VALIDATION, ACCESS, PROGRESSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Presentation to the 5th VPL Biennale, Kilkenny, Ireland, 6-8 May 2024

Dr Heidi Bolton & Dr Makhapa Makhafola, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
hbolton@saqa.org.za & mmakhafola@saqa.org.za

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Contents

1. Context
2. Concepts (RPL, flexible learning pathways, articulation)
3. Legislative framework
4. Examples of good practice
5. Enablers and challenges
6. Implementation and impact
7. Data and data gaps
8. Closing comments

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

1. Context

Inequality

Unemployment

Poverty

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

2. Concepts

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

"RPL is the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are **made visible**, **mediated**, and **assessed** for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development"

National RPL Policy, as Amended (2019).

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

"Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)" means the practice of accumulating credits from one or more cognate learning programmes in an institution and transferring those credits to be recognised towards a qualification/ part-qualification in the same or a different institution.

National Policy and Criteria for CAT, as Amended (2021).

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Articulation (Learning Pathways)

The process of forming systemic, specific, and individual … **connection(s) between** qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for the horizontal/ lateral, vertical and diagonal **movement …** through the formal education and training system and … the world of work
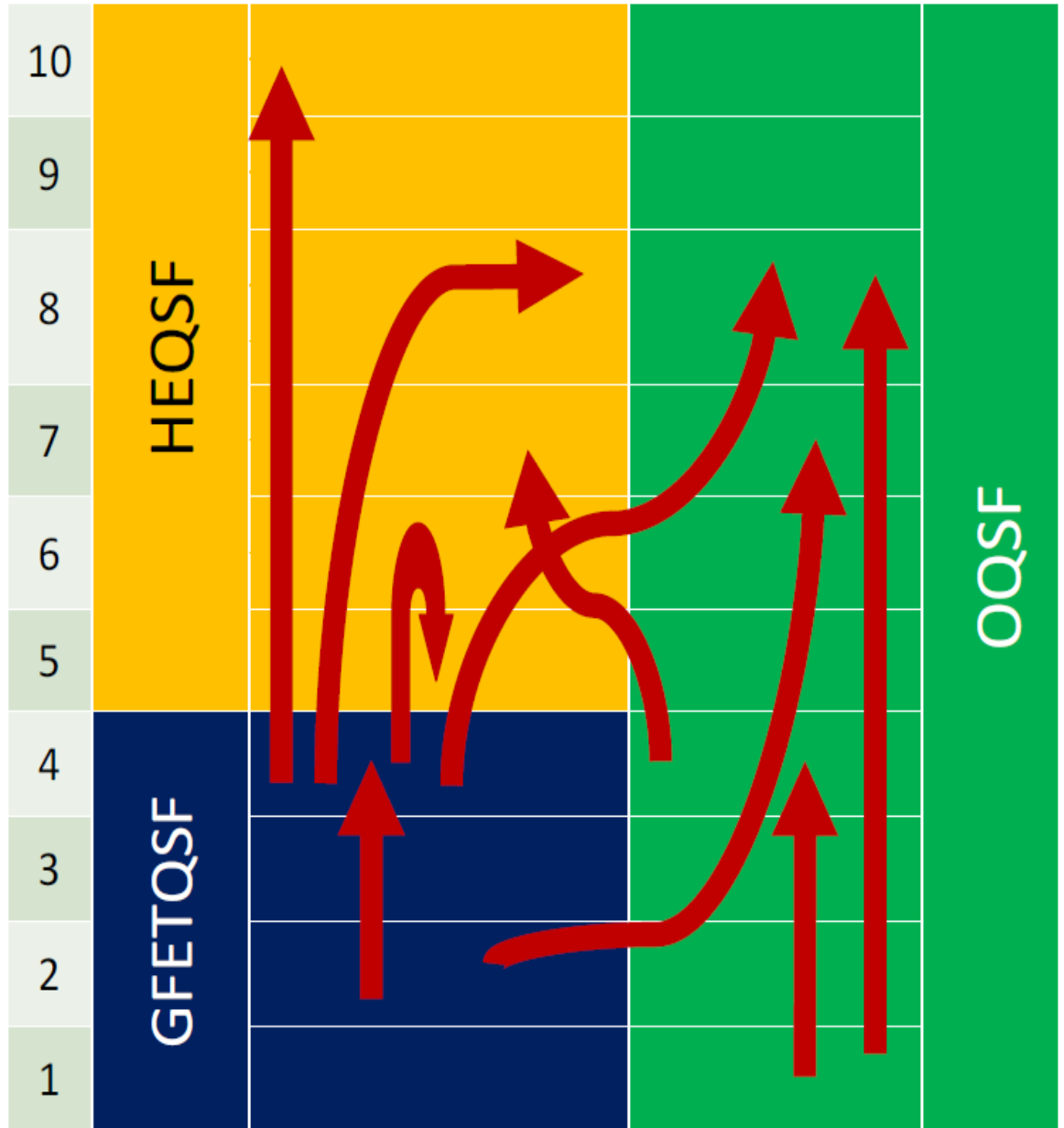
National CAT Policy, as Amended (2021).

