PSC

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Custodian of Good Governance

Oversight Report on the Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service

Public Service Commission

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Vision

The Public Service Commission is an independent and impartial body created by the Constitution, 1996, to enhance excellence in governance within the Public Service by promoting a professional and ethical environment and adding value to a public administration that is accountable, equitable, efficient, effective, corruption-free and responsive to the needs of the people of South Africa.

Mission

The Public Service Commission aims to promote the constitutionally enshrined democratic principles and values of the Public Service by investigating, monitoring, evaluating, communicating and reporting on public administration. Through research processes, it will ensure the promotion of excellence in governance and the delivery of affordable and sustainable quality services.

Oversight Report on the Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service

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FOREWORD

Qualifications are an important part of the professional credentials and identity of a public servant. Although they do not directly signify ability and competence, qualifications still imbue their bearer with a certain degree of value and could guide critical recruitment and selection processes. However, for qualifications to meaningfully serve this purpose, their authenticity needs to be verified.

As an institution that is mandated by the Constitution to promote good administrative practice in the Public Service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has, since 2001 been closely involved in the verification of the qualification of public servants. The PSC's first report in this regard was released in August 2001, and focused on the Senior Management Service (SMS). A follow up report was released in 2005, this time focusing on the Middle-Management Service (MMS). The PSC has completed the third edition in this series, which assesses the progress departments have made with the verification of the qualifications of employees below level 11.

This report, however, differs from the previous two in that it focuses on the monitoring of the implementation of the Guidelines that the PSC has developed to assist departments in their efforts to verify qualifications. In this study the PSC did not conduct a verification of the qualifications of public servants. Instead, it monitored the progress of the verification processes undertaken by departments. This approach marks an important departure from the previous studies conducted by the PSC in this area by placing the responsibility to verify qualifications on departments themselves. This way, the PSC can focus more on monitoring the progress made and advising Parliament and the Executive on areas that may require intervention.

I trust that this report will draw attention to the important work that is being done towards the verification of qualifications, and enhance efforts to create a skilled integrity-driven Public Service.

PROF SS SANGWENI
CHAIRPERSON: PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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GLOSSARY

DPSA: Department of Public Service and Administration

ETQA: Education and Training Quality Assurance

GSSC: Gauteng Shared Service Centre

HEC: Higher Education Council

MMS: Middle Management Service

NLRD: National Learner Records Database

NQR   National Qualification Register

PERSAL: Personnel Salary System

PFMA: Public Finance Management Act (Act 1 of 1999)

PSC: Public Service Commission

SAQA: South African Qualifications Authority

SMS: Senior Management Service

Executive summary

1.   Introduction and Background to the Study

In 2000, the Minister for Public Service and Administration announced that the qualifications of all public servants would be verified, starting with those of the officials in the Senior Management Service (SMS). In terms of a Cabinet decision of January 2002, each Accounting Officer must, for his or her department/organization-

"Verify the previous employment, qualifications, citizenship, and criminal record of all persons before they are employed."

Following the Minister's announcement about the verification of qualifications in the Public Service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) conducted two studies to verify qualifications of Public Service officials. The first phase which focused on the verification of qualifications of members of the Senior Management Service (SMS) was completed in 2001[1] and the second phase, which focused on the members of the Middle-Management Service (MMS)[2], was completed in 2005.

After the second phase, the PSC published a set of Guidelines[3] on the verification of qualifications in the Public Service. The Guidelines detail the verification process and the protocols involved. They also contain standardized templates to be used when gathering the required verification data. The Guidelines were workshopped with the respective heads of Corporate Services and/or Human Resources from both national and provincial departments. The aim of the workshop was to promote a common understanding of the verification process and to present clear protocols for reporting.

As part of its monitoring and evaluation mandate, the PSC decided to undertake an assessment of the verification of qualifications by departments and how the Guidelines were being used to support this process.

2.   Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to assess the progress made by departments in verifying the qualifications of employees who are below level 11. The study also sought to:

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1   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Verification of Qualifications of Senior Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2001.
2   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The Verification of Qualifications of Middle Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.
3   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Guidelines to Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.

- Evaluate the status of qualification verification procedures in departments;
- Evaluate the progress made with the implementation of the verification procedure; and
- Obtain feedback on problems that departments may have encountered in the verification process.

3.   Methodology

A combination of various data collection methods was used to obtain information. A systematic review was conducted, primarily of the two previous studies by the PSC on the SMS in 2001 and MMS in 2005. A detailed self-administered and structured questionnaire was developed and administered as a data collection tool. All departments at both national and provincial level were included in the study except the following: National Intelligence Agency, South African Secret Service and the South African National Defence Force.

Quantitative data was analysed by using the MS Excel computer programme, and this was complemented by a qualitative analysis of the narrative response that were provided by departments.

4.   The Findings of the Study

Overall, the findings of the study show that departments are at different stages of the verification process, ranging from the planning stage, verification stage and completion stage. In those departments that have already completed the verification process, a total of 16 employees were found to have fraudulent qualifications. The province with the highest number of employees whose qualifications were found to be fraudulent is the Western Cape.

4.1   Progress made with the process of verifying qualifications

The findings of the study show that the majority of departments (60 provincial and 19 national) are at the stage where they have already completed their planning for the verification process, communicated with staff on the matter and are now interrogating the personnel records and data provided by staff to start the verifications. Only seven provincial (two from Free State, one Limpopo, four Gauteng) and two national departments indicated that they have completed the verification process.

The findings show that the institution of the verification process by departments has generally been slow. The PSC's Guidelines were issued in 2005, but only nine (9) of the departments in the entire Public Service have actually completed the verification process.

4.2   The outcome of the verification process

According to the findings, only seven (7) provincial departments and two (2) national departments reported that they have received feedback reports on the verification of qualifications. The majority of departments (59) indicated that they were still busy compiling the Feedback Report for their HoDs. A department report on the verification process needs to be presented to the Accounting Officer to familiarize him/herself with the results and to take necessary steps to address areas of concern where qualifications could not be verified.

