

## The Role of SAQA in Partnering with Social Networks to Eliminate Qualification Misrepresentation and Fraud

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Qualification misrepresentation and fraud have emerged as significant challenges in education systems worldwide, undermining public trust, compromising professional standards, and affecting economies. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has positioned itself as a pivotal entity in addressing these challenges, leveraging partnerships with both national and global networks to uphold the integrity of qualifications.

### SAQA's National Efforts

Domestically, SAQA has been proactive in collaborating with regulatory bodies, institutions, and professional organisations to combat qualification fraud. One notable initiative is the establishment of the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), which serves as a central repository for verified qualifications. This initiative not only enhances transparency but also facilitates swift verification processes for employers and institutions.

Moreover, SAQA works closely with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), universities, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges to ensure compliance with national standards. Public awareness campaigns, such as the recently launched "Check Your Qualification" initiative, educate citizens on the importance of verifying credentials, thereby reducing susceptibility to fraudulent practices. This is part of SAQA's outreach through its NQF information project.

SAQA's efforts also extend to legal frameworks, advocating for stringent penalties for those involved in qualification fraud. Through partnerships with South Africa's legal and law enforcement agencies, SAQA ensures that cases of misrepresentation are prosecuted, setting a strong precedent against such actions.

SAQA is actively developing a **National Policy on the Elimination of Qualification Misrepresentation**, aiming to establish a comprehensive framework to address fraudulent practices, enhance verification processes, and uphold the integrity

qualifications in South Africa. This policy underscores SAQA's commitment to safeguarding public trust and maintaining professional standards within the education and training sectors.

## **Regional & Global Partnerships and Networks**

On an international scale, SAQA collaborates with a variety of networks to address the global nature of qualification fraud. The Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) is one such partnership, which focuses on creating secure and portable digital records for learners. By participating in GDN, SAQA aligns itself with cutting-edge digital solutions, ensuring that South African qualifications are recognised and verifiable worldwide.

Another significant partnership is with the Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN). This collaboration underscores the importance of academic honesty and works towards creating robust systems that detect and prevent fraud. SAQA's engagement with GAIN enhances its ability to learn from the best global practices while contributing its expertise to the international community.

SAQA is also an active member of the Association for Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP), where it shares insights into qualification equivalency and recognition. By working with agencies like the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), SAQA strengthens its role in promoting regional integrity in qualifications, fostering mutual recognition agreements that deter fraudulent activities.

## **Examples of Impact**

SAQA's partnerships have yielded tangible results. For instance, its collaboration with the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) has streamlined the verification of qualifications for Zimbabwean nationals working in South Africa. Similarly, its association with the Southern African Development Community-Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) ensures regional cooperation in tackling qualification fraud.

Globally, SAQA's participation in the GDN has enabled South African universities to adopt blockchain technology for issuing and verifying digital credentials. This innovation has significantly reduced the risk of tampering and misrepresentation.

SAQA has consistently demonstrated its commitment to addressing qualification fraud through strategic collaborations and international agreements. A notable example is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the HK-DIR (Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency) in Norway. This MoU focuses on enhancing cooperation between the two organisations, with a central aim of exploring innovative approaches to eliminate qualification fraud. The partnership facilitates the exchange of expertise, research, and best practices, allowing both entities to leverage their respective strengths in building robust systems to detect and deter fraudulent activities.

South Africa's role as a signatory to both the Addis Convention and the Global Convention further underscores its dedication to combatting qualification fraud. The Addis Convention, which focuses on the recognition of higher education qualifications across Africa, promotes the harmonisation of qualification frameworks and ensures that legitimate qualifications are safeguarded from fraudulent activities. The Global Convention expands this effort to the international stage, encouraging cross-border cooperation and the establishment of common standards for qualification verification.

These commitments place SAQA at the forefront of efforts to uphold the integrity of qualifications both regionally and globally. By integrating the objectives of the Addis and Global Conventions with bilateral agreements like the MoU with HK-DIR, SAQA not only strengthens its own systems but also contributes to a broader, unified approach to eliminating qualification fraud worldwide. These partnerships reflect a proactive strategy to protect the credibility of qualifications and maintain public trust in education systems.