National Qualifications Framework
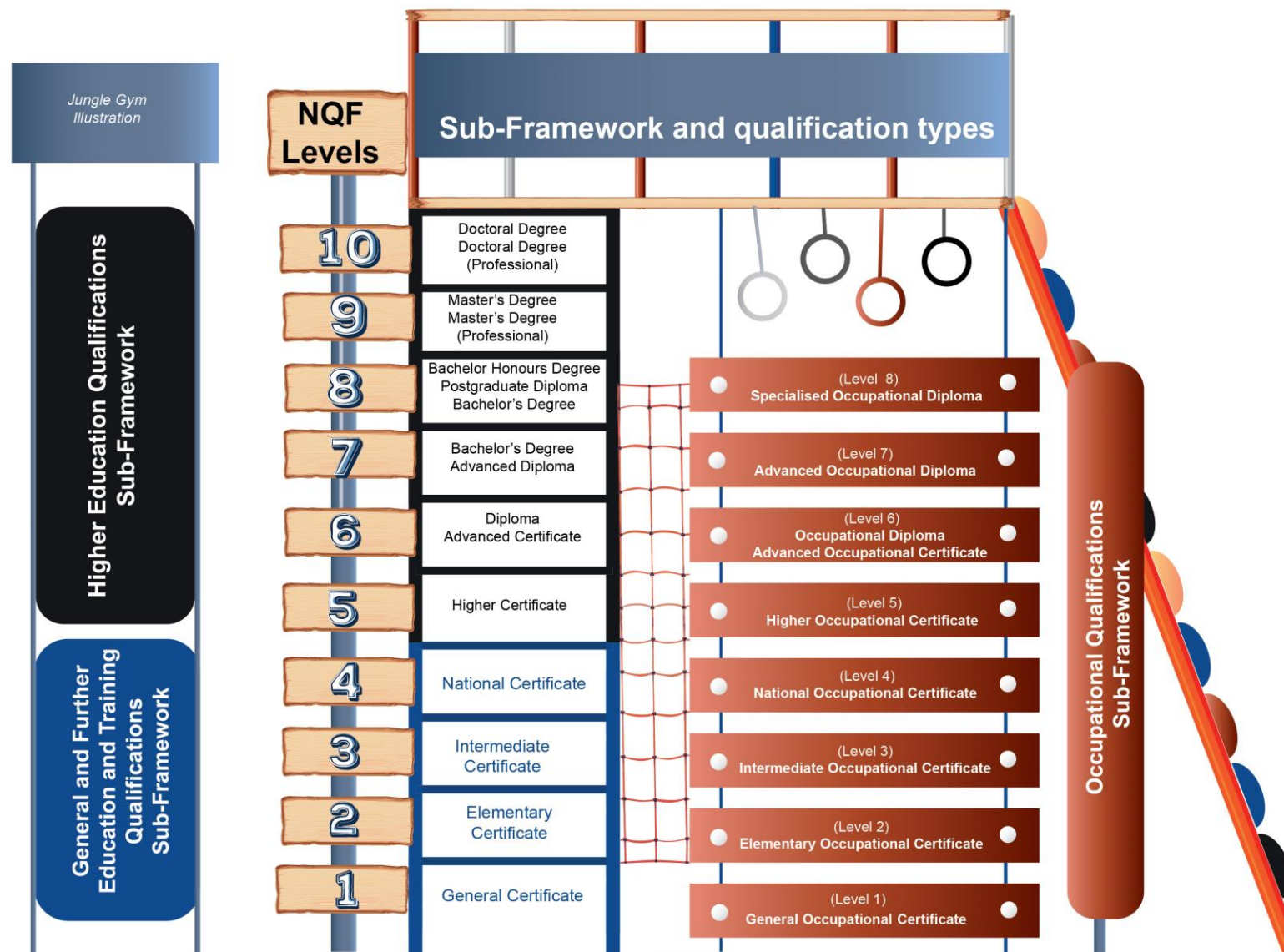
Articulation 'directions'

