

Fraudulent degrees a 'growth industry' in SA

Employers should verify the information on applicants' CVs

WORKPLACE STAFF

BUSINESSES that employ executives who claim to have degrees or diplomas without first checking that they are valid face huge risks.

That's the warning from Danie Strydom, managing director of the Qualifications Verification Company.

And because new employees who are not really qualified will not be able to do the job they are hired to do on the basis of the qualifications they claim to have, there is also a good chance that they might commit fraud, he adds.

"There is no doubt whatsoever that degree fraud is a growth industry because of the ease with



ALWAYS CHECK: Ethics expert Cynthia Schoeman warns that CV fraud has become a common practice in the South African workplace. Some job applicants claim higher marks for their degrees, while others lie about having passed subjects.

which fraudulent degrees and diplomas can be acquired through so-called 'degree mills'," Strydom says.

"The onus is on the employer to make sure that the new employee has the qualifications he or she lays claim to."

Cynthia Schoeman, managing director of the company Ethics Monitoring and Management Services, says fraud in the workplace

has become a cultural institution in the South African labour market and that people often lie about their qualifications or experience.

"Unfortunately many employers take the information applicants provide on their CVs at face value and don't bother to verify it," she says.

"This is a huge mistake because CVs often contain false information about qualifications, experience

and even work permits."

As part of the work she does to help companies to conform to ethics standards such as those entrenched in the King 3 report and required by the new Companies Act, Schoeman, as a matter of course, recommends that all qualifications are first checked and verified.

"I had a personal experience of job applicants who attempted to commit CV fraud when I started receiving phone calls for references for people claiming to have worked for my previous deregistered company.

"They thought it would be safe to use it, as a deregistered entity," Schoeman says.

It comes down to a lack of ethical awareness and is perhaps explained by competition for jobs.

"There needs to be verification of qualifications at all times."

The revelation by a British screening company that 25 percent of all CVs checked by it contained

lies was to some degree mirrored in South Africa.

Strydom says that although our qualifications fraud rate is not that high in South Africa, anywhere between 15 to 17 percent of all queries prove to be problematic to some degree.

Some students claim higher marks than what they got, while others add subjects that they did not pass, he adds.

The British study of 3 000 candidates conducted by the Risk Advisory Group found that CVs submitted by applicants for jobs in the British financial services sector contained at least three lies.

These ranged from lying about previous employers to lying about qualifications.

Unisa, the University of Pretoria, the University of Johannesburg and UCT have all made it clear that they will prosecute people who falsely claim to have degrees issued by their institutions.