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Verification of Qualifications

in Africa

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RESEARCH INTO THE VERIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN AFRICA

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHERS	African Higher Education *and* Research Space
BNVQF	Botswana National Vocational Qualification Framework
BQA	Botswana Qualifications Authority
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
CHE	Commission for Higher Education,
CUE	Commission for University Education (Kenya)
DIVT	Directorate of Industrial and Vocational Training
EAC	East African Community
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ENQF	Ethiopian National Qualifications Framework
IUCEA	Inter University Council for East Africa
JAMB	Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
JCC	Joint Consultative Committee
NCQF	National Credit and Qualifications Framework
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NABTEB	National Business and Technical Examinations Board
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
NECO	National Examinations Council
NERDC	National Educational Research and Development Council
NOE	National Organization for Examinations (Ethiopia)
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NUC	National Universities Commission (Nigeria)
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TEC	Tertiary Education Council (Botswana)
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
WAEC	West African Examination Council

TERMINOLOGY

Benchmarking
Practices that enable us to make mutually intelligible and useful judgements about the comparative value of qualifications.

Comparability
Pegging qualifications to a qualifications framework based on a wide range of criteria including purpose, specifications and characteristics of the qualification, high-level learning outcomes in relation to level descriptors, credits and quality assurance arrangements.

Certification
The formal recognition that a learner has successfully completed a qualification or part-qualification

Cross-border University education
Cross-border university education is defined as an educational service provided within a national boundary by foreign educational institutions(s) singly or in partnership with local institution(s) through conventional, part time or e-learning modes for the purpose of awarding degrees, diplomas and certificates.

Equivalence of qualifications
A process of formally establishing as to whether two or more qualifications are equal or deemed to be equal or comparable in value.

Foreign qualification
A qualification offered by an awarding institution that is accredited or recognised in a national system of another country and in accordance with the national policies, or generally accepted practice of that country.

Fraud
The unlawful and intentional making of a misrepresentation which causes actual prejudice or which is potentially prejudicial to another.

Mobile students
Internationally, mobile students are defined as students who have crossed an international border and moved to another country (of which they are not citizens) with the objective to study. These students' countries of origin are usually conceptualised by their country of permanent or usual residence, or their country of prior education i.e. the country in which they obtained the educational qualifications required to enter the programme they are studying abroad (UNESCO 2013).

Qualifications system
Where a qualification framework exists, it is normally one component of the overall qualifications system. A qualifications 'system' is broader and includes all activities that result in the recognition of learning, such as the means of developing and operationalizing policy on qualifications, along with institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, etc.

Verification
Confirmation that a credential is authentic and represents a qualification awarded to an individual by an institution at a specific time**.** Verification seeks to establish:
- Whether the documents in question are genuine, i.e. whether they have been issued by the institution indicated in the document; authenticating the status of the institutions and the qualifications offered by the institution.
- The authenticity of qualification documentation and whether they have not subsequently been unlawfully altered by the applicant or others.
- Whether the documents in question have in fact been rightfully issued to the applicant.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

This report has been developed as part of the SAQA process to improve the verification of foreign qualifications in an attempt to combat academic fraud. This report aims to provide credential evaluators in Africa with a list of guidelines to assist them in their daily recognition work. Challenges pertaining to the current process with regards to verification of qualifications are also highlighted.

The production of fraudulent documents, or false degrees and diplomas, has been reported on intermittently, but it is only in the last ten to fifteen years that educational fraud or 'false qualifications' has really become a worldwide problem. There are two principal reasons for this: firstly, academic qualifications have gained increasing commercial value and are now used to attempt to ensure access to employment, promotion as well as a real bargaining tool for better compensation or greater professional recognition. A qualification is gradually becoming a prerequisite for an increasing number of occupations and is now indispensable for most positions of power, authority and prestige in modern societies (Hallak & Poisson, 2007; Ineson, 2013).
Secondly, modern technology and the rise of the internet have undoubtedly contributed to the wide-spread trend of educational fraud and falsified degrees due to the ease of access to high quality desktop printing systems as well as online degree mills.

The Nigerian Minister of Education, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau stated: 'We can no longer afford to underestimate the need to map out co-ordinated action plan for our institutions to always be on security alert' (Gyamfi, 2014).

Internationalisation of higher education demands both intra and inter-regional academic collaboration. Recently, there has been an increasing focus on higher education collaboration within regions. Africa prioritises engaging in internationalisation activities within the region which can be considered as regionalisation of higher education. One of the major problems in the process of internationalisation of higher education in Africa is a lack in instruments to facilitate and promote the international mobility of labour and students. This is further complicated by the diversification of higher education services and delivery systems. There are growing concerns regarding the increase of fraud in the education and training landscape the world over. So serious is the situation that a UNESCO study undertaken in 2003 titled 'Combating Academic Fraud: Towards a Culture of Integrity' warns that 'any attempts to improve the functioning of the education sector in order to increase access to quality education for all cannot prove successful if problems of corruption [..] are not being properly dealt with' (IAU, 2009, UNESCO, 2003). The study conducted by UNESCO in 2003 highlighted (i) fraudulent qualifications, (ii) efficiency and turnaround time and (ii) credibility of the process (accurate and trustworthy information) as the biggest risks.

Internationalisation and the creation of exchange opportunities for both students and staff are also high on the agenda of most universities. Africa is emerging as an attractive and affordable study destination for international students. This is demonstrated in the rapidly increasing number of international students. Because of international exchange rates, South Africa offers real educational value for money. According to Higher Education South Africa (HESA) statistics, the number of international students increased from 6.7% in 2004, to 7.8% in 2012 at South African universities, of which 72% are from Southern Africa and 17% from the rest of Africa. This highlights the need for a proper and trustworthy service for qualification verification. All universities have policies and procedures in place for verification of foreign qualifications. However, little information is available on the implementation and effectiveness of these policies or its efficiency in terms of delivery. As students have to apply for a study permit, arrange finance, medical aid and logistics, time is of utmost importance. Not only can it be hard to verify if a foreign university is genuine, but also the ethical behaviour of educators. There have been cases of professors at genuine universities in Africa selling degrees on the side (Tutton, 2010). Some legitimate universities are unwittingly partnering with degree mills that operate abroad. 'This is a very sophisticated problem and I think it will continue to be a concern as international education becomes more significant' (Wolman, 2009).

The challenge for the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and all organisations involved in the evaluation of qualifications for recognition purposes is to obtain accurate and trustworthy information against which to carry out its evaluation. This information also needs to be available quickly in order to make stakeholder processes efficient. If fraudulent activity is suspected at any point, normal procedures

cannot continue, and processes can be put on hold or remain on hold indefinitely. The non-resolution of evaluation cases causes frustration at many levels, often for innocent clients whose work and study prospects are jeopardised.

SAQA contracted North-West University to undertake a desktop-research into current practices and policies with regards to verification of policies and practices in different regions on the African continent were conducted. Specific references are made to: Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, Uganda, DRC, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Zambia and Gabon as the African countries from which most qualifications are evaluated by SAQA and South Africa.

The research findings were to be presented at a seminar hosted by SAQA on 24 and 25 November 2014, entitled "Building trust: promoting genuine qualifications in Africa through effective verification".

RESEARCH FOCUS

The aim of this project was to research, evaluate and identify regional and continental trends in verification policies and practices as well as commonalities, differences, best practices and challenges in qualification verification policies and practices across the African continent (including schools, colleges and universities). This was done through:

- An environmental scan of qualification-related policies and practices in the various regions of the African continent.
- An analysis of regional and continental trends in verification policies and practices as well as commonalities and differences in qualification verification policies and practices across the African continent.
- A description of current good policies and practices from across the continent, as well as areas needing development and barriers to verification.
- General recommendations for further research and development regarding verification policies and practices on the African continent.
- Presentation of the preliminary research findings at the verification seminar and engagement with delegates to facilitate understanding of current realities and aspects requiring further development.
- Consolidation of feedback and input from the seminar.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve these objectives, the review was planned in 4 phases:

Phase 1 took the form of a documentary analysis which informed Phase 2. Current policies and procedures were examined using the concepts of efficiency and equity and the limits and constraints imposed by the different policies were considered. Role-players and decision making structures were identified. The last review dates of the policies were noted. Commonalities and differences in verification policies and practices were documented.

Phase 2 consisted of the development of a set of questions to be used in a series of telephonic interviews with registrars and role-players (officials) in the verification process as identified in Phase 1. Because the broad aim of the investigation was to assess the current status of the verification of qualifications in an African setting, the data collected during this phase was of primary importance. Both structured and unstructured questions were used. Participants were asked to share their reflection on the value of resources available.

An important consideration in planning the interviews was that of communicating with staff who are at different levels of seniority within the institution, with different designations, roles and responsibilities and who are therefore likely to have different experiences of the verification process. In turn, this provided

multiple perspectives that allowed for a richer, more holistic and composite view. A representative sample of universities from each country were identified and contacted.