- **Horizontal:** within and between Sub-Frameworks on the same NQF level

- **Vertical:** across NQF levels within NQF Sub-Frameworks

- **Diagonal:** across NQF levels and NQF Sub-Frameworks

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Levels of articulation in the system

Systemic
- Linked/joined-up qualifications, part qualifications, professional designations,
- Structured workplace learning and other elements within and between country systems

Specific
- Specific arrangements like Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement and other inter-institutional arrangements

Individual
- Supporting individuals as they progress in their learning and work e.g. through career advice, flexible learning and teaching, quality of qualifications, etc

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Learning pathway map

Early Childhood Development Learning Pathways

People, validation and power: democracy in action?
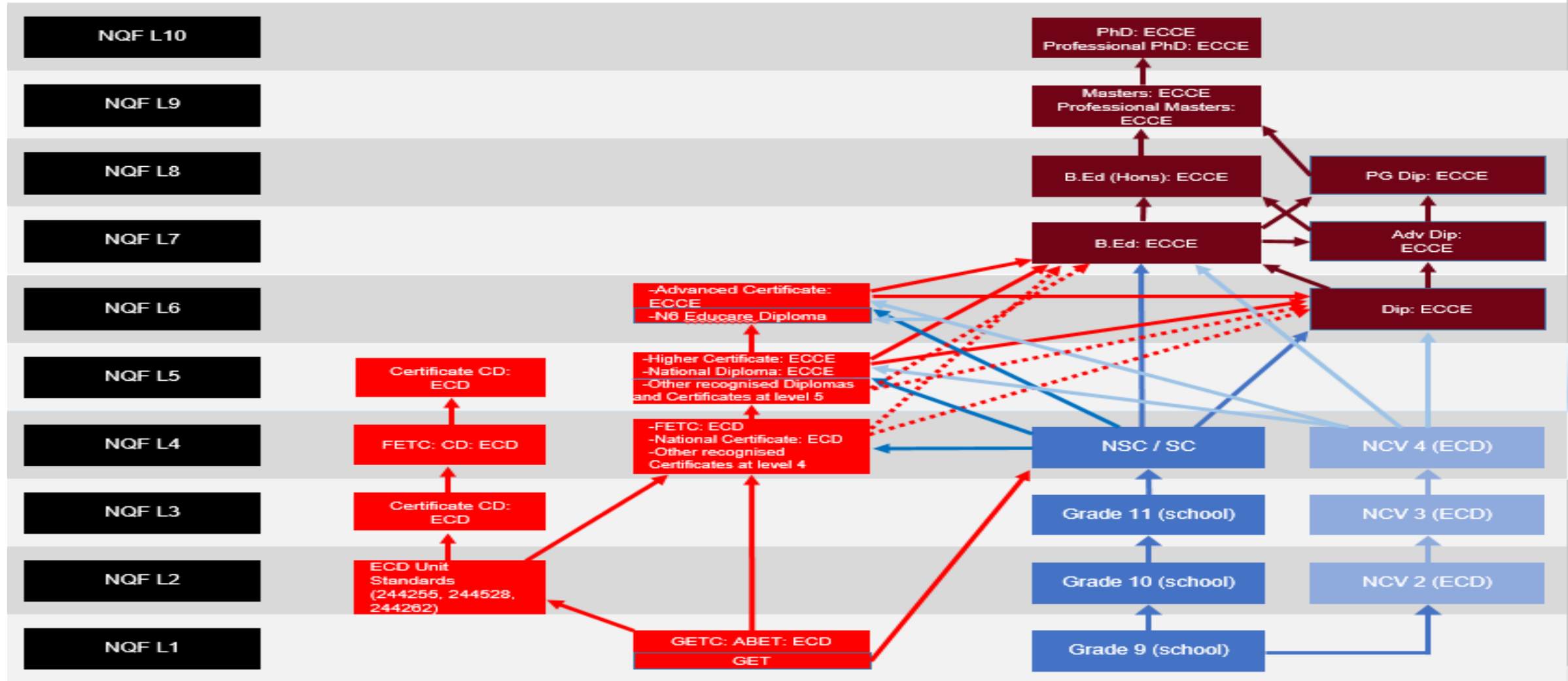
Flexible Learning Pathways in SA

