GHANA TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

POLICY GUIDE ON CREDENTIAL VERIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS IN GHANA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Credential verification and evaluation are integral processes designed to assess the legitimacy, quality, and relevance of an individual's educational, professional, or other qualifications. This policy document explores the compelling rationales behind the implementation of these processes, emphasising their vital role in safeguarding against all aspects of qualifications fraud, ensuring quality standards, and fostering equity and trust across diverse sectors. The rationale for credential verification and evaluation is to establish the credibility and authenticity of an individual's credentials. These processes are designed to confirm that diplomas, degrees, certificates, or other qualifications are valid and have been issued by accredited or recognised institutions/awarding bodies. By verifying the legitimacy of the awarding institutions and their certificates, verification and credential evaluation help mitigate the risk of fraudulent representations and protect the integrity of qualification systems, graduates, and professionals.

This policy document is divided into five main sections, each with a sub-section. The background of the policy document highlights briefly some challenges within the Tertiary Education landscape and the rationale for an efficient and credible credential verification and evaluation system. Further to this, an overview of credential evaluation and qualifications fraud is discussed. The section exposes the various types of fraud that are commonly perpetrated by some prospective students and employees. The overview assesses the current credential verification and evaluation systems. The challenges within the current system provide the rationale for the need to have a policy guide for academic qualifications verification and evaluation system that will mandate prospective students and employees to subject their qualifications to verification and evaluation.

Policy recommendations are made among others, to make it mandatory for all prospective students, employees, and the already working class to submit their credentials for verification and evaluation with the sole aim of ensuring that the right people with the right qualifications are employed to work, and enrolled into schools for further studies. The policy guide further emphasises the fact that such an approach will promote quality standards across every sector of the economy. Further recommendations are made on efficient and effective modalities that would need to be adopted to make the current mode of credential verification and evaluation more efficient.

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The term higher education embodies all forms of organised learning and training at the tertiary level, including all manner of learning experiences and qualifications (AssiéLumumba 2006). Students and therefore graduates are expected to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies appropriate for this level of education and training and the ability to contribute effectively to producing knowledge as well as developing critical faculties to a level where they can contribute positively to socio-economic and cultural transformation (Garwe 2015). Writing on the subject of "corrupt schools and colleges" a decade ago, Hallak and Poisson (2007a) noted that the higher education sector the world over faces significant difficulties ranging from financial constraints; weak management; low efficiency; wastage of resources; low quality of service delivery; and lack of relevance as illustrated by the high unemployment of graduates. Other than the challenges of funding and resourcing higher education requirements, there have been growing concerns surrounding the phenomenon of fake or counterfeit qualifications (Garwe 2015).

The subject of fake academic and professional qualifications has been around for some time and the globalisation of information has made the phenomenon more pronounced. Globally fake qualifications are associated with diploma mills[1]; understood as institutions that peddle academic and professional qualifications: certificates, diplomas and degrees. To date, the advancement in information and communication technology and the compression of time-space aspects of social interaction associated with globalisation have escalated the phenomenon, partly because of the ease of creating fraudulent institutions on the Internet. It has been suggested that a web designer can create a home page for a fraudulent college or university with effects that approximate the outlook, feel and properties of the home page of a legitimate, well established, respected and high-profile higher education and training institution. High resolution printers, scanners and colour photocopiers have become powerful enablers in the production of fake certificates. Apparently, easy access to academic information through web-based catalogues and

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[1] Diploma mills are companies that sell degrees without requiring recipients to do any prescribed, substan8al and appropriate coursework required to earn a qualifica8on at any par8cular level (Johnson 2006)

institutional web pages, which in some cases may include the signatures of institutional officials have eased the process. The combined effect is that it is difficult to decipher

genuine from fake qualifications to track perpetrators and mitigate qualification fraud nationally and globally.