Phase 3 was the analysis of the qualitative data collected to develop a final report, with a focus on:
- Best practices;
- Challenges;
- Regional and continental trends in verification policies and practices; and
- Recommendations.

Phase 4 was the finalisation of a comprehensive report and dissemination of the findings, including a conference presentation.
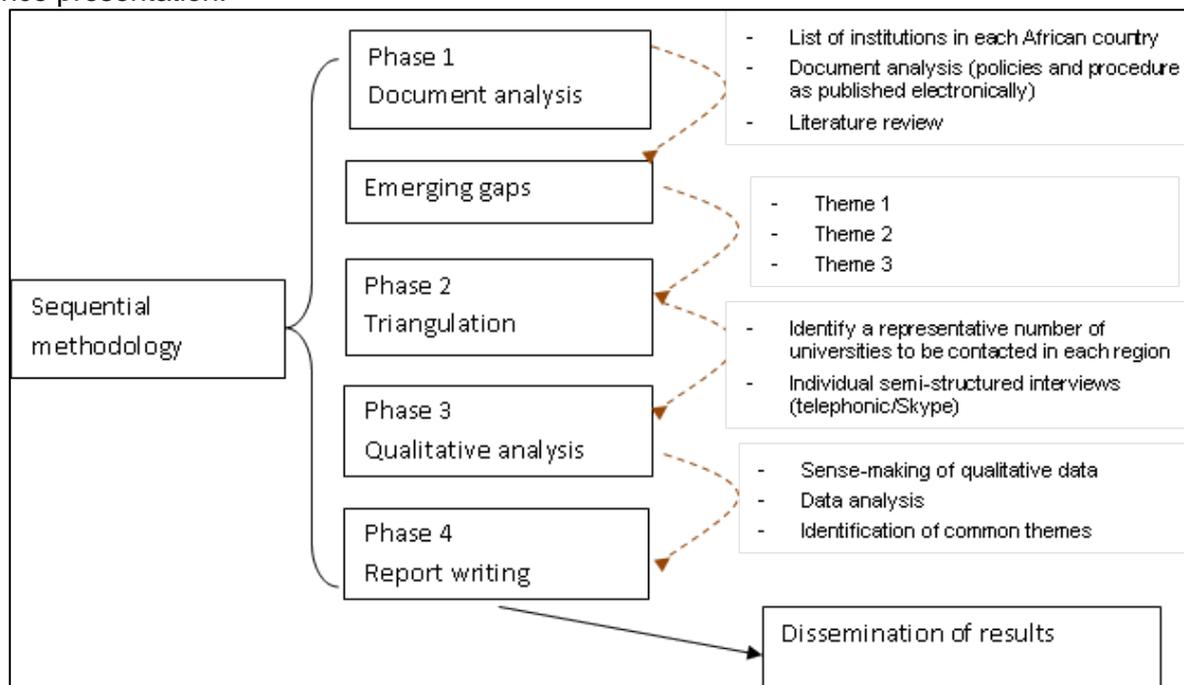
A DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Phase 1
A summary of the Education bodies of Governance was compiled using an extensive electronic search. Role-players and decision making structures were identified as well as current legislative issues affecting the provision of education.

Various international verification practices refer to websites which are regarded as valuable resources where more information about institutions, their status and contact information can be found.

National official sources, referring to:
- Website of the accreditation /quality assurance bodies.
- Website of the Ministry Of Education.
- Websites of the associations of accreditation/quality assurance agencies. And
- Official national publications regarding the education system.

International official sources, referring to:
- Websites of international organisations such as UNESCO (http://www.unesco.org/en/education);
- Websites of credential evaluator networks such as the ENIC and NARIC Networks (www.enic-naric.net).

Publications containing information about the national education systems/accreditation

and recognition, such as:
- the International Association of Universities (http://www.iau-aiu.net/);
- WHED. (http://www.whed.net/home.php). International Association of Universities' Worldwide Database of Higher Education Institutions, Systems and Credentials.

A comparison of information found on websites of national official sources and that of secondary sources, proved to contain substantial differences, highlighting again the risk of relying on information from electronic resources. The sources are not updated frequently and website owners rely on different sources for information. This poses a risk on relying on the validity of sources on secondary websites. According to Nicholas Poulton, Editorial Assistant of the International Association of Universities/International Universities Bureau, the World Higher Education Database is updated by the national bodies of each country using information provided on their institutions. The database is updated on a 4-yearly cycle (working on four regions: ENIC-NARIC countries; Africa; Asia-Pacific; Americas) and they are currently working on the ENIC-NARIC region (with the exception of Australia and New Zeeland which was done last year with the Asia-Pacific region). However, an online verification and comparison of data on WHED, compared to information on official ministerial databases, revealed significant differences in country profiles.

The environmental scan also highlighted a number of collaboration initiatives in Africa which impacts on the recognition of foreign qualifications, although more on equation and not necessarily on verification. The collaboration initiatives however, have the potential to assist with the establishment of a professional network, which can in turn enhance qualification verification. These initiatives are, amongst others: The African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS), the Harmonisation of Higher Education Programmes, Credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS), the Arusha Convention and the Groningen Declaration.

Challenges experienced with this preliminary survey included:
- Unavailability of websites.
- Websites not in English.
- No information of officials listed on the websites.
- Inactive/broken links to information.
- The documents were not dated to indicate the approval of the policy or procedure. There is thus a significant risk that policies found were outdated.
- Contradictory information is found on different electronic resources. The website owner therefore plays a crucial part in considering data integrity.

Phase 2
An open-ended questionnaire was developed to assess the current status of the verification of qualifications in an African setting. For a list of questions, see Appendix A.

A telephone and electronic survey was conducted with specific focus on verification practices and policies relating to:
- tertiary education (universities);
- school leaving and vocational education institutions;
- national and regional authorities, such as evaluation agencies and quality assurance bodies.

A total of 40 education institutions in Africa, of which contact details were available on official university websites, were randomly selected. These institutions represent polytechnics, universities as well as technical and vocational training institutions. A total of 15 national and regional authorities were contacted. Due to poor telephone connections, a number of the phone calls were followed up via e-mail. The preliminary findings were further validated during a two-day international seminar organised by SAQA, where officials from the different countries were invited.

Phase 3
Analysis of the qualitative data collected.

Phase 4

Finalisation of a comprehensive report and dissemination of the findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Environmental Scan

Information relating to qualification verification practices and policies could be found for the following countries: Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, Cameroon and Swaziland.

All the documents clearly distinguish two processes after receiving foreign qualifications. These are:
- A detailed description of documents that need to be submitted.
- A process for establishing equivalence of qualifications.

Only brief statements are made about the confirmation of awards by relevant issuing bodies, such as:
- Communication with foreign institutions and authorities, as well as access to databases to verify awards.
- Extensive investigation by the evaluators to authenticate the foreign institutions and the qualifications they offered.
- Extensive communication (e-mails, postal services, faxes and telephone calls) to authorities in the country of origin for information regarding education systems and regulatory frameworks.
- Consistent scanning of the international environment for any changes in laws, qualifications and other relevant information.
- A variety of investigative tools are used to verify foreign qualifications. These include:
  - An examination of all the documents submitted for evaluation to check for obvious signs of fraud.
  - Communication with foreign institutions and authorities as well as access to databases to verify awards.
  - Extensive investigation by the evaluators to check the authenticity of the foreign institutions and the qualifications offered by them.
  - Extensive communication (e-mails, postal services, faxes and telephone calls) to authorities in the country of origin for information regarding education systems and regulatory frameworks; and
  - Consistent scanning of the international environment for any changes in laws, qualifications and other relevant information.
- The guidelines for the evaluation and verification of foreign qualification from the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC, 2014) states: 'A letter by the embassy/ministry of education of the country where the certificate originated from, giving a detailed report on the accreditation status of the examination board which issued the certificate'.

Only two countries indicated in their process documentation that fraudulent documents will be reported to the authorities, i.e. Uganda and Namibia.

The Uganda National Examination Board states (UNEB, 2014): 'The equating officer carefully examines the certificate/document submitted for equation with the view to answer the following questions to ensure validity of the documents:
- Is it an original document? If not, reject.
- Is the certificate/document issued by a body/authority legally mandated to do so in that country? If not, reject.
- Is the certificate genuine? In establishing the genuineness of the certificates, reference is made to the security features and the signatures. In case of doubt, the Executive Secretary writes to the issuing authority for verification. If the certificate is not genuine it is confiscated and the applicant handed over to the police for further investigation
- If the certificate is genuine the applicant is authorized to go and pay the equating fee. After confirmation of payment, by showing receipt issued by account department, the equating officer can now go ahead and establish the equivalence using the database information and experience.
- A letter addressed to the institution seeking the equated results is written, typed, signed by the equating officer and sealed. The equating officer has a seal specifically made for the equated

results. There is only one person designated to sign the letters of equated results and also the one to keep the seal. These precautions are meant to check on possible forgeries'.