UNESCO-SAQA, 2020 (Chile, Finland, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Morocco, SA, UK)

- RPL
- CAT
- Extended Curriculum
- Supplemental Instruction
- Extended time-tabling (evenings, weekends, repeats, block)
- Part-time
- Blended-learning
- Work integrated learning
- Student support

  (Library/ Computer lab hours, mentoring, partnering, transport, Fairy Godmother)

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

3. Legislative framework

NQF Legislation & Policy

DHET Policies, Instruments

- NQF Act + Acts for HE, GENFET, SKILLS, TVET Colleges, Community Colleges, White Paper: PSET (NPPSET + NQF Improvement Plan + 2017 Draft Open Learning Policy)
- **2016** RPL Coordination and Funding Policy (+ Reporting)
- **2017** Articulation Policy (+ Reporting)
- Career Development System Policy (NCAP Portal, Helpdesks) (Since 2009)

NQF Policy Suite, Instruments (SAQA)

- NQF Level Descriptors with focus on learning outcomes, **2012**
- Registering qualifications and part-qualifications (Registration) 2013, 2020, **2022**
- Recognising professional bodies (Recognition) 2012, 2020, 2021, 2022, **2023**
- Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL] (Reporting, NLRD) 2013, 2016, **2019**
- Credit Accumulation and Transfer [CAT] (Reporting) 2014, **2021**
- Assessment (DBE, DHET Statistics) **2014**
- Evaluation of foreign qualifications (Evaluation, Verification) **2017**
- Verification, Misrepresentation (Public lists) **Forthcoming**

Quality Council Policies, Instruments

- Standard setting, Quality assurance, Accreditation, RPL, CAT, assessment (Accreditation)

Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (As amended, 2022)

Title, Field and Sub-field

Level

Credits

Articulation

International Comparability

Rationale and Purpose

RPL and Entry Requirements

Integrated Assessment

ELOs and AACs

Rules of Combination

4. Examples of good practice

Documented good practice

- Portfolio Development Course (PDC)
- Whole-HEI (Centralised RPL Office)
- Dual processes
- Individualised approach
- Online RPL platforms
- Artisan RPL (ARPL)
- RPL at Workers' Colleges
- SAQA RPL initiative for refugees / asylum seekers

Walters 2015a, 2015b / Cooper & Ralphs 2016 / SAQA Bulletin 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023 / SAQA-DUT 2018, 2020 / UNESCO-SAQA 2020 / Bolton & Matsau 2021