It has been shown for Africa and for that matter Ghana that the lack of comparable education standards, associated with different education systems, add further difficulties to deciphering legitimate and illegitimate credentials coming from different systems in the job market (Nyangau 2014). Several pertinent questions arise about the quality and standards of education, accessibility, and the integrity of higher education systems. For instance, how falsity in qualifications arises, and how it affects the legitimacy of genuinely acquired qualifications, are important questions for the tertiary education community and the tertiary education regulatory structures. The Statistical Report on Tertiary Education for 2021/2022 for Tertiary Education Institutions show that there are currently 278 accredited public and private Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). The TEIs include Public Universities, Public Technical Universities, Public and Private Colleges of Education, Public Specialised/Professional Teaching Institutions, Private Universities (University, University Colleges, Tutorial Colleges, and Distance Education Institutions), Public and Private Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Training Colleges, and Public and Private Colleges of Agriculture. Table 1 shows a trend of student enrolment and graduate output in the last 5 years.

Table 1: Students Enrolment in Tertiary Education Institutions from 2016/2017 to 2021/2022

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	2016/2017 NUMBER OF STUDENTS			2017/2018 NUMBER OF STUDENTS			2018/2019 NUMBER OF STUDENTS			2019/2020 NUMBER OF STUDENTS			2020/2021 NUMBER OF STUDENTS			2021/2022 NUMBER OF STUDENTS		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Colleges of Agriculture (B4:Q15)	156,413	102,256	258,669	147,170	96,909	244,079	164,186	119,872	284,058	178,200	138,827	317,027	187,611	145,175	332,786	202,318	159,486	361,804
Technical Universities and Polytechnics	33,365	17,567	50,932	32,707	19,826	52,533	31,095	19,744	50,839	34,303	22,307	56,610	39,898	23,830	63,728	40,942	24,258	65,200
Public Colleges of Education	24,041	20,772	44,813	25,664	22,489	48,153	25,434	22,651	48,085	24,888	22,697	47,585	26,107	27,213	53,320	35,241	37,017	72,258
Private Colleges of Education	2,721	2,475	5,196	3,043	3,095	6,138	2,970	4,124	7,094	3,242	4,545	7,787	2,318	3,523	5,841	2,489	3,634	6,123
Public Specialised Institutions	5,692	4,631	10,323	6,265	4,993	11,258	5,831	5,957	11,788	6,026	6,500	12,526	5,945	6,292	12,237	3,167	3,385	6,552
Private Tertiary Institutions (University, University Colleges, Tutorial Colleges etc.)	37,350	28,672	66,022	36,455	26,997	63,452	37,208	27,580	64,788	35,786	27,459	63,245	32,332	29,324	61,656	31,790	32,881	64,671
Public Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Training Colleges	1,634	4,691	6,325	4,263	12,675	16,938	6,729	21,581	28,310	10,114	30,366	40,480	10,949	38,098	49,047	12,406	43,004	55,410
Private Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Training Colleges	270	668	938	147	385	532	140	397	537	427	630	1,057	397	700	1,097	363	1,091	1,454
Colleges of Agriculture (public and private colleges of agriculture)	652	108	760	513	97	610	536	113	649	570	158	728	746	293	1,039	1,106	421	1,527
Total	262,138	181,840	443,978	256,227	187,466	443,693	274,129	222,019	496,148	293,556	253,489	547,045	306,303	274,448	580,751	329,822	305,177	634,999

Table 2: Tertiary Education Institutions Graduate Output from 2016/2017 to 2021/2022

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	2016/2017 STUDENTS	2017/2018 STUDENTS	2018/2019 STUDENTS	2019/2020 STUDENTS	2020/2021 STUDENTS	2021/2022 STUDENTS
Public Universities	51,140	54,826	55,991	56,847	56,847	85,429
Technical Universities and Polytechnics	13,533	14,803	11,950	15,868	15,868	16,738
Public Colleges of Education	13,227	12,464	14,373	16,041	14,482	15,061
Private Colleges of Education	2,232	1,524	1,193	1,193	1,135	2,039
Public Specialised Institutions	3,189	3,696	3,690	4,017	4,379	1,298
Private Tertiary Institutions (University, University Colleges, Tutorial Colleges etc.)	18,006	17,960	17,283	16,480	14,371	17,760
Total	101,327	105,273	104,480	110,446	107,082	138,325

In the 2021/2022 academic year, 73% of students were enrolled in bachelor's or equivalent level programmes whilst 21% were enrolled in short-cycle programmes (i.e., Diploma or Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes). Five percent (5%) of students were enrolled in second degree/certificate programmes (i.e., Postgraduate Diploma, MPhil. And other Master's Degree) whilst 1% were enrolled in doctoral or equivalent level (i.e., Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programmes (GTEC, 2022). All these graduating students are expected to compete for jobs with job prospectors in the field already aside from students who have committed certificate fraud. This requires the urgency to develop a policy guide on credential evaluation policy for enforcement.

