have also had cases where candidates have intentionally lied about having qualifications that they don’t – or have bought their (fake) qualifications online,” says Michelle Baron-Williamson, CEO of MIE.

## Online trading in fake degrees

Dubbed “degree mills”, the rapidly growing global phenomenon of online trading in fake degrees means that thousands of dishonest candidates may be competing for the same available jobs and adversely affecting opportunities for appropriately qualified candidates – from nurses to pilots, accountants, auditors, lawyers, and even doctors etc.

When a qualification is verified as fraudulent, it is the responsibility of the hiring organisation or higher education institution to report the candidate. This can result in the candidate being prevented from obtaining their qualification from that institution – as the institution retains the legal right to revoke the qualification.

“This can be equated to being listed as a bad creditor – as the likelihood of other higher education institutions assisting the student in completing their qualification is low and hiring organisations likely won’t look favourably on the student or candidate’s actions, as the perception is that they misrepresented themselves in bad faith,” says Baron-Williamson. “Even in less severe cases, where a student may be a credit or so shy of earnestly obtaining their qualification, and they apologise to the hiring organisation they are applying to for a job and the higher education institution, they could still face very severe consequences by not being allowed to complete their qualification through the institution they are currently studying at.”

## Serious consequences

Baron-Williamson however highlights that this is still a good potential outcome. “One thing that all students, graduates and

job candidates must understand is that to wilfully lie about having a qualification, by presenting a fake qualification bought online, is fraud. If found guilty, a candidate could face serious charges. Having a criminal record could make finding employment even more difficult.”

The fake degree phenomenon in the country has hit the national agenda and the South African government is pushing for a hard stance to crackdown on the fraudsters with the National Qualifications Framework Bill, as presented to the higher education oversight committee in parliament in August.

The proposed bill will make it compulsory for all employers – in public and private sector – as well as independent background screening companies to report people with fake qualifications. Further to this, it will also enable and authorise the national authority to create and continuously update the registers for all misrepresented qualifications and fraudulent qualifications - which could lead to a person having a permanent record on the register.

“Too often we unfortunately see cases where a candidate doesn’t understand the seriousness of these actions, or the legal trouble they will find themselves in, until it is too late. Misrepresenting or producing fake qualifications is not a victimless crime. We, as such, advocate that students, graduates, job seekers and candidates are always honest about their qualifications – to ensure that they don’t fall victim to a bad decision that could potentially hinder them professionally, for the rest of their lives,” concludes Baron-Williamson.

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