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Strengthening articulation

- **Unfurling PSET (UPSET)**
  - ❖ Articulation & RPL Hubs
  - ❖ Developing jointly offered qualifications
  - ❖ Tracking transitioning TVET students

- **Strengthening learning pathways**
  - ❖ (1) CommDev (2) CYC (3) ECD (4) Engineering (5) Environmental Activists (6) Tourism (7) Work at Height

- **Flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP)**
  - ❖ (1) Admin systems (2) Staff systems (3) Student systems (4) Curriculum and assessment systems
  - ❖ (a) policy (b) address blockages (c) incentivize (d) leadership (e) resources

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

5. Enablers, Challenges, Successes

Articulation (Learning Pathway) Enablers

1. Collaborative relationships

2. Using / advocating the NQF

3. Developing / implementing MoU & MoA

4. Inclusive admission criteria / flexible access (RPL, CAT)

5. Quality teaching & learning / flexible provision

6. Career advice at early & key points

7. Focusing on <u>particular</u> pathways

8. Critical resources

9. Articulation research

RPL Enablers

1. **Knowing how to implement** (Implementation models)
2. **Knowing how to quality assure** (Quality assurance processes)
3. **Resources** – human, contextual, financial

RPL/ CAT challenges

- Time consuming nature (complex processes; esp. CAT)

- Inconsistent application (multiple interpretations)

- Costs of RPL

- Perceived loss of quality

- Lack of trust between institutions (CAT processes)

- Poor record keeping

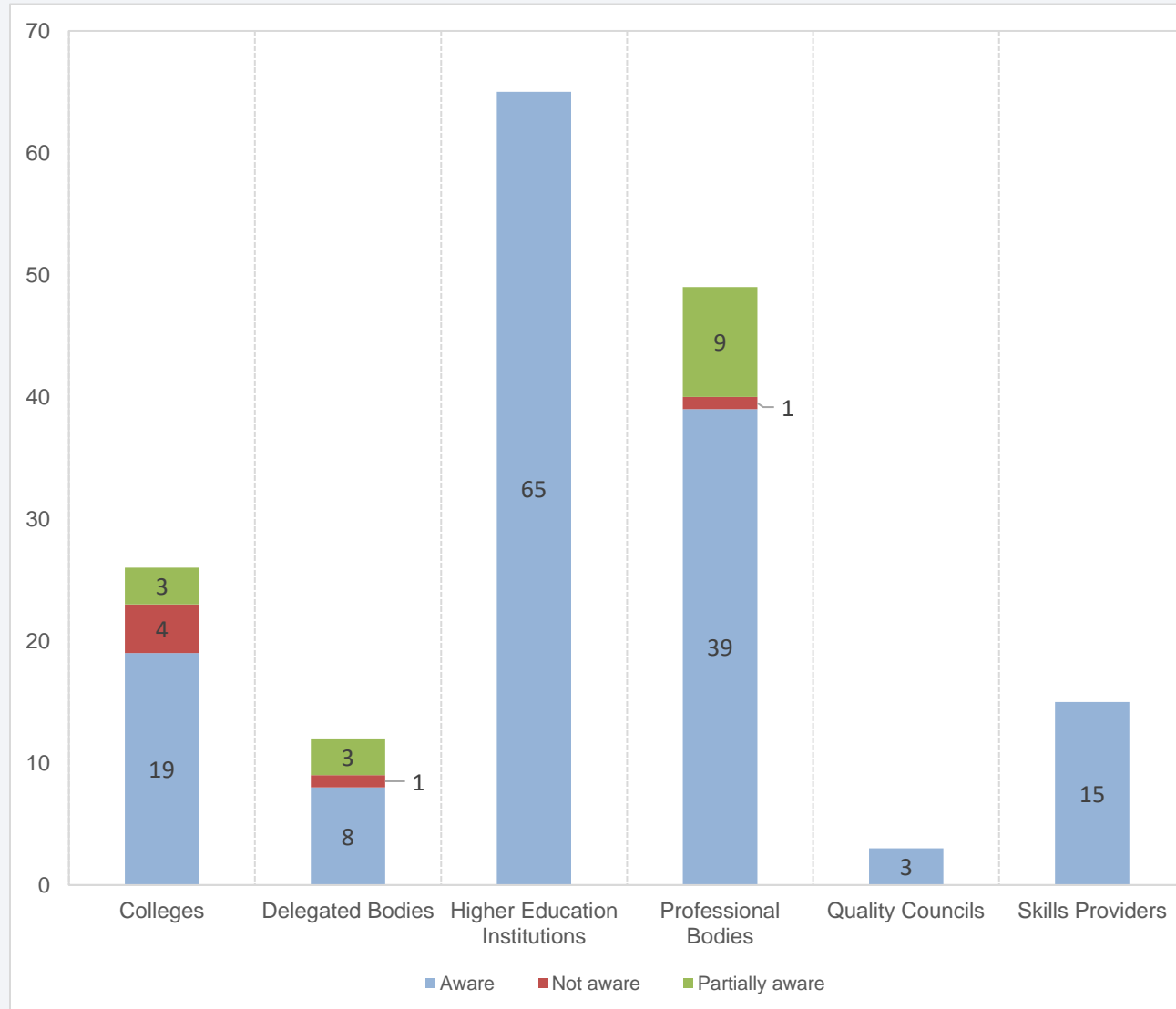- Capacity (inexperienced assessors, poorly-prepared candidates, lack of understanding of RPL/ CAT)