4.3   The challenges encountered by departments

The main constraints cited were staff resistance to the verification process and that staff take long to provide proof of qualifications where it is requested. Other factors that were mentioned as constraints were lack of funds, delays by verifying institutions, and obtaining proof of older qualifications where it has been lost.

4.4   Strengthening the verification process

The following were mentioned as factors that could strengthen the verification process:

- Improvement of appointment procedures;
- strengthening of internal capacity to conduct verifications;
- improving relations with external stakeholders involved in the verification process; and
- consideration of using a central service provider.

5.   Recommendations

To improve the implementation of the verifications of qualifications in the Public Service the following recommendations are made:

5.1   Leadership and Advocacy

- Heads of Department must assume a more direct role in leading the process of verification of qualifications. A strong message needs to be sent to all Public Service officials that the verification of qualifications is part of the anti-corruption programme of government, and that lack of compliance with this may adversely affect the ethical credibility of the department as a whole. Public servants need to be encouraged to blow the whistle if they suspect that any official has falsified their qualifications.

- Heads of Department must avail adequate resources for the process, including assigning Senior Managers to drive the process of verification of qualifications.

- In order to address the slow response rate from officials, effective communication should take place to raise awareness among officials about the importance of and the need for the verification of qualifications in the Public Service.

5.2   Policy Considerations

- The verification of qualification process should be incorporated as a compulsory and integral step in the recruitment and selection process of all departments. Appointment should only be approved once the qualifications are verified.

- The verification of foreign qualifications seems to pose a specific challenge to departments. This matter needs to be addressed by departments at policy level and the possibility of deferring the verification costs to the applicants should be considered.

- The DPSA and National Treasury should lead a process of ensuring that verified qualifications per official are captured on Persal. In this way, once an official's qualifications have been captured on the System, they will not have to be verified again when such an official is promoted or transferred.

5.3   Reporting Arrangements

- Reporting on the status of the verification process should be part of the standard items discussed at both executive and management meetings of departments. This will help to identify sections where there are problems and to hold the respective managers accountable.

6.   Conclusion

This study established that the Public Service still faces serious challenges in verifying the qualifications of officials and that compliance with the Guidelines on the Verification of Qualifications is slow. Given the slow implementation of the verification process, most of the findings in this study relate to intermediate steps that departments are still taking and not the outcome of the verification process.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND

Effective public service delivery is dependent on the quality and competence of public servants employed. Employees with appropriate qualifications and skills help to shape the policies of the Public Service and can also ensure that such policies are successfully implemented. Therefore, it is important for government departments to appoint people with appropriate qualifications and skills to meet the expectations and demands of the positions they hold. With the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa, mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that competencies that have been gained outside formal institutions of learning can still be assessed and duly recognized in line with comparable qualifications[4]. It can, therefore, not be argued that an insistence on qualifications disadvantages those who may have largely acquired the necessary knowledge and experience in the work place.

However, requiring employees to possess certain minimum qualifications may also raise the risk of fraudulent qualifications being presented by some of the public servants. Such fraudulent qualifications could impact negatively on service delivery as they may lead to the appointment of incompetent and dishonest officials. It is, therefore, important to ensure that as part of its human resource management value chain, the Public Service verifies the qualifications of all its employees to ensure the authenticity of these qualifications.

The importance of authentic qualifications became a serious matter in 2000 when the Minister for Public Service and Administration announced that qualifications of all public servants would be verified. At the time, the Minister confirmed that given the magnitude of the exercise, the process would be completed in phases. The first phase commenced in 2001 with the most senior level of the Public Service, the Senior Management Service (SMS). A report for this phase was produced in 2002[5]. The exercise was completed using the internal resources of the Public Service Commission (PSC). The report found that, only 2 out of the 2 376 officials (0,08%) whose qualifications were verified during the research had provided fraudulent qualifications[6].

The second phase focused on the Middle-Management Service (MMS) and commenced in 2003[7], with a report being produced in 2005. Unlike the first phase, the second phase was outsourced to a private service provider, which then worked under the supervision of the PSC. The report provided a confidential list of individuals who had falsified their qualifications.

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4   *Republic of South Africa. South African Qualifications Authority. Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning. June 2004.*
5   *Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Verification of Qualifications for Senior Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2001.*
6   *Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The Verification of Qualifications of Middle Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.*
7   *Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The Verification of Qualifications of Middle Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.*

Following the second phase, the PSC developed and published a set of guidelines[8] on the verification of qualifications in the Public Service in 2005. The purpose of the Guidelines is to assist departments to undertake such verification processes on their own, and to build these processes into their mainstream Human Resource Management value chain. The Guidelines detail the verification process and the protocols involved. They also contain standardized templates to be used when gathering the required verification data.

In June 2005, the PSC workshopped heads of Corporate Services and/or Human Resources Sections from both national and provincial departments on the use of the Guidelines. The purpose of the workshop was to promote a common understanding of the verification process and to present clear protocols for reporting.

As part of its monitoring and evaluation mandate, the PSC in 2007 undertook a study to assess the progress made by departments with the process of verifying qualifications of their employees. This report presents the findings and recommendations with regard to steps departments need to take to enhance the effectiveness of the verification process.

1.2   Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to assess the progress made by departments in verifying the qualifications of employees who are below level 11. Other areas the study focused on were:

- Evaluate the status of qualification verification procedures in   departments,
- Evaluate the progress made with the implementation of the verification procedure, and
- Obtain feedback on problems that departments may have encountered in the verification process.

1.3   Regulatory Framework

In South Africa, the verification of qualifications is guided by various legislative and normative frameworks that deal with fraud prevention, recruitment and selection, and the promotion of ethical conduct. The main legislative and normative frameworks are summarised below in **Table 1**:

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8   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Guidelines for the Public Service. Verification of Qualifications in the
        Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.