The Namibian qualification authority stipulates that it reserves the right to share the information with institutions and government agencies as appropriate (NQA, 2014).

The procedure for the verification of foreign qualifications from Cameroon makes no reference to any steps taken to verify the authenticity of a document. The procedure only refers to:
- verification of the information on the certificate/diploma presented;
- collection of information necessary for evaluating the certificate/diploma presented, teaching system, training and admission requirements, duration of studies, as well as the status of the institution in the country where the qualification is issued.

The Sub-Department of Comparative University Systems and Academic Equivalence in Cameroon has three services, namely:
- Comparative University Systems Service.
- Professional Training Equivalences Service.
- General Education Equivalences Service.

Qualitative feedback from Zimbabwe respondents revealed that when fraudulent qualifications are reported to the police they often indicate that they can do very little because they cannot trace the people who submitted qualifications for verification. This is even more difficult when the process goes across borders.

Table 1   Summary of the structure of the education systems and authorities in Africa

Botswana
Basic education covers both primary education which lasts for seven years leading to the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLE) and Junior secondary education that leads to the Junior Certificate. Senior secondary education leads to the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE), which is a prerequisite for admission to university. The running of the Senior Secondary School examinations by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES) was taken over by the Botswana government in 1998 (Nkosana, 2008). The Government of Botswana has had a policy on vocational education (VET) and training since independence. The Department of Vocational Education and Training played a coordinating role without any framework to guide it. The Botswana National Vocational Qualifications Framework (BNVQF) is housed in the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs by virtue of it being vocational in conceptualisation. The situation on the ground, however, shows that BOTA does most of its business with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development. In other words, it is within the Ministry of Education that most, if not all, providers of vocational courses are located An evaluation by Tau and Stanslaus (2011), led to the conclusion that while there was a framework of some kind, there was limited dialogue among providers regarding articulation or transfer of credits from one institution to another. Secondly, there was no coordination at national level to ensure an absence of ambiguity regarding the credibility of qualifications in Botswana. Thirdly, and further compounding the state of affairs, was the fact that private providers offer courses that are developed and accredited elsewhere (for example, secretarial courses accredited by Pitman, or courses accredited by the City and Guilds of London Institute or the Institute of Commercial Management in the United Kingdom). Therefore, there are many qualifications of various descriptions associated with the same type of profession. The Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) was recently established through the enactment of the Botswana Qualifications Authority Act No 24 of 2013. According to Young and Allais (2009), a growing number of countries are introducing qualification frameworks (QFs) following a common definition of outcomes, level descriptors and a set of occupational or knowledge fields. Botswana has been no exception to this trend. The passing of the Vocational Training Act (1998) led to the creation of the Botswana National Vocational Qualifications Framework (BNVQF). Prior to that, there had been no QF. The BQA commenced operations on 8 November 2013 following an order issued by the Minister of Education and Skills Development to affect the Act. The coming into effect of the BQA Act means that the Botswana Training Authority (BOTA) has been effective since 8 November 2013, continued under the new name of the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) with the following objectives: - To provide for and maintain the National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCQF). - To coordinate the education, training and skills development quality assurance system. The Tertiary Education Council (TEC) falling under the Ministry for Education and Skills Development was created

in 2004 and quality assures training from diploma-level upwards. As a parastatal body responsible for the coordination of Tertiary Education and for determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in tertiary institutions, TEC was responsible for the registration of tertiary institutions and the quality assurance of programmes of learning. All institutions interested in offering tertiary education from Diploma programmes and above were required to register with the Tertiary Education Council. The institutions would go through a process of accreditation after three years of registration or one year of operation. As from 1 April 2014, registration and accreditation of institutions at tertiary level previously undertaken by the Tertiary Education Council (TEC), now known as the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), will now be rendered by Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA), previously known as Botswana Training Authority (BOTA). The administration of the former Vocational Training Fund (VTF), now called the Human Resource Development Fund will be administered by the HRDC.

Cameroon

Political responsibility for education rests with the Anglophone and Francophone Ministries of Education. Secondary education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Secondary Education/*Ministère Enseignements secondaires,* while the Ministry of Higher Education/*Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieure* bears responsibility for higher education. The Republic of Cameroon has two education systems, the British system (in the south-western and north western provinces) and the French system (in the former French provinces), and the languages of instruction are accordingly English and French.

Higher education is mainly provided by universities, specialised institutions and schools. The Minister in charge of Higher Education takes final policy decisions regarding universities, although each university has a governing council. Councils are responsible for personnel recruitment. Several Higher Education institutions do not fall directly under the Ministry of Higher Education, but the Minister must ascertain that they meet academic standards. Some are directly run by other Ministries or form part of the private sector.

The Sub-Department of Comparative University Systems and Academic Equivalence (SUCE) as a structure and the National Commission for the Evaluation of Training Domains Offered Abroad (CNE) and its technical sub-commissions as organs, at the level of the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) is charged with issuing equivalences for certificates/diplomas, qualifications and grades.

Cameroon has not established a national qualification framework. Neither are national qualifications referenced to an overarching framework.

DRC

The educational system is based on the Belgian education system. Higher education was expanded in the 1990's mostly in the private sector. Many private higher education institutions are not recognized but claim to be affiliated with universities or colleges located in Western Europe and North America.

The DRC has five national ministries responsible for education – the ministry for primary, secondary and professional education (ministère de l'Enseignement primaire, secondaire et professionnel), the ministry for higher and university education (ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et universitaire), the ministry for social affairs (ministère des Affaires sociales), for informal education, the youth ministry (ministère de la jeunesse), for skills training, and the ministry of health fornursing education (ministère de la Santé). The splitting of responsibility for education causes a lack of coordination.

Archives for the educational system are also in a very poor state. Management of records is handled by the various government ministries and institutions responsible for education, rather than centralised in one national archive; the state of the archives thus varies greatly even in central government offices and some are completely disorganised and in need of rehabilitation. Computerisation is almost non-existent, except for an effort to computerise the records relating to the examen d'État since 2008 (AfriMAP, 2009). Before 2005, it took a number of years for graduates to get their degree certificate as a result of the number of signatures from the institutions and the signature of the Minister of Education that has to be on the certificate. The process has improved since then, yet there is still a delay between graduation and receiving a certificate and the timeframe is unknown and varies.

Ethiopia

Secondary School Credentials Required for University Level Admission is regulated by the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination.

Ethiopia's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system is in dire need of government attention in order to remedy the many challenges it currently faces. The system struggles to coordinate a variety of providers at different qualification levels. A TVET Leaders and Trainers Qualifications Framework (TLTQF) was introduced in 2010 (MoE, 2010).

The Ministry of Education has established the National Organization for Examinations (NOE) with the responsibility of managing examinations at all levels. At the end of grade 10, students sit the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination. At the end of grade 12, students must sit the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination to enter higher education institutions.

Higher education, provided by universities, university colleges and specialised institutions, is regulated by the Ministry of Education. The University Senate awards credentials which are recognized by the country. The Ministry of Education is mandated to accredit private and public Higher Education institutions according to whether they fulfil the required standards. There are also Junior colleges and colleges offering diploma programmes that are under the responsibility of regional governments and private providers.

The Ethiopian National Qualifications Framework (ENQF) is being developed by a taskforce set up in 2007 by the Ministry of Education. Since 2010, the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) was mandated to coordinate the process of the ENQF development and implementation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and other relevant agencies (Proclamation No. 650/2009 and 691/2011 (Ashcroft and Rayner, 2011).
The ENQF aims to:
- raise the quality of educational programmes, and therefore also the credibility of qualifications, by establishing quality assurance processes and setting out nationally valid standards detailing the knowledge, skills and competences expected of graduates of all ENQF qualifications;
- make Ethiopian qualifications more relevant to industry and the labour market;
- promote equity and access to education for all Ethiopians;
- provide mechanisms for the recognition of learning gained in formal, non-formal and informal settings;
- harmonise the three sub-sectors (general, TVET and higher education) by setting common standards and progression pathways between them, improving the transparency and comparability of qualifications.

Ethiopian higher education does not yet have the quality assurance systems that would withstand international scrutiny; nor that could assure its stakeholders that the education provided is relevant and appropriate. Universities have no mechanisms to assure themselves or their Boards in a systematic way that their students, teaching, learning and assessment processes, or facilities meet institutional, national or international standards. Curriculum development, validation and review processes exist but are not generally standardized at institutional level. There is no systematic process of externality in the assessment of quality, relevance or standards. Although institutions in Ethiopia have established good practice that would stand up to international scrutiny there is a lack of systems. The challenge is to develop these practices into a system-wide set of expectations that are monitored and evaluated. Unless this happens, it may be the case that quality exists (and in this context, quality includes relevance), but it cannot be assured.