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Successes

- RPL/CAT Successes:
  - *Facilitates access to the system*
  - *Facilitates mobility*
  - *Led to improved administrative processes, enhanced systems and procedures*
  - *Helped to provide personalized assistance for learners*
  - *Aided student retention*

"*RPL has given many students the opportunity to pursue tertiary education who might otherwise not have had the opportunity to do so. Students who have been admitted in accordance with an RPL process have in most cases performed very well on the relevant programme. The programmes in respect of which RPL for access has predominantly featured are the Advanced Certificate in Project Management and the Advanced Diploma.*" – **PvtH51**

6. Implementation and impact

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

Policy Awareness

Chart legend: Aware, Not aware, Partially aware

Data by category:
- Colleges: Aware 19, Not aware 4, Partially aware 3
- Delegated Bodies: Aware 8, Not aware 1, Partially aware 3
- Higher Education Institutions: Aware 65
- Professional Bodies: Aware 39, Not aware 1, Partially aware 9
- Quality Councils: Aware 3
- Skills Providers: Aware 15

- 88% of respondents were aware of national RPL and CAT policies. 3% unaware, 9% aware of just one of two.

- Respondents referred to the national RPL and CAT Policies; Ministerial RPL Policy and Policies of the three QCs.

- **High levels of awareness; generally positive impact, as entities continue to use the national policies as a guide. There are calls for advocacy and further simplifying of certain**

"No I am not aware of it; however, I am aware that each SETA has its own RPL policy" – **QDF5.**

"Partially. More so the RPL Policy than the CAT policy" – **PB32.**

Policy Implementation

Q: "*Please describe RPL/CAT structures and/or processes used in your institution?*" (n ~ 135 to 145)

- Broad descriptions in line with national policies
- Step-by-step/ detailed processes outlined in institutional policies
- Document review shows RPL appears more established than CAT:
  - In HEIs, some distinction in processes followed for RPL for exemption and access
  - RPL for designations awarded through a PoE , assessments or both
  - CAT and RPL policies usually written together in Colleges
  - No CAT structures in place for 30 of 42 Professional Bodies and 7 of 14 skills providers

- **Overall, there has been notable progress in implementing the national policies.**

- **There is a robust policy framework in place and most stakeholders have aligned their policies to the national policies.**

- **RPL is entrenched in the system, elements around CAT and how it is implemented remain ambiguous/incomplete.**