Table 1: Regulatory Framework for the Verification of Qualifications

Framework	
Cabinet decision of January 2002	Each Accounting Officer, must for his or her department, "verify the previous employment, qualifications, citizenship, and criminal record of all persons before they are employed.
Public Service Regulations 2001, Section D.8[9]	Before making a decision on an appointment or the filling of the post, an executing authority shall: (a) satisfy herself or himself that the candidate qualifies in all respects for the post and that her or his claims in her or his application for the post have been verified and; (b) record in writing that verification.
SMS Handbook January 2003 Chapter 2, 8.7[10]	Before making its final recommendation the selection committee should ensure that the information provided by the nominated candidate has been verified. This typically includes information pertaining to her/his educational qualifications, citizenship and experience.
SMS Handbook January 2003, Chapter 7, Annexure A [11]	A member will be guilty of misconduct if she or he falsifies records or any other documentation.
Treasury Regulations to the PFMA (Government Gazette 22219)[12]	"Internal controls" (3.2.1) need to be in place to determine risks to which the entity may be exposed, and develop strategies to manage those risks. Evaluating qualifications of officials may be viewed as a risk management tool implemented to deal with fraudulent behavior.
Guide for Accounting Officers: PFMA (2000)[13]	Departments should develop Fraud Prevention Plans no later than 31 March 2001.
Treasury Regulations to the PFMA (2001)[14]	• Section 3.2.1: Departments must carry out a risk assessment and develop a strategy to manage risks. • A Fraud Prevention Plan must comprise part of this strategy.
Public Service Anti-Corruption Strategy (2002)[15]	Departments should establish minimum capacity to combat fraud and corruption.

9   Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. Public Service Regulations. 2001.
10   Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. SMS Handbook. 2003.
11   Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. SMS Handbook. 2003.
12   Republic of South Africa. National Treasury. Treasury Regulations to the PFMA. 2001.
13   Republic of South Africa. National Treasury. Guide for Accounting Officers. 2000.
14   Republic of South Africa. National Treasury. Treasury Regulations to the PFMA. 2001.
15   Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. Public Service Anti-Corruption Strategy. 2002.

Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act (2004)[16]	Outlining offences in respect of corrupt activities (inc. fraud), relating to public officers.
Fraud Risk and Prevention: Volume 6, National Treasury (not dated)[17]	Wholly concerned with fraud prevention planning, including a variety of topics relating to awareness, management responsibility, risk assessment, monitoring progress, investigations, and deterring fraud.

1.4   Structure of the Report

The structure of the report consist of the following:

Chapter One   presents the background to the study on the verification of qualifications in Public Service.

Chapter Two   presents the research methodology followed to conduct the study.

Chapter Three   presents the findings of the study.

Chapter Four   presents the conclusions and major recommendations on the verification of qualifications in the Public Service.

16   Republic of South Africa. National Treasury. Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Act. 2004.
17   Republic of South Africa. National Treasury. Fraud and Risk Prevention. Volume 6. Not dated.

Chapter Two

METHODOLOGY

2.1   Introduction

The verification of qualifications involves various interrelated processes and systems, and requires liaison with external institutions. An assessment of the progress departments have made in this regard, therefore, requires a methodology that takes cognizance of these different elements and players that form part of the verification process.

This Chapter outlines the scope of the study as well as the methodology used for data collection and analysis.

2.2   The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study covered all national and provincial departments (138) except the following departments:

• 	South African Defence Force,
• 	South African Secret Service, and
• 	National Intelligence Agency.
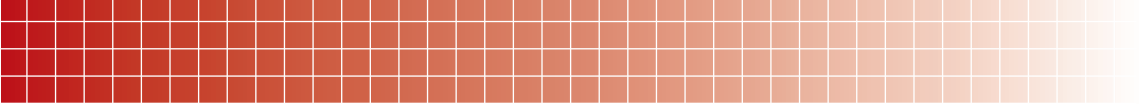
This study was limited to the verification of qualifications of officials below level 11. The choice of this as a focus group for the study was informed by the fact that the PSC had already conducted studies on the verification of qualifications of Senior Managers on levels 13 to 16 and of Middle managers on levels 11 and 12. It was, therefore, felt that a specific focus on officials below level 11 would be necessary. The study differs from the previous two in that it focuses on the monitoring of the implementation of the Guidelines that the PSC had developed to assist departments in their efforts to verify qualifications. In this particular study the PSC did not conduct a verification of the qualifications of public servants. Instead, it monitored the progress of the verification processes undertaken by departments. This approach marks an important departure from the previous studies conducted by the PSC in this area.

2.3   Methods and Procedures Used during Data Collection

2.3.1   Findings from Related PSC Reports

The findings from the two reports already completed by the PSC on the verification of qualifications were used as point of departure. The Report on the Verification of Qualifications of Senior Managers in the Public Service[18] found that, contrary to general perceptions of the existence of qualification fraud, only 2 out of the 2 376 officials (0,08%)

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18   *Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Verification of Qualifications for Senior Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2001*

whose qualifications were verified during the research, misrepresented themselves. However, the report on the *Verification of Qualifications of Middle managers on Levels 11 and 12 in the Public Service*[19], did not publish data on falsified qualifications. A confidential list of individuals who falsified their qualifications or other details was produced instead.

As part of the literature review, the Guidelines for the Public Service: Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service[20] was also looked at. The Guidelines were developed to assist departments in undertaking the verification of qualifications of all staff below level 11. The Guidelines detail the steps of the verification process and the protocols involved. They also contain templates to be used when gathering the required verification data.

