

Background Screening in Singapore

The Veris view on employee screening and hiring decisions

Employers in Singapore should base hiring decisions on reliable evidence about the candidate. Seniority, a strong track record or work-pass approval should not replace independent checks.

This paper sets out Veris Pte Ltd's view on employee background screening for local and overseas hires. It explains the distinction between qualification checks for work-pass purposes and the wider assessment of identity, credentials and integrity that may be needed for a hiring decision.

Why should employers verify claimed qualifications?

Employers should verify qualifications that materially influence the appointment. Comparing certificate copies with originals or assessing knowledge at interview does not confirm that the institution awarded the qualification.

The Mikhy Farrera-Brochez case illustrates this distinction. Brochez used forged qualifications to obtain teaching work at Temasek Polytechnic and Ngee Ann Polytechnic. In Parliament in February 2019, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education Low Yen Ling said the polytechnics had checked copies of his certificates against the originals he presented, and that he had shown a good grasp of the subject at interview. Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar pointed out that a forged original will match a forged copy, and urged checking with the institutions that award the qualifications. The polytechnics had since started verifying certificates with the issuing institutions.¹

In the UK, Jon Andrewes became chief executive of St Margaret's Hospice using false qualifications and false claims about his past jobs. The hospice did well while he led it, and his annual reviews often rated him "strong or outstanding". In 2017 he pleaded guilty to deception and fraud offences and was sent to prison for two years. His good performance did not resolve the dishonesty through which he had obtained the role.²

Does Employment Pass approval mean credentials have been verified?

Employment Pass approval does not, by itself, confirm that every credential on a candidate's CV has been independently verified.

Singapore's Ministry of Manpower (MOM) administers work passes for foreign workers. The Employment Pass (EP) is a work pass for foreign professionals, managers and executives with a job offer in Singapore.³

EP applicants must meet the qualifying salary. Unless exempt, they must also earn at least 40 points under the Complementarity Assessment Framework (COMPASS). Its C2 criterion awards points for qualifications. If those points are not needed, MOM says the qualification and verification proof need not be submitted for C2. Applicants earning at least S\$22,500 in fixed monthly salary are among those exempt from COMPASS.⁴

Where qualification verification proof is required, MOM requires authentic qualifications from accredited institutions and accepts specified sources of proof. Education certificates and notarised documents alone are not accepted. Other requirements may apply to particular occupations, and MOM may request further documents.⁵

Should employers verify qualifications when COMPASS points are not needed?

Veris recommends independently verifying material educational and professional credentials claimed by an Employment Pass applicant, even when they are not needed for COMPASS points. This is our recommendation for hiring, rather than a statement of the current work-pass rules.

The same principle should apply to Singaporean hires. Nationality should not determine whether a claim is checked. Consistent verification also protects genuine foreign professionals from being placed on the same footing as people who have misrepresented their background. A person without a degree may be well suited to a role; a person who claims one should be able to substantiate it.

Which background checks are relevant to the role?

Background screening should go beyond qualifications. Employers should also verify identity and conduct relevant integrity checks where reliable sources are available. The

scope should be proportionate to the responsibilities and risk exposure of the role, including access to money, sensitive information or vulnerable people.

For a chief financial officer (CFO), this may include confirming professional accounting status, previous responsibilities and relevant business interests. Integrity checks can examine relevant public records, adverse information or potential conflicts of interest. Any potential match needs to be checked before it is attributed to the candidate.

The employer and screening provider should agree the scope and obtain the required consent before starting. Checks should use authorised channels and information appropriate to the appointment.

What should an employer do when a qualification cannot be verified?

Treat an unverified qualification as an unresolved claim. An unanswered request is not evidence of fraud. An institution that requires additional consent, one that has closed and one that denies awarding the qualification present different issues. Give the candidate an opportunity to explain and provide supporting information.

At Veris, we work with clients to decide how best to proceed when an institution or former employer is unresponsive. We consider whether further enquiries or alternative reliable sources are available, how important the claim is to the role and the level of uncertainty the employer is prepared to accept.

Alternative evidence should be assessed for what it establishes. Confirmation of attendance, for example, does not necessarily confirm graduation or the award of a degree. Where a qualification is essential to the appointment, confirmation may be needed before proceeding. Any professional registration or work-pass requirements must still be met.

The 2019 Parliamentary discussion recognised practical limits, including overseas institutions declining confirmation for privacy reasons and the risk of losing talent through excessive checks.¹ The aim should be to resolve material uncertainty without pursuing checks that add little to the decision.

How should employers choose a screening provider in Singapore?

Employers should assess whether a provider is authorised to perform the proposed work, uses reliable sources and explains its findings clearly. They should also ask who conducts the checks, how sources are authenticated and how personal information is handled.

Singapore's Private Security Industry Act 2007 regulates private investigation activity, including obtaining and giving information about a person for reward, subject to statutory exceptions and exemptions. A business supplying regulated private-investigator services must hold the appropriate agency licence. Veris operates as a licensed Private Investigation Agency in Singapore.⁶

Where an Employment Pass application relies on qualification points under COMPASS, MOM accepts verification proof only from specified sources, including selected background screening companies. That proof serves the work-pass application. Veris is not on MOM's list for this purpose, and clients who need MOM-accepted proof should obtain it from a listed provider or another source MOM accepts.⁵

MOM-accepted proof covers the qualifications claimed for COMPASS points. A hiring decision usually depends on more than that, including employment history, professional standing and the integrity checks relevant to the role. That wider verification is the work Veris carries out for employers.

What should a background screening report tell the employer?

A background screening report should identify the checks completed, the sources used and what the evidence supports. Where a claim remains unresolved, it should explain what was attempted, why confirmation was unsuccessful and what remains unknown.

Findings need context. A minor date error should not be treated like a fabricated qualification. A genuine degree should not distract from an unsupported employment claim. The report should distinguish confirmed discrepancies from limitations in the available information.

The hiring decision stays with the employer. Screening provides evidence for that decision; it cannot guarantee honesty or identify the best candidate on its own. Performance monitoring remains important after appointment.¹

— HOW VERIS CAN HELP

Screening matched to the role

Veris screens candidates and employees for clients in Singapore, Indonesia and across Asia. Education, employment history, professional qualifications and licences are verified directly with the issuing institution, employer or authority where feasible. Checks are carried out with the candidate's documented consent and are matched to the role, from entry-level jobs to senior and control-function appointments.

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Sources

Singapore requirements checked on 4 October 2026. Recommendations and practitioner assessments are Veris's view.

1. CNA, parliamentary discussion of the Brochez checks, 26 February 2019. See also Parliament of Singapore, Official Report, oral answer on the background and academic qualification check of Mikhy Farrera-Brochez by polytechnics, 26 February 2019.
2. UK Supreme Court, R v Andrewes [2022] UKSC 24, 18 August 2022, in particular paragraphs 3 to 14.
3. MOM, Employment Pass key facts.
4. MOM, Employment Pass eligibility and COMPASS.
5. MOM, Employment Pass documents and verification proof.
6. Private Security Industry Act 2007, sections 5 to 7 and 37, subject to applicable exceptions and exemptions. SPF guidance: Private Investigator licence and Private Investigation Agency licence.