Gabon

Education in Gabon is largely based on the French educational system. French is sole medium of instruction. On a federal level, it is regulated by two Ministries: the Ministry of Education, in charge of pre-kindergarten through High School, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Innovative Technologies, which is in charge of universities and professional schools.

There are several different kinds of secondary schools in Gabon, of which general and technical institutions are the most common. Others include private and international schools. The state program takes 7 years to complete. After 4 years students write their brevet d'études du premier cycle examination. At the end of the period they graduate with a baccalauréat. Vocational and on-going adult education is under the control of the ministry of technical education and vocational training. Its primary role is to suggest strategies that re-integrate citizens into the more important sectors of the economy.

There are a variety of tertiary education institutions in Gabon, including national higher schools, institutes and state universities. Higher education is provided by public universities as well as by various higher institutes, both public and private. Higher education in Gabon, which began in 1971 with the founding of the national university, gradually grew and is now comprised of three universities and six 'grandes écoles' and is governed by 'Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et technique'.

Ghana

The Ministry of Education is the authority responsible for policy formulation, the administration and financing of education at the national level. Higher Education includes universities and university colleges; professional institutes and pre-service training institutes. Higher technical/vocational education is provided by post-secondary pre-service training institutions under sector Ministries.

Secondary School Credentials required for University level admission are obtained from the West African Senior

School Certificate Examination.

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) accredits both public and private Higher Education institutions' programmes and determines the equivalences of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications awarded by institutions in Ghana or elsewhere.

Ghana has not established a national qualification framework, nor have national qualifications been referenced to an overarching framework (NUFFIC, 2013).

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) reviews study programmes. For Access to Non-University Post-Secondary Studies: Credentials should be sent to the Executive Secretary, National Accreditation Board. For Access to University Level Studies: Foreign credentials in the form of certificates should be sent to the Academic Registrar of the university. This applies to both nationals with foreign credentials and foreigners. For Access to Advanced Studies/Research: Foreign credentials in the form of certificates, transcripts and Referee's reports of two or three people should be sent to the office of the Dean of Graduate Studies of the university. This applies to both nationals and foreigners.

Access to the profession is subject to the recognition of credentials by the professional associations and to passing professional qualifying examinations. Foreign credentials should be sent to the Board or Institute of the individual professions. In addition, candidates should pass the professional examination conducted by the professional body.

Kenya

Political responsibility for the education system lays with two ministries namely Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

Primary education lasts 8 years in Kenya. Secondary education in Kenya is focused both on those pupils who plan to enter the labour market afterwards and those who plan to continue on to higher education. Secondary education ordinarily takes 4 years. Following completion of primary education and the award of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), pupils have the option of following a vocationally oriented study programme as part of the artisan and trade programmes at youth polytechnics. These programmes lead to a variety of diplomas and certificates. Post-secondary technical study programmes are delivered by various technical training institutes and institutes of technology.

Admission to higher education at Kenya's public universities is managed by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB). The JAB is an umbrella body for admissions, with representatives from all public universities as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Commission for Higher Education.

Higher Education is offered in public universities (some of them with constituent colleges) and private universities. Universities are autonomous. All administrative functions are independently managed by University Councils. Apart from universities, there are a number of post-secondary institutions offering training at diploma and certificate levels. Technical education is offered at polytechnics, institutes of technology and technical training institutes.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology is tasked with developing higher and technical education and enhance integration of science, technology and innovation into national production systems for sustainable development.

The Commission for University Education (CUE), previously called Commission for Higher Education, and reorganised in 2012, is responsible for accreditation, planning, budgeting and financing of public universities; accreditation of private universities; coordination of education and training in middle level colleges for the purpose of admission to universities; standardization, equation and recognition of qualifications; and advice and recommendations to the Government on matters relating to university education. Recognition of the system is by done a Committee of the Commission for Higher Education (CHE). Experts in relevant disciplines are invited to the Committee. Private universities are established by a Charter granted by the President of Kenya upon recommendation of the Ministry of Education, following a recommendation of the CHE.

In September 2012, Margaret Kamar, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, signed *The Universities Bill 2012*, which seeks to introduce changes to Higher Education, such as:
- Abolishing the decades-old CHE, which has to date, regulated the sector and replacing it with the Commission for University Education (CUE).
- The CUE would advise government on university education policy, undertake accreditation inspections, monitor and evaluate the state of university education and ensure compliance with set standards.
- Additional new bodies running the educator sector would include the Universities Funding Board to coordinate

financing of universities; the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service, to handle admissions to public universities and colleges; and the Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) Funding Board, to handle funding of the TVET sector – a role previously undertaken by individual, middle-level colleges.

In January 2012, the bill was signed into law, bringing public universities, which were previously governed by specific acts of parliament, under the same law as private institutions.

Kenyan authorities, in partnership with the East African Community (EAC), are also promoting more student mobility. To that end, in November 2012, education ministers from Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda met in the Rwandan capital Kigali, and after three years of negotiations, approved the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) Bill 2012. This bill aims to achieve a unified university system in the region and enables the building of a system allowing students access to learning and mobility across East Africa. Officials are of the opinion that these harmonisation efforts could help avoid accreditation disputes, such as the recent trouble thousands of Kenyan graduates of Kampala International University in Uganda have been facing upon learning that their qualifications would not be recognised because some courses had not been cleared by the Commission for University Education.

Lesotho

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for the management, provision and regulation of education and training.

Pre-higher education is offered by government, church, community and private schools. After seven years of primary school which lead to the Primary School Leaving Examination, pupils enter a junior secondary school which offers three years of secondary schooling leading to the Junior Certificate Examination (minimum requirement for admission to craft courses), followed by a two-year course in a senior secondary school leading to the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate. All examinations are organized by the Examination Council of Lesotho (ECOL). Higher education in Lesotho includes all post-high school education with a minimum continuous duration of at least 2 academic years. It consists of several public and private institutions (IAU, 2012).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a statutory corporate body established by Section 4 of the Higher Education Act of 2004. The overall mandate of CHE is to regulate the Higher Education sector and promote quality assurance in Lesotho.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) office was only set up in 2010 and the appointment of Director Quality Assurance & Standards and Director Policy, Strategy and Information in July 2011, strengthened the capacity of the Secretariat and enabled CHE to make significant strides in developing systems, tools and operational documents. Minimum Programme Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for Registration of Private Institutions were approved by Council in April 2012, and are now awaiting legislation. The Policy on Higher Education in Lesotho was approved by Council in September 2012 and is now awaiting official approval and legislation.

Malawi

The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MOEHRD) is responsible for the provision of primary, secondary and tertiary education. However, the provision of technical and vocational education falls under the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MOLVT).

The Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) has responsibility over the following public examinations:
- Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE).
- Junior Certificate of Education (JCE).
- Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) including artisan examinations.

To date, the Malawian TEVET system lacks an appropriate and comprehensive quality assurance mechanism. The accreditation of training providers does not yet exist, although TEVETA is working on the conceptualization of a modern accreditation system. Currently, the registration of all TEVET providers in Malawi, combined with institutional assessments can be seen as a first step.

Namibia

Evaluation regulations were gazetted in 2007 and guides the process of evaluation in Namibia

When evaluating qualifications the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) seeks to confirm the legality, validity and credibility of the qualification document submitted and the qualification to which the document refers. The NQA then analyses available information to express each qualification in terms of the nomenclature and structural features of the National Qualifications Framework of Namibia. This serves to assist the recognition of qualifications by other bodies for the purpose of academic, career and/or professional placement of the qualification holder.

Appointed by the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has, in order to promote the establishment of a co-ordinated higher education system, the access of students to higher education institutions, and quality assurance in higher education; as well as to advise on the allocation of funds to public higher education institutions.

Nigeria

Basic education includes primary education (six years) and junior secondary (three years). Pupils who complete junior secondary school are streamed into senior secondary school, technical college, vocational enterprise institutions or apprenticeship centres. Technical colleges are the only alternative to senior secondary schools as a route to further formal education and training after junior secondary education. To enter university, students have to pass the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) conduct the Matriculation Examination for entry into all universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria.

Higher education is provided by universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and innovative enterprise institutions. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has been vested with the overall responsibility for laying down national policies and guidelines for uniform standards for all levels of education in Nigeria.

The National Examinations Council (NECO) is responsible for conducting the Junior and Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), as is the West African Examination Council (WAEC).
The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) conduct the National Technical Certificate (NTC)/National Business Certificate (NBC) examinations, as well as the advanced level versions of these exams in a number of trades/disciplines such as engineering and construction.
The National Universities Commission (NUC) operates under the Federal Ministry of Education and is mandated to approve programmes, monitor universities and accredit programmes. The NUC provides a comprehensive listing of recognised federal, state and private universities in Nigeria.