2.3.2   Questionnaire development

A detailed self-administered and structured questionnaire was developed and used as a data collection tool. The questionnaire was developed in line with the objectives of the study. Departments were requested to reflect on their experience in implementing the Guidelines, progress made with the verification process and to provide feedback on the problems that were experienced in the process. Departments were also requested to provide data on the occurrence of fraudulent qualifications cases.

2.4   Data Integrity and Validation

After data had been collected, telephonic follow-ups were conducted with persons who were responsible for the completion of the questionnaires in the respective departments. The follow-ups were mainly done where it was discovered that there was insufficient information received. Gaps in the data received were addressed during this follow-up. This process improved the quality and integrity of the data.

2.5   Response Rate

Ninety six (96) out of the 138 departments included in the study responded to the questionnaire circulated by the PSC. This represents a 69.6% response rate. Of the departments that responded, 75 (or 78%) were provincial departments and 21 (or 22%) national departments. A breakdown of departments that participated both national and provincial, and their response rate is presented below. A list of all departments that participated in the study is attached as Annexure C of this report. The following is a list of national departments that responded to the study:

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19   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The Verification of Qualifications of Middle Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.

20   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Guidelines for the Public Service. Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.

National Departments
Education
Environmental Affairs and Tourism
Foreign Affairs
Independent Complaints Directorate
Land Affairs
National Treasury
Office of the Presidency
South African Management Development Institute
South African Police Service
Sports and Recreation
Trade and Industry
Water Affairs and Forestry
Public Works
Minerals and Energy
Government Communication and Information Services
Arts and Culture
Public Enterprise
Social Development
Housing
Communications
Home Affairs

Table 2: Breakdown of Responses from Provincial and National Departments

LEVEL	NUMBER OF DEPARTMENTS THAT RESPONDED
Provincial	
KwaZulu-Natal	9
Eastern Cape	8
Western Cape	11
North West	4
Northern Cape	11
Free State	6
Limpopo	10
Mpumalanga	9
Gauteng	7
National	21
TOTAL	96

From **Table 2** above, it can be observed at provincial level, that most of the responses received were from the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Limpopo. The lowest response was received from the North West where only 4 departments responded.

2.6   Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed by using the MS Excel computer programme. This was complemented by a qualitative analysis of the narrative responses that were provided by departments.

2.7   Limitations of the Study

Except for the telephonic follow-ups that were conducted with officials, the study did not allow for any further verification of the data provided by departments. Therefore, the PSC had to rely largely on the information it received from departments.

Chapter Three

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1   Introduction

The verification of qualifications becomes more effective when it is undertaken as part of the mainstream Human Resource Management functions of a department. In conducting this study, the PSC was, therefore not only interested in the final outcome of the verification processes in departments, but also in the manner in which such verification is being conducted and the challenges that exist. This chapter presents the findings of the study regarding the progress made by departments in the verification of the qualifications of employees.

3.2   A Breakdown and Analysis of the Findings

A breakdown and discussion of the findings of the study is provided below. The findings are organized into three major categories. These are:

*   The process of verification, which assesses how far departments have gone with the verification of qualifications since the release of the Guidelines by the PSC,

*   The outcome of the verification, which assesses whether any fraudulent qualifications were found, and

*   The challenges encountered, which analyses the constraints departments had to deal with during the verification of qualifications.

3.2.1   Progress made with the Process of Verifying Qualifications

The study used the procedural steps outlined in the Guidelines to assess how far departments have progressed with the verification process. The findings show that the majority of departments (60 provincial and 19 national) are at the stage where they have already completed their planning for the verification process, communicated with staff on the matter and are now interrogating the personnel records and data provided by staff to start the verification process.

Only seven provincial and two national departments indicated that they have completed the verification process. A breakdown of the progress made by provinces in implementing the verification process is provided in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: Breakdown of progress made by provinces in implementing the verification of qualifications process[21]

| Province	Commenced with planning	Commenced with Verification	Received feedback[22]	Captured results on Persal
KwaZulu-Natal	7	6		
Eastern Cape	6	6		
Western Cape	9	8		1
Northern Cape	10	9		
Free State	5	5	2	2
Limpopo	8	7	1	1
Mpumalanga	6	8		
Gauteng	4	7	4	1
North West	2	4		1
TOTAL	**57**	**60**	**7**	**6**

There are two critical observations to make from **Table 3** above. Firstly, it appears that some departments went straight into the verification process (the second column) without first engaging in careful planning (the first column). This explains why, for example, in a province like the Free State, 9 departments indicate that they have already commenced with the verification process while only 5 indicated that they had done the required planning. While not all the steps contained in the Guidelines are necessarily linear, it is the PSC'S view that the verification process needs to be preceded by careful planning. Such planning would ensure that the department puts a proper, realistic and adequately resourced implementation process in place.

The second observation to make is that departments are generally taking too long to complete the verification process. The PSC's Guidelines were issued in 2005, but it is disappointing to note that only 9 of the departments have completed the verification process. The uptake of the verification process by departments has generally been slow. As **figure 1** below shows, the majority of departments (41%) only commenced with the verification process in 2006, and what is even worse is that 33% of the departments only started the process in 2007.

21   *Table 3 provides information on progress with the verification process and numbers of the departments reflected under the different columns do not reflect the total number of the departments that responded. This is because depending on the progress made, a department may appear in more than one column. For example, a department that has started with the verification would be counted under commenced with planning and commenced with verifications.*
22   *Feedback means submission to HoDs either by a service provider or by the department if the verification was done internally.*

Figure 1: Year in which departments commenced with the verification of qualifications
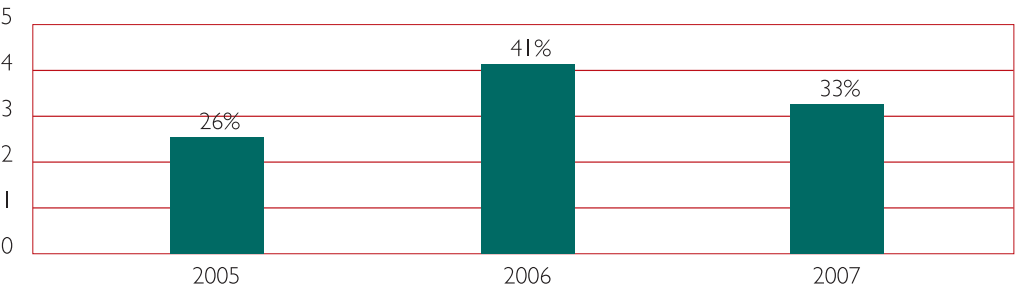
The slow uptake has profound implications for the Public Service. What this means in practice is that an official may join a department and work for at least 2 years before it is found that she/he has fraudulent qualifications.