1.1   Policy Guide on Credential Verification and Evaluation of Academic Qualifications in Ghana

Academic credentials are highly valued everywhere; as a result, they are seen as a trustworthy and dependable proxy for the knowledge, abilities, and skills of the bearers (OECD, 2001). As a result, Ghana's higher education system goes above and beyond to generate graduates with excellent credentials who can help drive the nation's socioeconomic progress. Ghana also boasts a diverse and evolving education system that encompasses a wide range of institutions, from traditional universities, and technical universities to private institutions. Education is therefore highly prioritized in Ghana, with both government and private sector investments aimed at improving access to quality education at all levels. The country's educational goals align well with global objectives, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Ghana, as in many other countries, the evaluation and verification of academic certificates and qualifications hold significant importance in various aspects of life, ranging from education and employment to professional licensure and mobility across borders.

Higher education institutions are expected to educate, train and eventually award qualifications to their learners as competent, qualified and to some extent employable at the end of their studies (Carnevale, Rose & Hanson 2013).

Challenges such as diploma mills, offering fake degrees and the falsification of academic credentials have emerged as concerns. These challenges underline the

need for robust systems of certificate evaluation and verification. With advancements in technology, the methods and processes for certificate evaluation and verification have evolved.

In Ghana, public higher education institutions are granted authority to offer degrees and diplomas by an Act of Parliament whilst private Universities are granted a Charter. Authentic qualifications are conferred to a student who has satisfied the minimum requirements for graduation.

In Ghana, five major types of fraudulent academic qualifications can be described as follows:

- Degree or Diploma Mills: These generate and sell bogus qualifications to clients who have not undergone the purported studies.
- Fabricated or Counterfeit Documents: These are fake documents designed to epitomise a legitimate or fictitious programme or institution.
- Modified Documents: Alterations such as omissions and additions are performed on official, legitimate documents. Changes may include the name of the candidate, enrolment and graduation dates, grades, course content and date of birth.
- Produced in-house: These are fake documents manufactured by institutional employees. They can either be modified or fabricated but appear on authentic paper complete with institutional seals, stamps and appropriate signatures. Grades are usually inflated, credits falsified and degrees awarded for incomplete programmes.
- Misleading Translations: These are documents inaccurately translated with the aim of misleading and falsifying them. Grades are often altered and course titles changed to meet the expectations of the recipient.

The rapidly growing global phenomenon of online trading in fake degrees means that thousands of dishonest candidates may be competing for the same available jobs and adversely affecting opportunities for appropriately qualified candidates – from nurses to pilots, accountants, auditors, lawyers, and even doctors etc.

In some sectors like health, accounting, engineering and energy, employment of a graduate with fake qualifications may not just be wrong but highly risky for people and

property. Hiring those who have falsified their qualifications or lied on their CVs can lead to costly exposure to legal actions, high staff turnover, loss of revenue and public reputational damage which, may take years to repair.

Educational qualifications play a pivotal role in determining an individual's eligibility and competence for various positions in the public and private sectors. However, the prevalence of fraudulent or misrepresented academic claims has become a growing concern, raising questions about the reliability of educational credentials provided by applicants and employees.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF CREDENTIAL EVALUATION AND QUALIFICATION FRAUD

Modern society attributes great value to qualifications as an agreed and trusted proxy for the competencies and skills of individuals (Keating, 2008). The global spread of national, regional and transnational qualifications frameworks to organise qualifications in a manner that increases transparency and international comparability bears testimony to this fact, as does the prominent role of credential evaluation agencies in societies to translate foreign credentials into locally accepted currency.