The Federal Ministry of Education, through the National Council of Education (NCE), coordinates education policies and procedures through the federation.
The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) is an independent body of professional educators acting in an advisory capacity to both the Federal and State Ministries of Education, universities, institutes of education and other education agencies.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria became a statutory body in 1974 and its main functions are:
- Granting approval for all academic programmes run in Nigerian universities.
- Granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes in Nigerian universities.
- Ensure quality assurance of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities; and
- Channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities.

In addition to providing standardised minimum guide curricula for technical and vocational education and training, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) also has the responsibility of establishing minimum standards in polytechnics, technical colleges and other technical institutions in the Federation. The NBTE supervises and regulates, through an accreditation process, the programmes offered by technical institutions at secondary and post-secondary levels. It is also involved with the funding of polytechnics owned by the Government of the Federation of Nigeria. The NBTE provides a comprehensive listing of approved polytechnics and technical colleges in Nigeria.
The National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) was established in 1972 to encourage, promote and coordinate educational research programmes in Nigeria. This agency provides significant data on educational problems within Nigeria and its work underpins the reform agenda nationally.

According to the Nigerian Minister of Education, Mr Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has discovered 55 illegal universities operating in the country (Guardian, 2014). The minister said the government would do everything to ensure that operators of such illegal universities are 'stopped from further ruining the future of the nation's youths.'
He called on state governments to complement the efforts of the tertiary education regulatory bodies by creating more awareness on the existence of unapproved universities, polytechnics and colleges of education by explaining clearly the damage such institutions can cause individual victims and society in general.

Swaziland

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for early childhood care education; primary education; secondary education; vocational education; university education; teacher training; special education; adult education; distance education; in-service education; inspectorate and advisory services; quality assurance and

accreditation.

Very little information could be found on private sector provision in Swaziland, as the sector is largely unregulated, with trainers not having to register or seek accreditation.

A strange 'schizophrenia' exists in Swaziland with a highly centralised and highly regulated public VET system and largely unregulated private sector provision. Private sector institutions offering training programmes, either for profit or as part of in-house skills development programmes, do not need to register these programmes with any state authority. This means that the awards offered through these systems do not fit into any formal qualification framework nor are they necessarily recognised by all employers. The only private sector participation in VET that is at all regulated is the registration of apprenticeships with the Directorate of Industrial and Vocational Training (DIVT).

Swaziland lacks comprehensive data in ECCD, TVET and Tertiary sub-sectors, largely because of their lack of organisation in these sub-sectors. The ECCD sub-sector is still largely in private hands and the number of institutions fluctuates dramatically – for example, there were 800 ECCD centres in 2011 and only 450 in 2013 as some have closed down.

Similarly, private TVET and Tertiary institutions face challenges, partly because the Ministry needs a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to effectively categorise types of programmes. Swaziland is often late or missing in reporting internationally to bodies such as UIS, SADC and AU.

The Ministry of Education and Training has its own information management system that collects, compiles, analyses, publishes and disseminates statistics in the education sector. The Swaziland Education Management Information System (EMIS) has improved its service delivery and has only a one-year backlog in terms of data processing, but it continues to face a number of challenges. There is no independent audit to check the reliability of the statistics collected by the EMIS, although there have been no serious contradictory statistics. The problem of data reliability is further compounded by data gaps due to some schools providing incomplete data or none at all. These are mainly private schools that are less cooperative with regards to data submission. Moreover, it is difficult to obtain data from remote schools owing to poor road access (Khumalo, 2013).

Uganda

The Ministry of Education and Sports is responsible for pre-tertiary education.
The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established to implement the University and Other Tertiary Act of Parliament (2001) as the regulator of Higher Education institutions and their programmes.

The legal framework for accrediting institutions of higher learning in Uganda is the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001. The Act established an accrediting body, the National Council for Higher Education. Members of the Council are representatives of various constituencies in the country including higher education institutions, students, commerce, industry, agriculture, people with disabilities etc. In all, there are 20 members of Council. The National council for Higher Education can issue two types of permits to universities a Provisional Licence and a Charter. Besides accreditation, the National Council for Higher Education is responsible for streamlining the establishment of tertiary institutions and ensuring the delivery of quality higher education in the country.

The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) is charged with the responsibility of equating those foreign qualifications to UNEB standard and to advise whether an applicant has the required minimum qualification or standard to join a secondary school or a university in Uganda.

The procedural document for the equation of qualifications refers to the verification of foreign qualifications, but no specific steps or procedures are listed. The submission of documents and the process of establishing equivalence are described in detail:

Submission of requirements by clients
Guidelines have been produced and published that stipulate all the requirements a client seeking equating services must provide (UNEB, 2014). The applicant should:
- apply in writing for equating services to the Executive Secretary UNEB;
- provide the original documents to be equated. e.g. certificates, diplomas, result slips;
- provide one clear photocopy of each document to be equated;
- provide the address of the institution that needs the equated results;
- appear in person for a five to ten minute interview with the equating officer;
- have a personal identification document, for example identity card or passport;
- provide a photocopy of the identification document.

Certificates from non-English speaking countries must first be taken by the client to Makerere University Institutes of

Languages for translation into English before equating (UNEB, 2014).

UNEB, over the years, has collected data on various certificate awarding bodies and set up a database on each country. The data include information on the education system, regulations on grade awards and conditions for award of certificates, syllabus/curriculum followed and the legal bodies mandated to award the certificates. The database is used as benchmark to compare the grades and qualifications issued to that of UNEB.

Zambia

The Ministry of Education, Science and Vocational Training is responsible for the educations system, implemented the legal framework for HEA 2013 and QA 2011 (10 levels). The Zambia Qualification Authority was established in October 2014.

The TVET sub-framework was established from 2010. TEVETA is an institution created under the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Act (No.13 of 1998) together with TEVET (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2005. The functions of TEVETA are defined in the Act as follows:
- Advise the Minister on the development of the quality of human resources in Zambia through technical education, vocational and entrepreneurship training.
- Regulate and advise management boards.
- Regulate and coordinate apprenticeship and trade testing facilities.
- Provide technical consultancy to management boards and private training institutions.
- Promote the technical capacity of management boards.
- Develop the national curricula in consultation with all stakeholders.
- Set minimum standards and qualifications for any occupation, skill, technology or trade for institutions in accordance with developments in industry.
- Provide guidelines for the development of institutional curriculum.
- Approve examinations at an institution established or registered under this Act.
- Regulate and conduct national examinations relating to technical education, vocational and entrepreneurship training.
- Charge and collect fees in respect of examinations set under this Act.
- Award certificates to persons who succeed in examinations set under this Act.
- Guide institutions in preparing rules for the recruitment of students and teachers.
- Approve curricula and standards of certificates in institutions established or registered under this Act.
- Register institutions.
- Cancel the registration of an institution established under this Act.
- Facilitate all aspects connected with or incidental to the functions of the Authority.

Zimbabwe

Primary education lasts seven years. Secondary education lasts for six years students take the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) or CGE 'A' Level Certificate.

The following statutory bodies are responsible for education and training:
- The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Act is responsible for quality assurance of higher education.
- The National Manpower Advisory Council (NAMACO) acts as a middleman between Industry, Higher and Tertiary Education, and supervises Industrial Committees which identify and monitor the training needs.
- The Zimbabwe Occupational Standards Services (ZOSS) carries out job profiling and develops occupational standards upon which Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula are based and which form the basis upon which examination test items and trade tests are developed.
- The Ministry of Education and Technology regulates practical skills training programmes at a variety of state and privately owned vocational training centres.

Qualitative Analysis

A total of 29 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 53%.

The qualitative responses were analysed as follows:
- The data was categorised into emerging themes; they are:
  - difficulty in contacting the awarding institution and receiving a response;
  - payment for verification;
  - quality of documentation;
  - differences in educational systems;
  - procedural complexities;
  - involvement of the applicant;
  - lack of digitised information; and
  - language barriers.
- The responses were subsequently categorised according to the process involved in verification of qualification. The three major role-players, the qualification holder, the verification agency and the institutions that awarded the qualification were identified as the major stakeholders and the different responses were divided according to the stakeholders referred to in the response.

The qualitative responses are summarised according to the themes.

- **Difficulty in contacting the awarding institution and receiving a response**
  - Inaccessibility of data sources. ADEA (2011) confirmed that this is a problem of inadequate data coverage of all education and training institutions (both public and private) and all sub-sectors in the education system.
    'Verification is a lengthy, costly, and labour intensive process'.
    and
    'Verifications issued by embassies, consulates or public notaries are not accepted. The process of certification or notarisation by such entities cannot be academically authenticated.'

  - Quality of responses. The responses from institutions differ from formal documents to a one-word reply by e-mail.
    'Transcripts, presumably received directly from issuing institutions, often fail to meet the criteria of an official document'.