3.2.2   The Outcome of the Verification Process

Departments were further asked whether a departmental report capturing results of the verification process has been compiled and the final report submitted to their respective Accounting Officers. Seven (7) provincial departments and two (2) national departments reported to have received Feedback Reports on the verification of qualifications. The majority of departments (59) indicated that they were still busy compiling the Feedback Report for their HoDs. While it is encouraging to note the number of departments that are already compiling the Feedback Reports, it is important to keep in mind that until such reports are completed and submitted, the verification process remains incomplete. According to the Guidelines on the Verification of Qualifications in the Public Service, the receipt of the verification report is a key milestone of the process. This report signals the end-result after the verification of qualification exercise has been completed. A departmental report on the verification process needs to be presented to the Accounting Officer to familiarize him/herself with the results and to take necessary steps to address areas of concern where qualifications could not be verified.

Figure 2: Departmental report on the verification of qualifications

Not started
31%

Compiled report
submitted
31%

Busy compiling report
61%
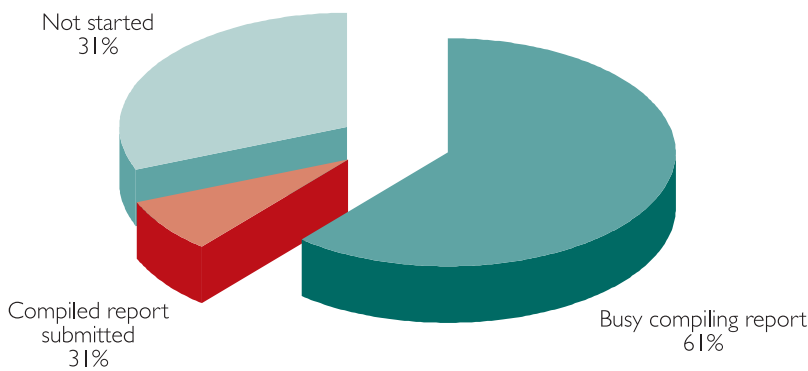
Departments were asked to provide the number of fraudulent qualifications reported during the verification of qualifications process. The findings indicate that in the departments which completed the verification process, the qualifications of 16 officials (13 provincial and 3 national) were found to be fraudulent. Nineteen percent of the officials with such qualifications were in national departments and 81% in provincial departments. The province with the highest number of employees whose qualifications were found to be fraudulent is the Western Cape with 7, followed by Mpumalanga with 4 and then Eastern Cape with 2. The PSC has drawn attention to these trends, emphasizing that it is worried that such employees, many of whom are entering the first supervisory levels, may already be showing a propensity to abuse their positions of trust[23].

It is worrying that such incidents of fraudulent qualifications occur. Considering that this information is based only on the 9 departments that reported to have completed the verification process, it can only be hoped that more of such incidents do not emerge as more departments finalise their processes. Officials below level 11 constitute the largest section of the Public Service (97,4% of the public servants as at 28 February 2006)[24]. As a result, the risk of fraudulent qualifications at these levels may have serious implications for the Public Service. While these findings do not point to a significant pattern in qualifications fraud, it is important to note that previous PSC reports have raised concerns about certain acts of unethical conduct among officials at levels below eleven (11). For example, the PSC has previously found that the largest number of financial misconduct cases is encountered among officials below level eleven (11)[25].

Against the background of these observations, it is important that departments timeously finalise the process of verifying qualifications.

23   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. State of the Public Service Report, 2006.
24   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. State of the Public Service Report, 2006.
25   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Financial Misconduct Report, 2007.

3.2.3 The challenges departments had to deal with during the verification of qualifications process

Departments were required to indicate the type of constraints they have experienced when verifying qualifications and to propose ways of improving the verification process. The main constraints cited were staff resistance to the verification process (including lack of commitment), and that staff take long to provide proof of qualifications where it is requested. It was also indicated that lack of capacity in departments to effectively and efficiently carry out the verification process was a serious challenge. Other factors that were mentioned as constraints were the lack of funds, delays by verifying institutions, and obtaining proof of older qualifications where it has been lost. The fact that some institutions have closed down since issuing certificates, also proved to be a problem. A further breakdown of these constraints is shown below.