The evaluation of credentials is not limited to the recognition of qualifications but may include professional designations, and in some cases, non-formal and informal learning. Notably, credential evaluation precedes the emergence of qualifications frameworks (NQF) and other quality assurance practices over several decades. As an example, the establishment of a foreign qualification evaluation service in countries such as South Africa dates back to the late 1950s, while the South African NQF was only formally established in 1995. The evaluation of foreign qualifications gradually evolved from a quantitative, time-based focus to a more qualitative, benchmarking approach. Its evolution has been accelerated to promote access, mobility, portability, a focus on outcomes and a culture of lifelong learning.

The recognition of foreign qualifications on the other hand involves both a process leading to an understanding of what a particular qualification signals, as well as the result of that process, which is a decision to accept the qualification for a specific purpose, i.e. an acknowledgement of its appropriateness for that purpose.

2.1 Credential evaluation

Credential evaluation is the process involved in verifying the authenticity of foreign qualifications and comparing them with qualifications in the local qualifications system.

Credential evaluation generally involves two main aspects:

i. Verify foreign qualifications by ensuring the following

- Issuing bodies are accredited/recognised in the national systems they operate in.

- Qualifications are legitimately issued by those issuing bodies and are part of the national qualifications of that country.

- Qualifications documents are in order and awards claimed by individuals are authentic.

ii. Compare foreign qualifications with local qualifications, considering the structure and outcomes of the foreign qualifications.

Holders of foreign qualifications apply to the credential evaluation body to have for verification and establishment of equivalence. Credential evaluation is required in the following areas:

- Immigration policy requires foreign individuals seeking work permits to submit credential evaluation reports as part of their application.

- Foreigners seeking admission into educational institutions require credential evaluation before admission will be granted.

- Foreigners seeking to practice in a regulated profession, are also required to submit certificates for recognition and evaluation.

2.2 Qualifications Fraud

Studies show that fraudulent degrees are now commonplace in advanced and developing countries (Altbach, 2004; Aumann, 2006; Brown, 2005). For example, Grolleau, Lakhal, & Mzoughi (2008) estimated that in the United States alone, over 2 million fake degrees and 300 unaccredited universities exist whilst Cohen & Winch (2011) reported that the United States with 810-degree mills topped the list of countries with fake institutions followed by the United Kingdom with approximately 271 bogus institutions. In Australia, between 25 and 35 percent of candidates were reported to have either exaggerated or falsified their credentials to obtain employment (Healy 2005; Lucas 2004). The University of Dodoma in Tanzania discovered more than 200 bogus degrees submitted by prospective lecturers and professors from Kenya (Jamiiforums, 2009).

It also emerged that large but unspecified numbers of Zimbabwean lecturers who possessed fake academic degrees were asked to resign during the period 2005 to 2008. Further studies also revealed that some holders of foreign degrees purported to have been earned through online study and yet they were obtained before the internet era.

In another weird observation, some Zimbabweans who left the country during the time of economic hardships were reportedly coming back with dubious degrees notably doctorates, taking advantage of the shortage of lecturers in universities and other professionals. In a similar situation, 200 fake qualifications were detected during an interview of prospective academic staff. Interestingly, the discovery came barely two months after the withdrawal of a degree certificate that had been awarded by the University of Dar es Salaam 20 years earlier to a staff member who had forged academic certificates required for entry into the degree programme. The array of areas infested by academic corruption confirms that academic fraud involves a variety of stakeholders: examination candidates, teaching or faculty members, supervisors, managers of courses, programmes, institutions, and universities. It has also been observed that entities in charge of quality assurance and accreditation are equally susceptible to corrupt practices, implying that accreditation may not guarantee academic quality (Hallak and Poisson 2007). Apparently, there are several layers of deceit that those seeking to obtain higher education on the one hand and employers recruiting higher education graduates to fill vacancies and sometimes applicants for promotion in the workplace on the other need to appreciate, manage and avoid.