  - Difficulty in contacting the institution.
    'It is hard, but we try to get a contact person from each institution that we can rely on at all times'.

  - Delays in responding. Some respondents indicated that reminders often have to be send.
    '*The main challenge is in detecting forged documents presented to be equated. The experience shows that those documents where the applicant is in a hurry and exerting a lot of pressure to have his/her document equated could be a forged document. The equating officer should take time to scrutinize all documents carefully without yielding to any pressure. When in doubt the equating officer should consult the issuing body for clarification. Some countries take long to respond to request for clarification.'*
    and
    'Examination councils are unreachable'.

  - Non-response
    '*I had asked Botswana, Malawi, Ghana, but had not been lucky to get a response. RSA is good'*
    and
    'There is hardly a response to an enquiry. On rare occasion that we get one, one is still left in doubt if it is from an authorized person. Getting a response from places like Nigeria or the Democratic Republic of Congo is like extracting blood out of a stone.'

  - Turnaround time
    'Verification is a lengthy, costly and labour intensive process'.
    and
    'Sometimes, the verification of a qualification cannot be finalised because the issuing institution no longer exists'.

- **Payment for verification**
  - Request for payment for verification. *'When people do not pay, institutions do not respond.'*
  - Changes in verification fees without notice.
  - Payment for verification has to be made in the local currency of the issuing body.
    'Some organisations and institutions choose to respond to document verification requests only if they have authorisation from the certificate holders'.

- **Quality of documentation**

  The original documents are sometimes of a poor quality. In some cases food stains are visible or the owner covered the document with adhesive plastic or laminated it. In some cases only transcripts are available as the original documents are either lost or stolen.

- **Differences in educational systems**

  In some cases, it is the lack of structural arrangements for the management of education in the absence of a policy as well as norms and standards for the management of information on education and training. Some countries have more than one Ministry responsible for the delivery and management of education as seen in Table 1.

  '*Equating primary school education qualification is a problem as there are no formal certificates issued in many countries. In some cases documents are issued at provincial or district levels. Incomplete or lack of information on some countries' grading system or curriculum makes equating difficult, and in some cases impossible, particularly in countries which do not respond to request for clarifications.*'

- **Procedural complexities**

  Seeking confirmation of awards by relevant issuing bodies is done at the different stages of the qualification verification process. In some cases the confirmation is only sought after establishing equivalence. This results in students having to be dismissed after enrolment. Not all awards are sent for verification. A number of respondents referred to a scrutiny of documentation before the process of contacting the issuing institution, such as:
  - Improbable qualification title;
  - Lack of official stamps/official seals. Degree certificates come with official seals or stamps. These may be embossed, stamped or raised seals.
  - Paper quality: What is the paper quality of the certificate? Are there any security features?
  - A variety of fonts used. (The majority of degree certificates do not use more than three or four font styles);
  - Alignment - you can often see 'cut and paste' techniques;
  - Handwriting;
  - Informal or inaccurate language and spelling errors;
  - Documents marked 'confidential';
  - Inconsistency between the date of birth and the graduation date;
  - Sometimes information on the academic transcript and qualification does not correspond

    '*The signature of the person on the certificate, the stamp which is different, faded documents which a student fails to provide the original. In these cases we follow up with the examinations council*'
  - The confirmation document should be received in a sealed, institutional envelope with a University stamp, or an envelope with a normal post office stamp. Transcripts, presumably received directly from issuing institutions, often fail to meet the criteria of an official document. Documents provided sometimes reflect information inconsistent with other information already on record.

    Of the respondents, 60% indicated:
    '*Where we are suspicious we request for the original document*', and '*where we are in doubt, we either verify from the institution itself or refer the results to our National accreditation board for advice*'.
    and
    '*If is the first time we receive a qualification from a foreign institution we will contact the institution and put the information in our files. If it is not the first time we will only scrutinize the document for authenticity and then proceed with comparison'.*
    and

'We have admitted foreign nationals in good faith (in the hope that the qualifications are authentic)'.

- **Involvement of the applicant**

  In some cases the application is tasked with seeking confirmation from the qualification authority.
  'At the time of applying the applicant is required to request a confirmation letter from Qualification Authority'
  and
  'We also ask the student to provide us with a written document from their examination councils certifying the authenticity of the results'.
  and
  'I have to rely on applicants by requesting them to go to respective institutions and request and place a verification request'.

- **Lack of digitised information**

  Respondents from four countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Ghana and Malawi) indicated that databases are maintained for primary and secondary schools, but the respective tertiary institutions are responsible for their own database. Respondents from Namibia indicated that a national database is under development – currently there are only institutional records. The National Qualification Authority will be in charge of the national learner record database once developed.

  Respondents further indicated that requests sometimes have to be re-routed to different bodies for verification. Even in cases where databases exist, qualifications that predate those databases are submitted for verification.

- **Language barriers**

  The language barrier between non-English speaking countries and incorrect translation of documents, hamper the verification process.
  '*The certificates from non-English speaking countries could be wrongly translated or even forged. It is important to have only one translation centre where the equating officer can cross-check the equated results.'*

Respondents from the 16 countries (as outlined in the research scope) were asked to indicate how often they come across academic fraud. These results should be read with the understanding that the institutions that awarded the qualification were not contacted in all cases. It is possible that some fraudulent documents were not detected. The results clearly indicated that no country is indemnified from fraud. Responses varied from '*not so many*' and '*not too many as our international student population is not very large*' to '*yes - there seems to be an increase*' and '*yes – often*'. The findings are summarised in Figure 1. Ethiopia and Gabon were contacted several times via e-mail and telephonically but no response was received. This resulted in a response rate of 88%.
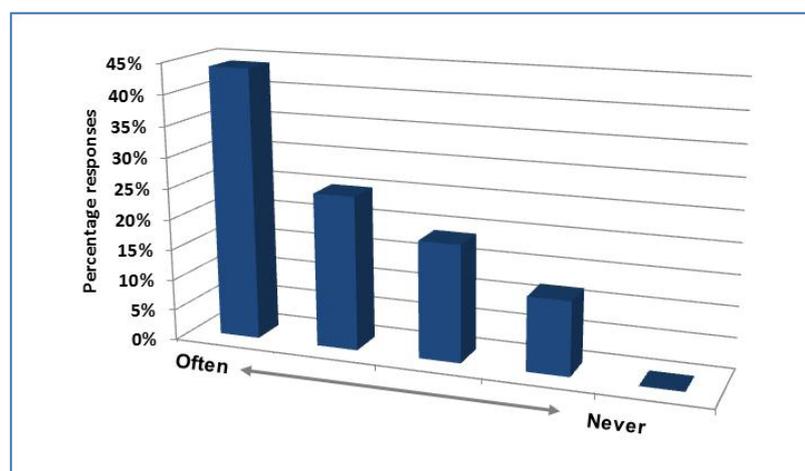
**Figure 1   Number of fraudulent applications**

All the countries were asked to indicate whether they have a national database for the different education sectors. Results indicate that 86% of the countries have a database for General Education and training (the general term used for education in other countries on a similar level). Less than half of the countries have a

national record of TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training), whilst only 21% of the institutions have a national record of higher education graduates. The availability of national databases are summarised in Figure 2.
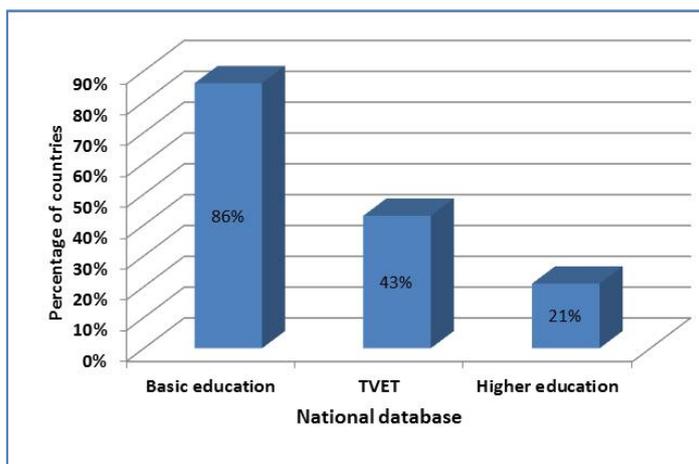