## **Summary of Findings on Misrepresentation of Qualifications on the SAQA database (Q1 2024)**

### **1. Overview**

- Total misrepresented qualifications: 1,118 (1,115 national and 3 foreign).
- Primary data sources: SAQA, QCTO, UMALUSI.
- Reporting aligned with the NQF Amendment Act (No. 12 of 2019).

### **2. National Qualifications**

- SAQA reported 16 cases: 15 National Senior Certificates (NSC) and 1 Bachelor's degree.
- QCTO reported 193 cases, predominantly in trades (192) and 1 occupational certificate.
- UMALUSI recorded the highest numbers, with 906 cases, primarily NSCs (890).

### **3. Foreign Qualifications**

- Three misrepresented cases involving certificates and diplomas from Lesotho, Angola, and the DRC.

### **4. Key Trends**

- NSCs dominate the misrepresentation landscape with 905 cases.
- Trades such as boilermaker, mechanical fitter, and diesel mechanic show significant instances.
- Increased verification requests stemmed from private entities and national departments.

### **5. Challenges and Future Directions**

- Current reporting mechanisms require standardisation to improve accuracy.
- Stakeholder engagements planned for refining data collection and reporting protocols.

This comprehensive analysis underscores the need for robust verification processes and stakeholder collaboration to combat qualification fraud effectively.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Despite these successes, challenges remain. The increasingly sophisticated nature of fraudulent practices demands constant innovation. Additionally, ensuring uniformity in standards across different regions and networks poses significant hurdles. However, opportunities for collaboration and technology-driven solutions offer promising avenues for addressing these challenges.

## Key Questions for Further Consideration

Here are additional key and central questions that could be explored to help eliminate qualification fraud:

### 1. Policy and Legal Frameworks

- What legislative changes or updates are necessary to create a more robust legal deterrent against qualification fraud?
- How can international treaties and agreements on credential fraud be strengthened to address cross-border cases?

### 2. Collaboration and Partnerships

- How can partnerships between education providers, employers, and credential verification agencies be improved to create a unified front against fraud?
- What strategies can be used to engage stakeholders, such as professional associations and industry bodies, to actively monitor and report fraudulent qualifications?

### 3. Public Awareness

- What innovative approaches can be employed to educate the public on the dangers and consequences of qualification fraud?
- How can campaigns be tailored to target vulnerable groups, such as job seekers and employers, to prevent them from falling victim to fraudulent claims?

### 4. Technology and Innovation

- What role can blockchain and other secure technologies play in creating tamper-proof digital credentials?
- How can artificial intelligence and machine learning be used to detect patterns of fraud and flag suspicious qualifications?
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### 5. Verification Processes

- How can the efficiency and accessibility of qualification verification processes be improved to encourage their widespread use?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to ensure the authenticity of qualifications from institutions in regions with weaker regulatory oversight?

### 6. International Collaboration

- How can global networks like GDN, TAICEP, and UNESCO facilitate a more coordinated international response to qualification fraud?

- What role should global conventions, such as the Addis Convention and the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications, play in standardising anti-fraud measures?
- 7. Data Management**
- How can the security of national databases, like SAQA's NLRD, be enhanced to protect against data breaches and unauthorised alterations?
  - What are the ethical considerations in sharing data about fraudulent qualifications across borders?
- 8. Institutional Accountability**
- What accountability measures can be implemented for institutions found to be complicit in qualification fraud?
  - How can accreditation processes be strengthened to prevent fraudulent institutions from operating?
- 9. Monitoring and Evaluation**
- What metrics should be used to measure the success of anti-fraud initiatives?
  - How can continuous feedback loops be established to adapt and improve anti-fraud strategies?
- 10. Capacity Building**
- How can training programs for law enforcement, education regulators, and verification specialists be expanded to deal with increasingly sophisticated fraud methods?
  - What resources are needed to build the capacity of under-resourced regions to combat qualification fraud effectively?

These questions can help shape a multi-dimensional approach, addressing not just the symptoms but also the systemic causes of qualification fraud, ensuring a more robust and sustainable solution.