The Ghana government through the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) in 2018 ordered the verification of qualifications of all teaching staff in Technical Universities because of concerns that some lecturers had used fraudulent certificates to obtain their employment. As recent as 2022, through the GTEC revoked the appointment of a senior assistant registrar of the C. K. Tadem University Technology and Applied Sciences. As part of efforts by the GTEC to crack down on such malpractices, a new Tertiary Education Policy was developed. The Tertiary Education Policy is among others expected to crack down on academic fraud and abuse of academic titles. The policy document indicates that "academic fraud is a global phenomenon that has found its way into all professions." The 80-page document points out the risk of the wrong people being employed in the right businesses. It said academic fraud undermines the credibility of the educational system. According to the policy, "all forms of academic fraud are criminal and must be handled by the appropriate agencies." It states that "employers have the primary responsibility to confirm credentials presented for consideration for employment by job applicants." This policy document grants provides sufficient justification for the development of this

GTEC policy guide on credential and evaluation document. Below is a table that shows types of certificates that are often fraudulently acquired. Table 3 below indicates the outcome of research showing perceptions on the types of certificates that are fraudulently acquired

Table 3: Types of Fraudulently Acquired Certificates

Type of Certificate	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ordinary and Advanced level	50	2
Bachelor's degree	80	3
Master's degree	156	6
Doctoral degree	280	11
Professorship	371	15
Honorary degree	1526	62
	2463	**100**

Source: Garwe, 2015.

2.2.1 Consequences of Qualification Fraud

Qualification fraud is a serious problem that can have significant consequences for both individuals and organizations. It undermines the legitimacy and reputation of universities and employers and robs honest candidates of opportunities for further education or employment.

When evidence of qualification fraud becomes apparent, the institution in which a diploma has been acquired loses its value and it makes a mockery of legitimate graduates. It is an attractive alternative for legitimate students if left unexploited since more people will be tempted to lie about their qualifications. If tougher measures are not taken people begin to think that if others are getting away with fraud there will not be sufficient reason not to follow suit. The worst consequence is that professionals recruited based on fake qualifications can cause damage to humanity and the environment. This finding augurs well with the assertion by Armour (2003) that employees in possession of fraudulent credentials often secure jobs in critical areas such as health, psychology, engineering and education.

For employers, hiring those who have falsified their qualifications or lied on their CVs can lead to costly exposure to legal action, high staff turnover, lost revenue and public

reputational damage which may take years to repair. Selling fake certificates, including fake course certificates, is illegal and can result in serious consequences. The charges that someone might face for selling fake certificates can vary depending on the specific circumstances and the laws of the country or jurisdiction where the offence occurred.

In general, some of the potential charges that someone could face for selling fake certificates might include:

1. Fraud or forgery: Selling fake certificates could be considered fraud or forgery, which is a serious criminal offence. This could result in fines, imprisonment, or both.
2. False advertising: If the seller advertises the certificates as legitimate, they could be charged with false advertising, which can result in civil or criminal penalties.
3. Intellectual property infringement: If the fake certificates use the branding or intellectual property of a legitimate institution, the seller could be charged with intellectual property infringement, which can also result in civil or criminal penalties.
4. Conspiracy: If the seller is part of a larger scheme or conspiracy to sell fake certificates, they could face additional charges for their involvement in the conspiracy.

It's important to note that selling fake certificates is not only illegal but also unethical. It can have serious consequences for both the seller and the people who purchase the fake certificates, including reputational damage, loss of trust, and potential legal or professional consequences.

2.3 Current Credential Verification and Evaluation System

The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) is the agency established by the Government of the Republic of Ghana (Education Regulatory Bodies Act 2020, Act 1023) to among other functions, verify and evaluate certificates awarded by recognised institutions in Ghana and elsewhere. The Commission carries out this mandate through the Credential Evaluation Department.

