

Criminal records and bogus degrees keep recruiters guessing

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JOB ASPIRANTS with as many as 12 criminal convictions will brazenly apply for a job without disclosing these convictions.

There are also those who will present an impressive certificate from an unknown university in the UK or the US to get an executive position.

Kirsten Halcrow, the managing director of EMPS, the oldest screening and vetting agency in South Africa, has seen them all and more.

So now, she says, nothing shocks her anymore.

She advises: "For those of

you recruiting employees who believe education verifications are unnecessary, every qualification under the sun is now available online through a diploma mill."

She says screening can reveal all sorts of misrepresentation, which is becoming worse as times are getting tougher and people are desperate to get employment. Many candidates will present false qualifications and embellish their CVs.

Although the practice is more rife at the lower level of employment, Halcrow says it also happens at executive level.

Misrepresentation is most common in the retail and secu-

rity industries. A matric certificate is one of the easiest documents to forge, yet employers will accept it without verification, she says.

Previous colleagues can be a valuable resource when gathering information on applicants, and an essential part of the screening of any candidate.

South Africa has had its fair share of bogus intellectuals.

Former Land Bank boss Phil Mohlahlane was forced to resign as chief executive of the Limpopo Agribusiness Development Corporation after an investigation discovered he had two bogus PhD qualifications from US universities. The

probe revealed that he did not even have a matric certificate.

Another investigation found that Sicelo Shiceka, the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, did not possess the master's degree in political science that he claimed to have earned.

Leading recruitment firm PAG has revealed statistics from its verification agency that show 34 percent of job applicants falsify their experience and abilities.

Halcrow says it has become common practice in South Africa to conduct checks on job applicants to establish the existence of a criminal record.

EMPS screening report for 2010

Criminal records: 13.5 percent of job applicants had a criminal record (using fingerprints).

Theft convictions: 24 percent of criminal records picked up were convictions for theft.

Other convictions: 33 percent of criminal records picked up were convictions for assault, drug offences and housebreaking.

Repeat offenders: 17 percent of applicants with criminal records were second-time offenders, 5 percent were third-time offenders and 3 percent were fourth-time offenders. Job applicants had up to 10 convictions.

Credit records: 25 percent of applicants had a credit record of sorts (bad payer /in default/judgment).

Driving licence: 11 percent of driving licences checked were invalid or had expired.

Qualifications: 12 percent of qualifications could not be validated.

ID documents: 8 percent of South African ID documents were invalid.