Figure 3: Challenges to verifying qualifications
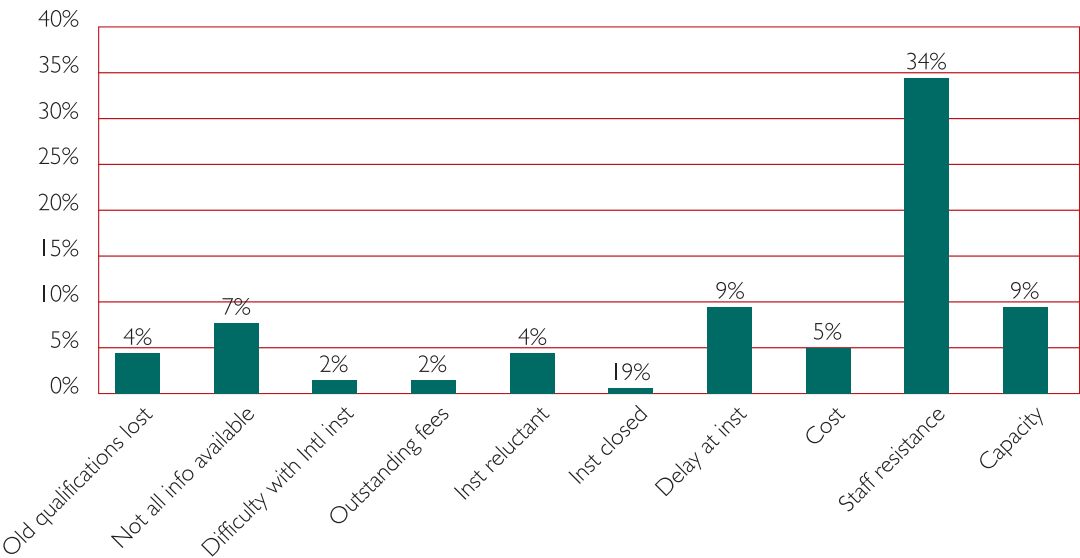
3.2.3.1 Cost of Verifications

Five percent (5%) of departments indicated that lack of funds due to the fact that this initiative is not budgeted for prevent them from implementing the verification of qualifications effectively. This was a critical constraint because availability of funds is a key factor in undertaking the verification of qualifications especially considering the cost of verifying one qualification. Many officials have more than one qualification and this pushes up the cost of the verification process even more. It is, however, encouraging to note that this

constraint was only mentioned by a few departments. This may suggest that departments are increasingly including the verification process in their mainstream budgeting process.

3.2.3.2 Human Resource Constraints
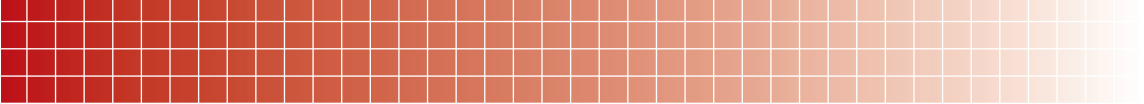
A further constraint identified by 9% of departments was that they did not have the appropriate or adequate human resources capacity to conduct the verification of qualifications. Departments also indicated that they found the process time consuming and onerous. The human resource constraints would be more evident for departments with a large geographical spread like Foreign Affairs and with large numbers of employees, which seem to place a greater burden on the human resources (HR) components. The other HR related constraint is the delays in appointments where qualifications are verified during the recruitment process.

The figure below shows that 18% of departments indicated that they verify qualifications before a candidate is appointed.

Figure 4: Verification of qualification during the recruitment process
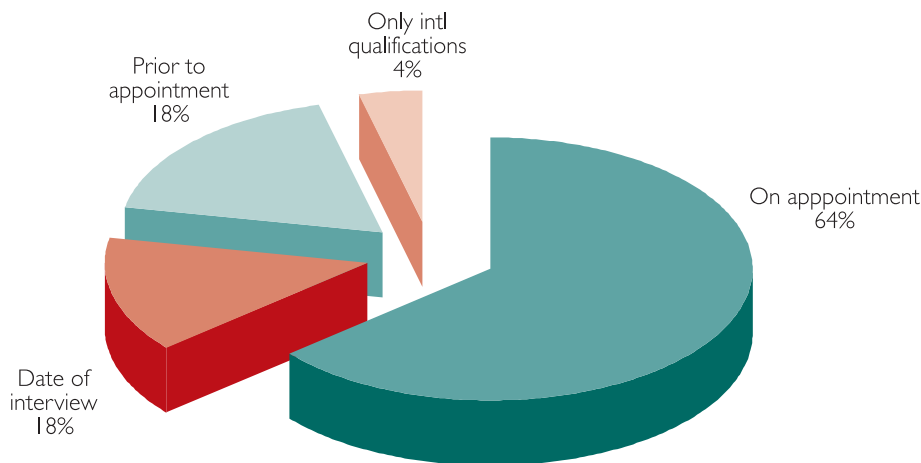
From **figure 3** above, the majority of departments (64%) only conduct the verification of qualifications once the appointment has been made. This means that it is not part and parcel of their recruitment process. Technically, leaving the verification of qualification until the appointment has been done might be problematic because the employee would have entered into a contract of employment and started work already. If the qualifications are then found to be fraudulent, this might be costly for the department to remove the employee on this ground. Eighteen percent (18%) of the departments reported that

they verify qualifications prior to the assumption of duty while 14% request shortlisted candidates to bring original certificates of their qualifications to the interview. Four percent (4%) of respondents only verify internationally acquired qualifications and not South Africa obtained qualifications.

3.2.3.3 Liaison with External Stakeholders

Fifty three percent (53%) of departments indicated that the verification of qualification process also requires liaison with external stakeholders. Concerns raised included the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and other verifying institutions like Kroll MIE, which are supposed to provide a "one-stop-service" for the actual verification of qualifications, but do not yet have a comprehensive national database of all qualifications issued in the country. It was indicated by departments that the availability of such a database will expedite the verification process.

Another serious constraint that was identified was the verification of foreign qualifications. It was found that this verification involves additional costs since more stakeholders are involved in the assessment and verification process.

3.2.3.4 Challenges Experienced in Departments

In addition to the above challenges with external stakeholders, departments also indicated that lack of cooperation from officials within departments is a serious challenge in the process of verifying qualifications. Human Resource Components indicated that 41% of their officials were slow to respond to the request for verifying qualifications. The findings show that these officials were resistant and uncooperative to requests to complete the required templates to feed into PERSAL report and to submit original certificates of their qualifications. The general excuse provided by officials was that their qualifications have been misplaced or destroyed. In many instances departments found it difficult to establish the veracity of these claims. This is a continuation of the trends established with the previous studies on the verification of qualifications of the MMS in the Public Service. In this study, missing copies of matriculation or tertiary institutions accounted for 76%[26] of the missing data that Human Resource Components had to deal with.