The Department receives applications from individuals, institutions corporate bodies and other non-governmental bodies on a daily basis. Statistically, the number of applications received has been increasing significantly from year to year. The table below depicts the number of applications received within the last five years. Table 4: Credential evaluation applications received from 2018 - 2022

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS	YEAR
2,357	2018
2,521	2019
2998	2020
2,720	2021
3,241	2022
13,837	**Total**

2.3.1 The Credential Evaluation System

Credential Evaluation is carried out through an Input-Process-Output system – with effective feedback. The evaluation system in Figure 1 operates as follows:

Figure 1: The credential evaluation processes of the Commission
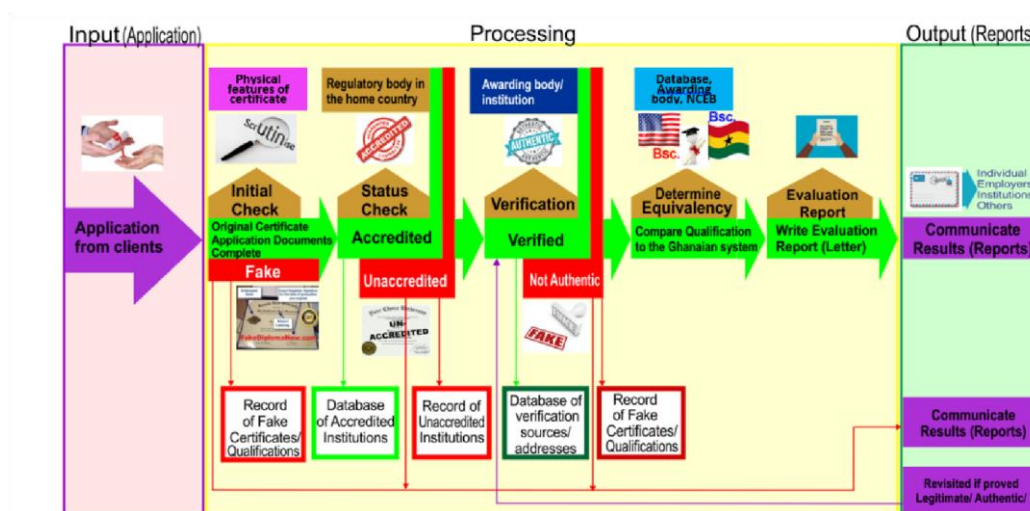
2.3.1.1 Input

Various types of certificates are received from clients for evaluation on daily basis. Certificates are received from all the five (5) continents of the world. For evaluation purposes certificates are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Documents required for submission of application for certificate evaluation/status check generally include:

- Original Certificate (certificates in languages other than English a GTEC approved body (University of Ghana, Department of Modern Languages and Ghana Institute of Languages, should translate English)
- Transcripts if (applicable)
- Pre-qualification (The qualification used to enrol in the programme which certificate is being submitted for evaluation)
- Consent form (To be completed and signed by the holder of the certificate)

Applications can be submitted by the holder of the certificate/diploma or by a third party on behalf of the holder. In the case of the latter, consent and application forms must be completed and signed by the holder of the certificate/diploma.

2.3.1.2. Processing

Step 1: Submission of application

    i.   Applicants are required to submit original certificates, transcripts and prequalification's for physical examination after which photocopies are made for the application. Certificates are physically examined to confirm their suitability for evaluation in terms of the following:

- any evidence of forgery
- whether it falls within types of certificates acceptable for evaluation.
- defaced or defective certificates

If the certificate is found to be fake - based on known features of original ones, further evidence is sought as in transcripts/supplements and enrolment letters etc. If the certificate is confirmed to be phoney, it is rejected and kept in the record of phoney certificates. Additionally, the requesting organization/institution is informed.

    ii.   If the certificate is suitable for evaluation, the applicant is made to fill out two forms namely: an evaluation application form and a consent form.
The evaluation form collects information on the following:

- Applicant's background
- Purpose of the evaluation
- The certificate /qualification to be evaluated • the awarding body/institution.

iii.   With the consent form, the applicant signs a declaration and provides information that would help the awarding body to verify the certificate.

iv.   When all application documents are complete, the applicant makes payment and then submits the application.

Step II: Status check of institutions/awarding bodies and programmes

i.   The accreditation/recognition status of the awarding institution and programme or qualification is checked and confirmed from the legally authorised accrediting/recognition body in the home country.

ii.   If the institution is not accredited or recognized, the process is stopped and a report is sent to the requesting agency. We also add the unaccredited institution to the relevant database.

iii.   Status checks can also be done as a separate service for individuals, institutions, and organisations. Foreign bodies may want to confirm the accreditation status of institutions and programmes.

