

HR NEWS - AUGUST 2008

FROM THE DESK OF THE TEAM AT PSC



BUYER BEWARE - WHEN IS A DEGREE A REAL DEGREE!

There have been a number of cases reported in newspapers overseas where applicants for positions have claimed that they possessed a qualification from either a university or tertiary institute that have turned out to have been purchased over the internet!

Recently a New Zealand primary school principal, his human resources director brother and a security guard were among 10 New Zealand names on a list of buyers of bogus United States university degrees. Prices for the bogus degrees ranged from a few hundred dollars for a Bachelor or Masters degree to US\$5400 for a PhD.

Whilst you might find this unbelievable, another person unwittingly involved in the same case spent more than \$5000(US) over two years to obtain a BBA degree from St Regis University. You have to empathise with him when he stated that he could not "...believe what I have now is just a piece of rubbish," ..."It is not just the money, but I also spent a lot of time studying and submitting the assignments the university sent me through emails."



YOU MAY WELL ASK WHAT THE RELEVANCE OF THIS TO YOU

In any recruitment, process there is a requirement for the selection panel to ensure that all information provided by any

potential employee is both accurate and valid.

This aspect in the recruitment cycle is vital. When a panel meets to make a recommendation to appoint to a vacancy, they must ensure that a proper assessment of all applicant's statements against the selection criteria occurs diligently. To enable this to occur all parties involved in the recruitment process have to:-

1. Examine the applicants claims against the selection criteria
2. Independently verify those claims
3. Quality assess the process

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICAL TERMS?

When assessing the applicants statement against the selection criteria there are three methods used; short listing, interviewing and reference checking:-

Pre-interview assessment of applications via a desktop audit process

- 👁 Reviewing the formal application that addresses the selection criteria
- 👉 If an applicant doesn't address the selection criteria - then they should **not** be interviewed - it is unfair to other applicants who have taken time and effort to submit a proper application for the position
- ☒ Just because either you know an applicant personally or professionally is not good enough grounds to interview them. They have to demonstrate in their application that they meet all of the criteria in the same way as other applicants.
- 👉 If an applicant does not meet **all** of the essential criteria then they should be excluded from the interview process
It is wrong to give people false hope by interviewing them if they do not have

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the minimum experience or qualification for the role. This may also result in an appeal being lodged with the PSC unnecessarily

- ✎ Check out any claims that they make regarding the possession of qualifications
If they sound too good to be true they may well be! Has the applicant provided certified copies of their qualifications certified by a lawyer or notary public? This is a must for applicants from overseas at any level including Consultants. Are the qualifications from a recognised and well respected University - if in doubt undertake research ask for advice from the HR Policy & Legal Division of the PSC if needs be.

- 🕒 Look at the chronology of their employment.
Are there any unexplained gaps in their employment history? This might give an indication that the person has deliberately omitted a period of employment

- 👉 Have they provided their most recent employer as a referee?
If not this could mean they left their last employer in challenging circumstances

This pre-interview phase of the assessment is important and it takes time. It is best to do it right the first time every time. Appointment of the wrong person can be both frustrating and costly.

Formally interviewing to validate the applicants claims

- 🗨 Structure questions to provide interviewees a fair chance of providing information about their skills, knowledge and abilities relevant to the requirement of the job

- 🗨 Make sure that there are linkages between the questions being asked and the criteria for appointment
Have a structure to the way in which you ask the questions. Don't be afraid to probe further if the applicant has not answered the questions to your satisfaction.

Reference checking

Following the interviews and the identification of the recommended applicant, the panel **must** check references.

- 🗨 This is the opportunity to do some reality checking to see if what you have read and heard from the applicant(s) is accurate.
- 👁 Referee reports are a legitimate part of a selection process, but shouldn't be used in isolation but in **conjunction** with other selection tools to increase the validity of the selection process.
- ❓ What if the panel wants to contact a different referee to the ones provided?
This is OK but the applicant must be advised of this.

Quality assessing the process

This means that any decision made in respect to the appointment into a position must be transparent and open to review. There needs to be sufficient documentary evidence present about the recruitment and selection process for an independent person to understand how a decision to appoint one person over another was reached. This aspect is vital if there is an appeal lodged under Section 49 of the Public Service Act 2004.



WATCH OUT FOR THE NEXT EDITION DUE OUT IN SEPTEMBER