Figure 2   Availability of national databases

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they contact the institution that awarded the qualification. The results are shown in Figure 3.
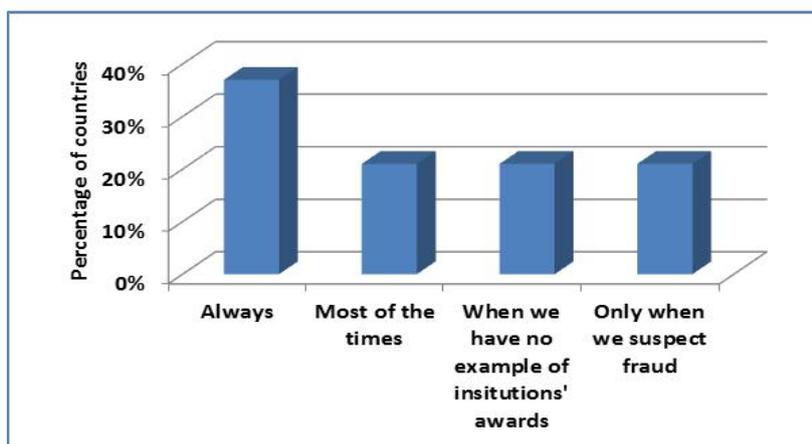
Figure 3   Frequency of contacting issuing bodies that awarded the qualification

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have policy documents and/or procedural guidelines available for the verification of foreign qualifications. The results are summarised in Figure 4.
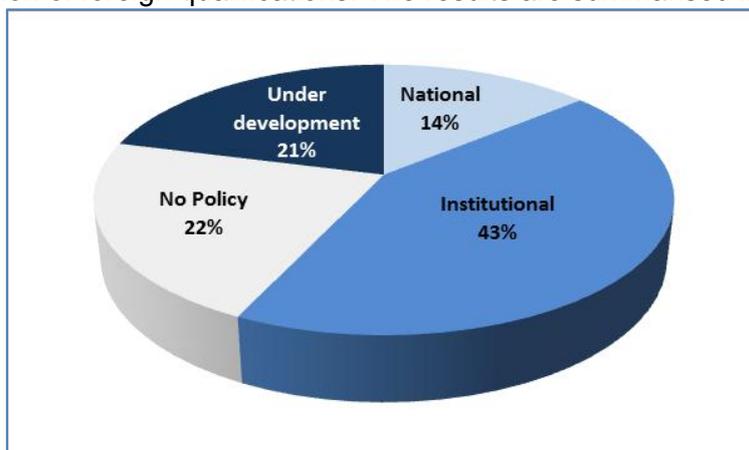
Figure 4   Status of policy development for verification of qualifications

Respondents were asked to rate the importance and possible impact that each of the statements below will have on the verification process. The scale used:

1 - Not important at all
2 - Slightly important
3 - Sometimes important
4 – Extremely important

Considering the current challenges facing verifiers, a standard verification fee, is helpful, but not critical, whilst the movement away from paper-based to electronic verification, is regarded as most extremely important. It is clear that up to date, accessible data is regarded as the most important factor in the verification process.

The vision of SAQA to build a credible, trustworthy network of public verification institutions on the African continent with central, on-line digital learner records databases providing fast and affordable services; is therefore in accordance with the priorities as expressed by other countries.

The rating of public awareness programmes and the implementation of a fraud register as *extremely important*, supports the need to disincentive criminal behaviour. The need for collaboration and networking and communicating with the right people are also regarded as extremely important. The responses are indicated in Figure 5.
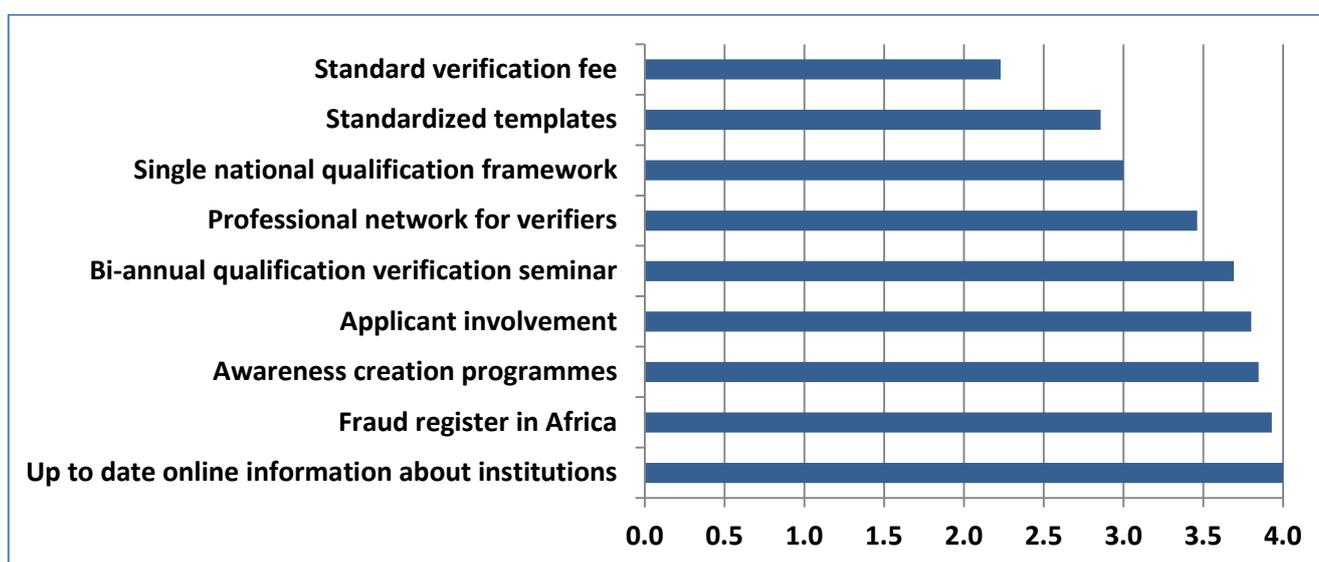
Figure 5   Verification process

Qualitative data indicated that the payment in foreign currency, with fluctuation in payable amounts, hampers the verification process. Country representatives were asked to indicate whether they feel the service should be offered for free and the responses are indicated in Figure 6.
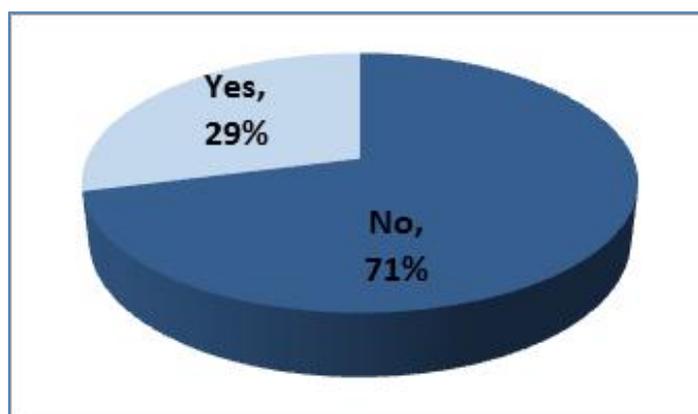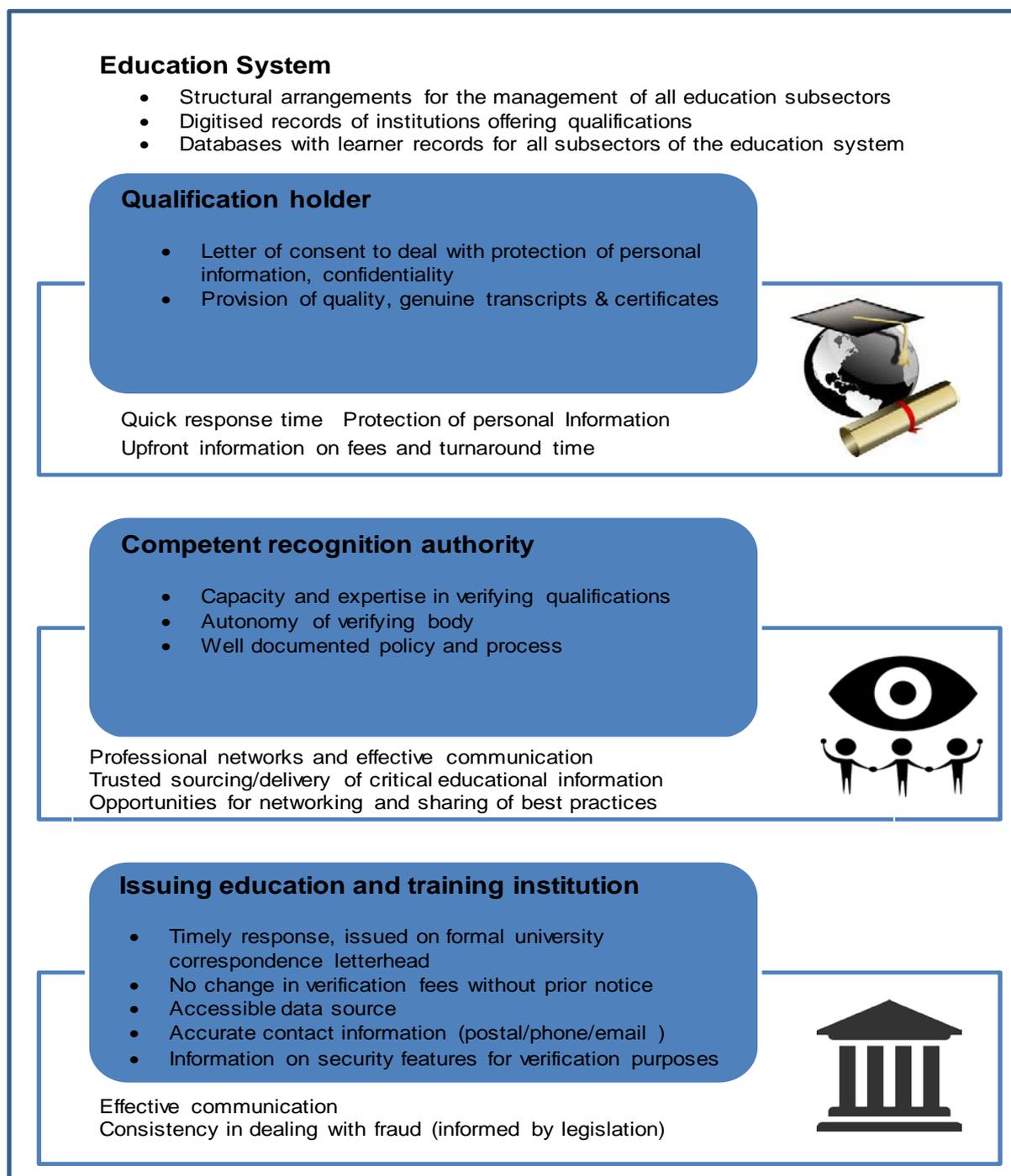