Step III: Verification of certificate

i.   The verification stage is vital as far as evaluation is concerned. It's an internationally endorsed measure to curtail forgery and misrepresentations on certificates. A search is conducted to obtain the relevant address or office to send the request for verification.

ii.   Copies of certificates and consent forms are attached to a letter and sent by official email or post to the awarding institution.

iii.   The awarding institution then verifies the certificate and sends feedback in writing.

iv.   If the certificate is found to be fake or with misrepresentations, the process is stopped and the requesting institution or organisation is informed. The fake certificate of qualification is then added to the relevant record.

Step IV: Establishment of Equivalence

i. Once the certificate is verified, the next step is to establish the level of equivalence. We first check the relevant database for existing qualifications. ii. If the qualification is not found in our database research is conducted to gather relevant information on the qualification. This may include, but not limited to level of placement on the qualification framework of the home country, learning outcomes, entry qualification and level of progression.

iii. We may also resort to expert review and opinion on the equivalence of the qualification in Ghana.

2.3.1.3 Output

Step V: Writing of Evaluation report and communication of results

i. After the establishment of equivalence of individual certificates, evaluation reports are drafted for review and signing by the Executive Secretary.

ii. The reports are sent in hard copies either by dispatch or courier service to the requesting institutions/organisations. iii. As an international best practice, copies of the evaluation reports are given to the applicants, only for their information.

3.0 RATIONALE FOR POLICY ON ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS VERIFICATION AND EVALUATION

In our increasingly interconnected world, certificate verification and evaluation promote international recognition of qualifications acquired in diverse educational systems and nations. These processes facilitate the mobility of individuals, allowing them to access educational and job opportunities beyond their national borders. Standardised methods for assessing foreign qualifications foster international collaboration and integration. Credential verification and evaluation therefore provides an integral process designed to assess the legitimacy, accuracy, and relevance of an individual's educational, professional, or other qualifications. This document explores the compelling rationales behind the implementation of these processes, emphasising their vital role in safeguarding against qualification fraud, ensuring quality standards, and fostering equity and trust.

The foremost rationale for certificate verification and evaluation is to establish the credibility and authenticity of an individual's credentials. These processes are designed to confirm that diplomas, degrees, certifications, or other qualifications are valid and have been issued by recognized institutions and other awarding bodies. By verifying the legitimacy of these documents, certificate evaluation and verification help mitigate the risk of fraudulent representations and protect the integrity of Ghana's educational system.

In ensuring and upholding standards of excellence in educational qualifications, there is the need for rigorous examination and procedures that will ensure that individuals possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies in alignment with established quality benchmarks. In this manner, certificate evaluation and verification contribute significantly to preserving the integrity and reputation of educational institutions and industries.

Central to the concept of certificate verification and evaluation is the principle of standardisation. These processes adhere to carefully designed standardized procedures and criteria that ensure consistency and fairness in assessing qualifications in Ghana. This standardization is vital in promoting impartiality, transparency, and equity, regardless of an individual's background, origin, or circumstances. It ensures that all qualifications undergo an equitable evaluation process.

In Ghana, certificates presented for job placements, further education and other purposes are mainly awarded by accredited public and private tertiary institutions. In the last 5 years (2016-2022) total graduate output stands at 666,932. Ghana Tertiary Education Commission which is mandated per section 7(i) and 8(4)(e) to verify the authenticity of certificates and to establish their equivalences, has been evaluating over 1000 local and 2000 foreign certificates annually. About 5% of such certificates are often found to be unauthentic which, but for the verification process, would have been found on the labour market. It is important to note that these evaluated certificates are those submitted as a requirement by employers or prospective institutions. This would imply that there are several certificate holders in Ghana, whose qualifications are yet to be verified by GTEC.

Educational institutions and employers who depend on the authenticity of academic certificates for making admission and hiring decisions face a considerable challenge in identifying the features of genuine academic certificates including tedious verification processes and wrongful engagement of unqualified personnel. The purpose of this paper is to review the sources and types of fraudulent qualifications and outline a policy aimed at ensuring compliance with Sections 7(i), 8(4)(e) of Act 1023.