The capacity constraints faced by departments are possibly also related to the fact that many tend to use internal resources for the verification of qualifications. As **Figure 5** below shows that 44 departments utilize internal human resource units to verify the qualifications of their officials while 46 departments have outsourced the verification of qualifications to consultants.

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26   Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. The Verification of Qualifications of Middle Managers in the Public Service. Pretoria. 2005.

Figure 5: Departments and type of resources they use to verify qualifications
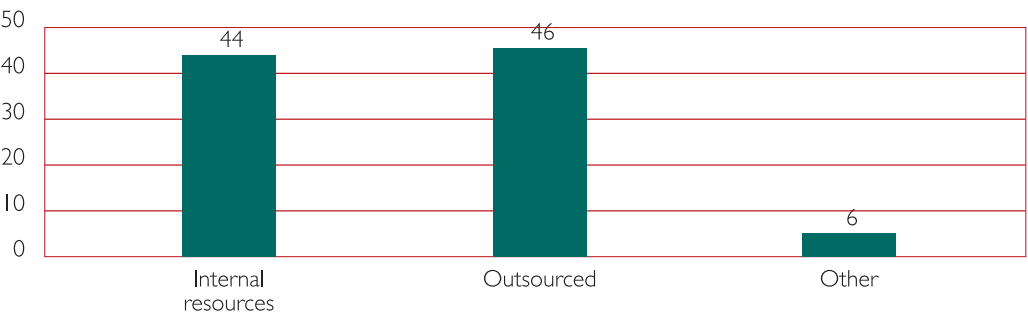
The findings further show that in 5 (55%) of the 9 provinces, the verification of qualifications function is centralized. For an example, in Gauteng it is done by the Gauteng Shared Services Centre (GSSC) that renders support services to all the departments in the province. In other provinces like the Eastern Cape it is done by the Premier's Office. In both instances, reluctance by officials to subject their qualifications to verifications was a challenge.

3.3   Strengthening the Verification Process

Departments were afforded an opportunity to state what they would consider as ways to improve the implementation of the process. This information is of particular importance, given that departments as implementers would be in the best position to make practical suggestions.

3.3.1   Appointment Procedures

The findings show that 29% of departments stated that the verification of qualifications needs to take place before the appointment is made. This may be enforced through the amendment of the Public Service Regulations and should include timeframes within which the process should be finalized with serving officials in the Public Service.

3.3.2   Strengthening Internal Capacity

Seven per cent of the departments suggested that the process of verifying qualifications could be improved by the strengthening of the internal capacity of departments. The strengthening of the capacity could be done through making additional resources available, and centralizing the process of verifications. In the case of provinces, the findings suggest that a provincially coordinated initiative on verification of qualifications could ensure a more effective process.

3.3.3 Involving External Stakeholders in the Verification Process

There was a suggestion made in relation to improving the relationships with external stakeholders such as professional bodies of various professions and Shared Services Centres like the Gauteng Shared Service Centre. It was suggested that if government departments could sign a memorandum of understanding with such bodies, the verification of qualifications could be done without cost. It was also suggested that if a contact list of South African tertiary institutions was made available to the departments, it could facilitate the verification of qualifications process. It was further suggested that the accreditation of South African tertiary institutions should be in line with SAQA requirements and that this could make it easier for the departments to determine the validity of each qualification.

3.3.4 Use of a Central Service Provider

It was recommended that centralization of the function of verifying of qualifications of all government employees, especially at the provincial level be effected. It was indicated that the centralization could eliminate delays because once an official's qualification has been verified, the data would remain in the database to which every department has access.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1   Introduction

Authentic qualifications of employees remain one of the most critical proxies for determining capacity and skills levels. The verification of qualifications should, therefore, be regarded as an important mandatory human resource management process that ensures that the Public Service has a capable team of employees. Given the findings contained in the report, the PSC feels that certain crucial steps need to be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the verification process. This chapter provides a set of recommendations for consideration. The Chapter also provides some concluding remarks.

4.2   Recommendations

To improve the implementation of the verification of qualifications process in the Public Service the following recommendations are made:

Leadership and Advocacy

- Heads of Department (HoDs) must assume a more direct role in leading the process. They need to send a strong message that the verification of qualifications is part of the anti-corruption programme of government, and that lack of compliance in this regard may adversely affect the ethical credibility of the department as a whole. Staff need to be encouraged to blow the whistle if they suspect that any official has falsified their Curriculum Vitae or qualifications.

- Heads of Department must avail adequate resources to the process, including sufficient funds and assigning senior managers to drive the process.

- In order to address the slow response from officials, more effective communication should take place to raise awareness among officials about the importance of and the need for the verification process.

Policy Considerations

- The verification of qualifications process should be incorporated into the mainstream recruitment and selection process of all departments. More specifically, it should be included as a compulsory and integral step in the departmental recruitment and selection process.

- The verification of foreign qualifications seems to pose a specific challenge to departments. This matter needs to be addressed at a policy level to particularly address the possibility of deferring the verification cost to the applicants.

- The DPSA and National Treasury should lead a process of ensuring that verified qualifications per official are captured on Persal. In this way, once an official's qualifications have been captured on the System, they will not have to be verified again when such an official is promoted or transferred.

Reporting Arrangements

Reporting on the status of the verification process should be incorporated into the standard reporting at executive and management meetings of departments. This will help to identify sections where there are problems, and to hold the respective managers accountable. In addition such reporting would ensure that specific deadlines are set and monitored so that the verification process is completed within reasonable time frames.

4.3   Conclusion

This study has established that the Public Service still faces serious challenges in verifying the qualifications of officials and that compliance with the Guidelines on the Verification of Qualifications is slow.