Figure 6   Payment for verification

The majority of respondents (79%) indicated that the service should NOT be free, but proposed that:
- It is charged at a nominal fee;
- The process be optimised, only then costs can be reduced; and

- Payment should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

'*For the purpose of further education, the service should be provided at a minimal fee. If it is for a company, wishing to employ a person, they should pay for having the qualification verified'.*

Figure 7 contains a schematic representation of the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the verification process. Research findings clearly indicate that a lack of performance in any of these areas hampers the effective and efficient verification of foreign qualifications.

Education System
- Structural arrangements for the management of all education subsectors
- Digitised records of institutions offering qualifications
- Databases with learner records for all subsectors of the education system

Qualification holder
- Letter of consent to deal with protection of personal information, confidentiality
- Provision of quality, genuine transcripts & certificates

Quick response time   Protection of personal Information
Upfront information on fees and turnaround time

Competent recognition authority
- Capacity and expertise in verifying qualifications
- Autonomy of verifying body
- Well documented policy and process

Professional networks and effective communication
Trusted sourcing/delivery of critical educational information
Opportunities for networking and sharing of best practices

Issuing education and training institution
- Timely response, issued on formal university correspondence letterhead
- No change in verification fees without prior notice
- Accessible data source
- Accurate contact information (postal/phone/email)
- Information on security features for verification purposes

Effective communication
Consistency in dealing with fraud (informed by legislation)

Figure 7   Role and responsibility of stakeholders in the verification process

It is clear from Figure 7 that the institution that issued the qualification is a key role-player for the successful verification of a foreign qualification. The competent recognition authority is but one component in a big international network and its effective function is dependent on other stakeholders, outside its dominion.

BEST PRACTICES

To combat academic fraud and improve the process of verification, respondents indicated:
- Broad-based public education.
- Awareness creation programmes e.g. organising a seminar on academic fraud;
- Strengthen cross-border partnerships to combat academic crime;
  '*Sometimes we use regulatory agencies in those countries. What is useful, especially in East Africa, is the network of lecturers and managers whose contacts we know. This proved to be very useful'.*
- Get contact persons who you can rely on and trust at all times;
- Only use formal sworn translators;
- Increased focus on improved security features. Introduce booklets containing security features from different issuing bodies. Continuously collect examples of qualifications with their validity dates and security features where appropriate to use as reference material for future applications. This serves to familiarise credential evaluators with the format and content of educational documentation that can be expected from individual countries, as well as the educational terminology used;
- When sending documents for verification, it is important to check the address to which the verification request is sent against an address appearing in published sources, and not to the address provided on the letter asking for verification itself.
- Standardised letters for requesting and responding to verification requests;
- Verification requests should be addressed to the office bearer who issued and signed the document, and not to a particular individual.
- Recognition authorities should draw up an inventory of typical recognition cases and/or a comparative overview of other education systems or qualifications in relation to that of their own country as an aid in making recognition decisions consistent;
- Improved legislation on dealing with academic fraud;
- Forming of international partnerships;
- Move away from paper-based to electronic verification. Create on-line digital learner records. The existence and effective functioning of the WEAC and NLRD are frequently referred to as a best practice by countries dealing with these sources directly or indirectly.
  '*We contact the Examining Board (e.g. West Africa Examination Council) to verify the authenticity, or lack thereof, of qualifications and it is working very well.*
- Share information about academic fraud with institutions and government agencies as appropriate;
- Training on qualification verification;

Feedback from respondents showed strong support for the establishment of a national fraud register. This responds to the requirement for some form of sanction. The more robust the system is, and the more aware one is of the environment in which you operate, the less chance there is of a fraudulent qualification. Creating a fraud register for internal, administrative purposes is possible, but the implementation of a fraud register has several legal implications that will have to be considered. More work in this regard is needed.

The purpose and use of such a register will also have to be determined. Falsifying documents is a type of white collar crime. It involves altering, changing, or modifying a document for the purpose of deceiving another person. It can also involve the passing along of copies of documents that are known to be false. The national register for sexual offenders is a good example of how such a register can be implemented and used. The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development in South Africa has, in terms of Chapter 6 of the Act, implemented the National Register for Sex Offenders on 30th June 2009.

A name can only be added to the register once the person has been found guilty. There are also issues to consider such as:
- Who is responsible for the management of the fraud register?
- What type of information must be contained in the fraud register?
- Is the registration of an offender in the register a violation of the Bill of Rights?
- Who has access to the register?
- What are the implications of having one's details added in the register?
- Once a person's details are in the register, can they be removed?

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is evident that the entire process of qualification verification can improve as more clarity is created regarding recognition practices in all African countries. Whilst there seems to be general consensus on what should be done, these practices are not always implemented, or interpreted differently as a result of various challenges highlighted in the report. A more harmonised and transparent recognition practice is essential for the quality of student mobility in Africa.

The three biggest challenges appear to be the following:
- Due to various factors beyond the control of the evaluation service provider, the timelines for processing applications are difficult to determine and lengthy delays often occur as a result of slow responses and difficulty in contacting the foreign institution;
- There seems to be no standard procedure that can be applied in Africa to ensure consistency in terms of service, turnaround time and fee structures;
- Lack of digital records and national learner record databases for quick reference.

To improve the process for the verification of qualification, specifically the confirmation of awards by relevant issuing bodies it is recommended that:
- platforms are created to share best practices;
- up to date and accessible process and official information are made available;
- verification practices should be aligned to improve the process in Africa;
- institutions and organizations in Africa that assess international academic credentials should be familiar with varied global practices and take these into consideration when developing and applying their own policies and practices for global standard and consistency; and
- digitisation options are explored for implementation across Africa.

The frustration and lack of resources result in people skipping the final step in the verification process (confirmation from issuing body) and accept documents in '*good faith*'. It is clear that Africa has a lot of development to be done to be able to have an effective verification process. The efficiency of the process depends to a large extend on availability and response of the institution being contacted for confirming the issuing of the qualification. The creation of digitised records, already established as a trend in America and other European countries, appears to be the only long-term solution.

An efficient verification process that is scalable (as the number of requests increase) and sustainable will require the move to an electronic verification process. Student data portability in the digital age require a paperless process where the identification of an applicant, can be coupled with authentic educational attainment data, in a secure environment, that is accessible through the necessary authorisation. It is recommended that further research is conducted to determine the minimum requirements for the effective functioning of a verification system on the African continent that will result in a process that is reliable, efficient, consistent in delivering results, trustworthy and cost effective.

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Appendix A   List of Questions

The questions are summarised below:

-   When you receive an application form from a candidate with foreign qualification who is a potential student or employee – what are the steps you follow to verify the authenticity of the document (to ensure it is obtained from a recognized institution that has the authority to offer the qualification; that it belongs to the applicant and that it is not fraudulent)?

-   Do you receive many fraudulent applications?

-   How did you detect that it is fraudulent/ who informed you?

-   What are the challenges when verifying qualifications from other African countries?

-   How do you overcome these challenges?

-   What do you have in place at your institutions/organisation to combat academic fraud?

-   What advice would you give to 'inquirers' who want to verify qualifications that were obtained at your institution/in your country?

-   Do you have a reliable national database where student records are kept?

-   If you have, which authority is responsible for maintaining the database?