Structures/Processes	Colleges (n=26)		HEIs (n=68)		PBs (n=49)		SDPs (n=15)	
	RPL	CAT	RPL	CAT	RPL	CAT	RPL	CAT
Detailed process exists	8	3	42	32	14	2	3	1
External process only	1	3				2	1	
Internal process guided by external Policies	1	2	3	6	4	2	4	1
No structures/processes	5	5		3	5	32	3	6
Partial process'	3	3	21	22	23	4	2	6
	18	16	66	63	46	42	13	14

Policy Impact

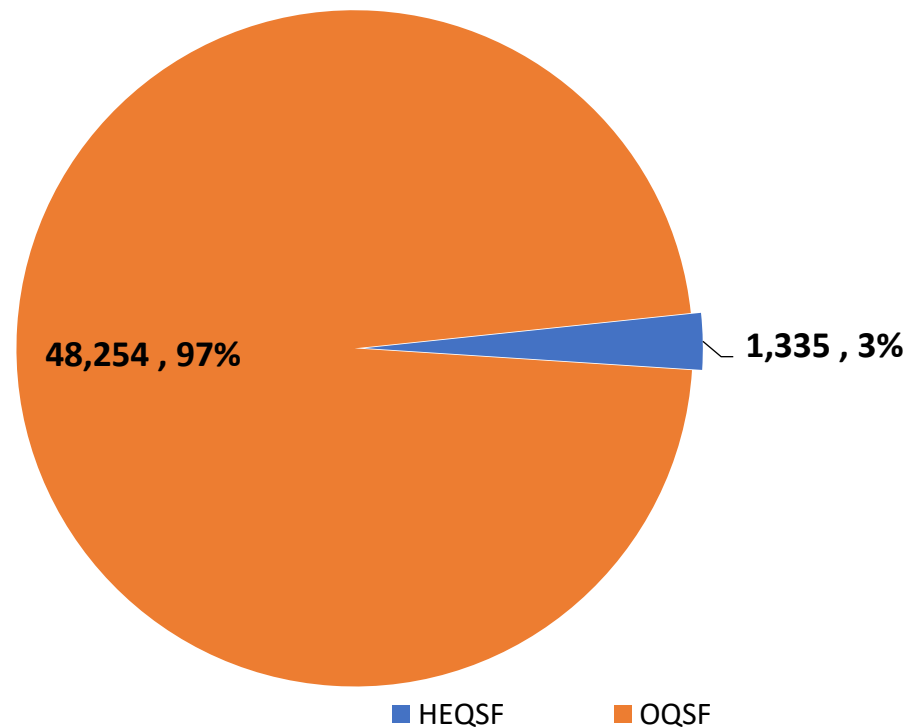| Themes	No. of comments	Selected examples	Respondent
Inform organisational policies and practices	87	"It has provided guidance for our internal RPL process."	PB2
Facilitated/widened student mobility and access	49	"In our postgraduate programmes, it has allowed wider access to students who would not have had access to the institution otherwise. In the undergraduate programmes, CAT and RPL have benefitted students to enter 2nd year of the programme, rather than starting from 1st year."	PvtH8
Aided with the administrative system	10	"The national policy principles have been used to update the…student administrative systems and faculty processes"	PubH6
Aided/assisted with capacity building	10	"Create more training and employment opportunities "	SETA5
Created anxiety	6	" It created anxiety amongst staff members, that is academic and admin, within the multiple Brands and Campuses ....since they were generally not conversant with the construct of RPL and some members portrayed negative opinions on the validity of the RPL theory".	PvtH19
		"The contestations regarding some aspects of the RPL and CAT policies have not been helpful and have generated unnecessary confusion in the higher education sector"	QC1
Little/no impact	35	"A little – they are not really applicable to the work of the QDF"	QDF1