Even though many of the problems experienced by departments can only be addressed in the medium term, Accounting Officers should play a more active role in supporting and monitoring the process.

Given the slow uptake of the verification process, most of the findings in this study tend to relate to intermediate steps that departments are still taking and not the outcome of the verification process. However, ultimately it is the final verification result that would be critical for public administration and to inform decision-making.

Annexures

Annexure A

Qualifications audit for all personnel (QVA 2)

All officials in the public service who are on salary levels 9 – 10(including Professional/Technical personnel) must complete this form. The intention of this form is to verify qualifications obtained. In addition, this information is essential for developing a detailed database of skills and competencies of middle managers. You are required to provide all studies undertaken (completed, incomplete, or current) and include all degrees, diplomas, certificated programmes, accredited programmes, and fellowships. Complete and return to your Human Resources immediately.

A. PERSONAL DETAILS	
Name	
PERSAL number	
Department	
Designation of occupation	

B. SCHOOL/TECHNICAL SCHOOL	
Name of school/ technical school	
Country	
Highest standard passed	
Year	

C. COMPLETED tertiary education (degrees/ diploma's - equal or greater than one year of full-time study) – complete for each qualification

	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3	Qualification 4	Qualification 5
Qualification (must match certificate)					
Major subject					
Name of institution					
Country					
Year obtained					
Minimum duration of qualification					

D. COMPLETED significant short courses (equal or greater than three months of study but less than one year of full-time study) – complete for each qualification

	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3	Qualification 4	Qualification 5
Qualification (must match certificate)					
Name of institution					
Country					
Year obtained					
Minimum duration of qualification					

E. CURRENT studies (equal or greater than three months of study) – complete for all current studies					
	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3	Qualification 4	Qualification 5
Qualification (must match certificate)					
Major subject					
Name of institution					
Country					
Expected year for completion					
Minimum duration of qualification					

F. TERMINATED studies (equal or greater than three months of study) – complete for all studies started but not completed (excluding current studies)

	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3	Qualification 4	Qualification 5
Qualification (must match certificate)					
Major subject					
Name of institution					
Country					
Last year of study					
Minimum duration of qualification					
Duration remaining					
Do you intend completing (yes/no).					
If yes, when?					

DECLARATION

I declare that I hereby give my consent to have my qualifications verified.

I declare that the above particulars are complete and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any false information supplied could lead to appropriate disciplinary action against me.

Signature: Date:

Annexure B

Verification of qualifications: monitoring questionnaire

VERIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS: MONITORING QUESTIONNIARE		
I	Department: Province	
2	Contact person:	
3	Position:	
4.	Contact details:	Tel:
		Fax:
		Email:
5.	Number of officials whose qualifications still need to be verified	
6.	Number of officials whose qualifications need not be verified	Number per level please

VERIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS: MONITORING QUESTIONNIARE

7.	Resources to verify qualifications (Please tick the appropriate one)	Will be done with own resources
		Decided to outsource verification process
		Will be done as part of a provincial initiative (provincial departments to engage in one process, rather than individual processes for each department)
		Has already completed verification process
		Any other process followed (electronic verification process-e.g.I-digital process)
7(a).	Commenced Planning verification process	Yes
		No

	VERIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS: MONITORING QUESTIONNIARE	
8.	Commenced with verification process:	Officials received PERSAL reports to verify personal information
		Officials verified information on PERSAL Reports and submitted certified copies of qualifications
		Human Resource Component commenced with ensuring completeness of information received
		Human Resource Component commenced with validating information received against departmental information (Z83, CV submitted with application.)
9.	Engaged service provider to undertake verification process- IF APPLICABLE	Tender advertised and adjudicated
		Tender awarded
		Information provided to successful tenderer.
10.	Received feedback report from successful tenderer	Yes
		No

VERIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS: MONITORING QUESTIONNIARE

11.	Departmental report capturing results of verification process	Busy compiling report
		Compiled report and submitted to DG or HOD.
12.	PERSAL System	Busy with updating of information
		Updated to reflect results of verifications process.
13.	Further investigation of qualifications not initially verified	Number of officials per level
14	What constraints or problems have you experienced so far:	
15	What suggestions do you have to improve the process:	

Annexure C

National Departments that participated in the study

National Departments
Education
Environmental Affairs and Tourism
Foreign Affairs
Independent Complaints Directorate
Land Affairs
National Treasury
Office of the Presidency
SAMDI
South African Police Service
Sports and Recreation
Trade and Industry
Water Affairs
Public Works
Minerals and Energy
GCIS
Arts and Culture
Public Enterprise
Social Development
Housing
Communications
Home Affairs

Provincial Departments that participated

	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	N. Cape	North West	E. Cape	W. Cape
Office of Premier	√			√		√			√
Agriculture				√	√	√	Agriculture, Conserv & Envir	√	√
Education			√	√	√	√	√		√
Health			√	Health & Soc Dev	Health & Social Serv	√			√
Local Government and Housing	√	L. Govt	LG & Trad Affairs		√	√		√	√
Provincial Treasury/Finance	√		√	√	√			√	√
Safety, Security and Liaison	√	√		√	√	√		√	√
Social Development	√	√				√		√	

Department									
Sports, Arts, Culture Science and Technology	√	√	Sports & Recreation	√	√	√		√	√
Tourism, Environmental Affairs, and Economic Affairs	√					Tourism, Env & Conserv			
Economic Development				Econ Dev, Env & Tourism	√	√		Econ Dev & Env Affairs	
Roads and Transport		Public Trans, Roads & Works		√		Transp, Roads & Pub Works	Transp, Roads & Comm Safety	√	Env Aff & Dev Planning √
Public Works		√		√	√		√	√	Trans & PubWoks
Housing		√							
Arts & Culture		√							
Royal Household		√							
Shared Service Centre									

Notes

Notes

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