4.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to users of all academic qualifications in Ghana whether obtained locally or internationally. It also covers the role of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) in ensuring that the needed service provision regarding verification, recognition and evaluation is made available.

Ghana as part of the global system must ensure that it keeps to international standards concerning the verification and recognition as outlined in the Global Convention on Recognition of Qualifications as well as the Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2018-2030) and the Education Regulatory Bodies Act 2020, Act 1023, which established the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC).

As a quality assurance check on the standard and authenticity of these qualifications, a policy document is needed to be used as a tool for formalizing an operational framework within which the needed validation, recognition and evaluation can be carried out, thus the need for this policy document.

All agencies and other organisations in the public sector are to mandatorily ensure that certificates of existing and newly recruited staff are submitted to the Credential Evaluation Department of GTEC for verification. Academic institutions are also required to submit certificates of staff (teaching and non-teaching) and prospective students to the GTEC for verification and evaluation.

The private sector is also strongly encouraged to embrace this directive as a general quality assurance measure.

The evaluation reports issued should serve as a guide for the employer in the decision-making process regarding placement levels of employees in an organisation

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5.0 POLICY PROPOSAL

This policy proposal outlines the establishment of a comprehensive Credential Verification and Evaluation Policy within our organisation. We recognised the critical importance of ensuring the authenticity, validity, and relevance of educational, professional, or other qualifications presented by individuals. By implementing standardised certificate verification and evaluation procedures, we aim to enhance the integrity of our institution, foster quality assurance, promote fairness, and build trust among all stakeholders.

5.1 Credential verification and evaluation

In full compliance with Sections 7(i) and 8 (4)(e), all existing employees and newly hired staff of public agencies, organisations and institutions shall be made to made to:

- submit their local academic qualifications to the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission for verification

- submit their foreign academic qualifications to the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission for credential evaluation.

In full compliance with Sections 7(i) and 8 (4)(e), employers of private sector organisations and institutions are to ensure that existing and newly hired staff:

- submit their local academic qualifications to the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission for verification

- submit their foreign academic qualifications to the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission for credential evaluation.

5.2 Learners Records Database

In pursuance of Section 8(4)(a) of the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, Act 1023 set up the National Learners Records Database (NLRD) which is basically a repository of all qualifications awarded by tertiary education institutions in Ghana.

The NLRD will be a blockchain-based certificate verification system which can be used to verify academic qualifications. The system will work by creating a digital certificate that will be stored on a blockchain. Information on the certificate will include the student's academic qualifications, indicating the name of the institution, the degree awarded, and the date of graduation. The certificate is then verified by a network of nodes on the blockchain, which ensures that it is authentic and has not been tampered with.

When an employer needs to verify an applicant's academic qualifications, they can request access to the digital certificate stored on the blockchain. The employer can then use the information contained in the certificate to verify the applicant's qualifications. Since the certificate is stored on a blockchain, it is secure and tamperproof, making it an ideal solution for verifying academic qualifications.

5.3 National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The Commission seeks to develop and implement a comprehensive NQF encompassing all levels and types of qualifications acquired in General Education, Higher Education, TVET and Professional Education.

Ghana already has a TVET Sub-framework which is currently at the implementation stage.

5.4 Ratification of Global and Addis Convention on Recognition of Qualifications.

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education is a United Nations convention on higher education that was adopted by UNESCO's Member States on 25 November 2019. The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications on Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention) is a legal framework for the fair and transparent evaluation of higher education qualifications in the African region to facilitate inter-university cooperation and exchange through the mobility of students, researchers and faculty.

6.0 RESOURCES REQUIRED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

To ensure the successful implementation of the proposed policy the following resources shall be required:

- Human Resource (additional staff)
- Focal persons on campuses of awarding institutions for verification of certificates.
- Additional office space /accommodation
- Logistics – Computers, printers, IT equipment and devices, efficient internet services
- Vehicles

7.0 CONCLUSION

This Certificate Verification and Evaluation Policy proposal underscores our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of integrity, quality, and fairness in our educational and professional endeavors. Through the implementation of these procedures, we aim to strengthen our institution's reputation and trustworthiness while providing individuals with equitable access to opportunities based on their verified qualifications.

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