- **Positive policy impact**

- The fact that the national policies have helped inform institutional practices is a proof of how widespread the implementation and impact is.
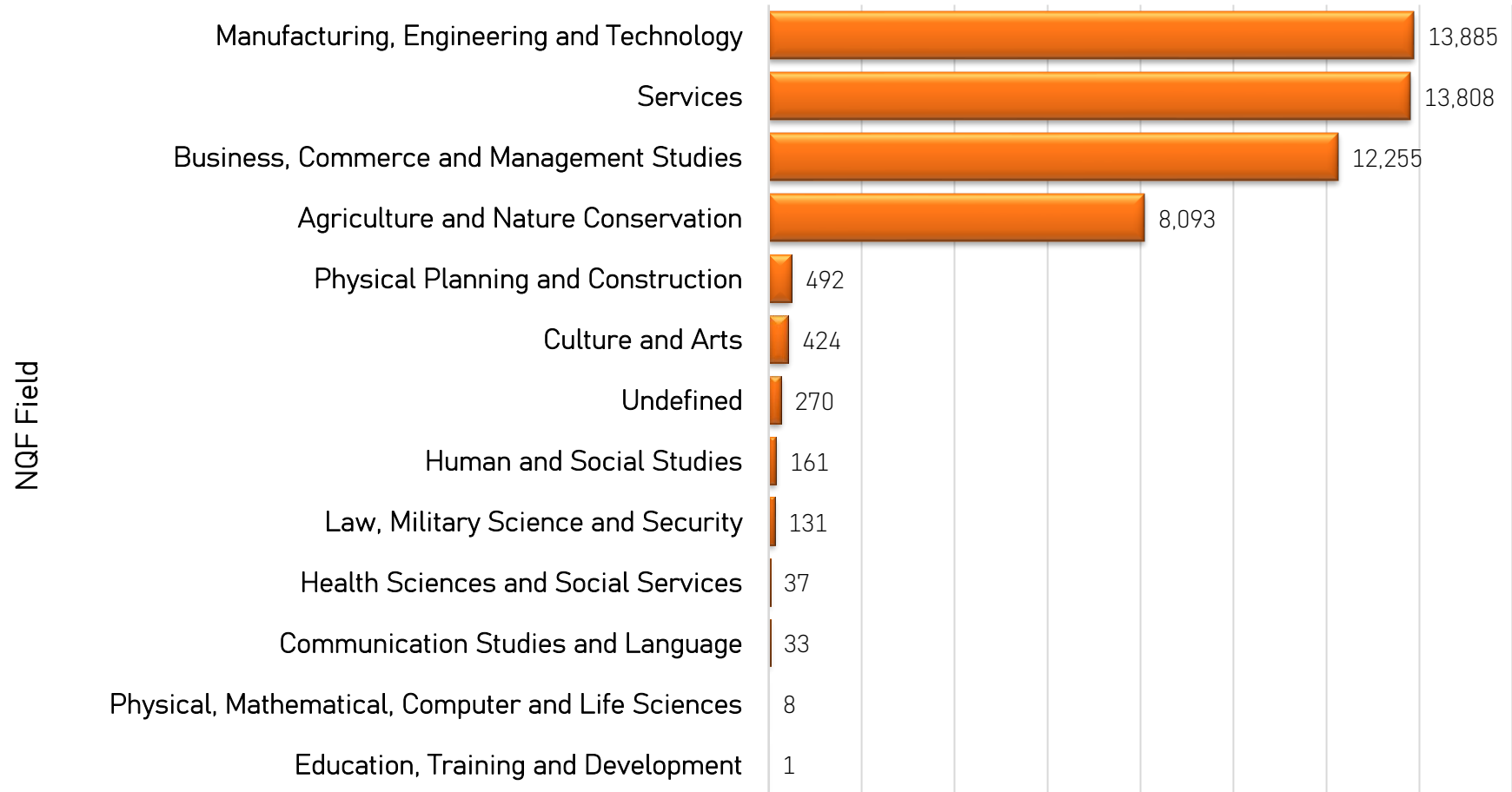
7. Data and data gaps

Learner Achievements through RPL

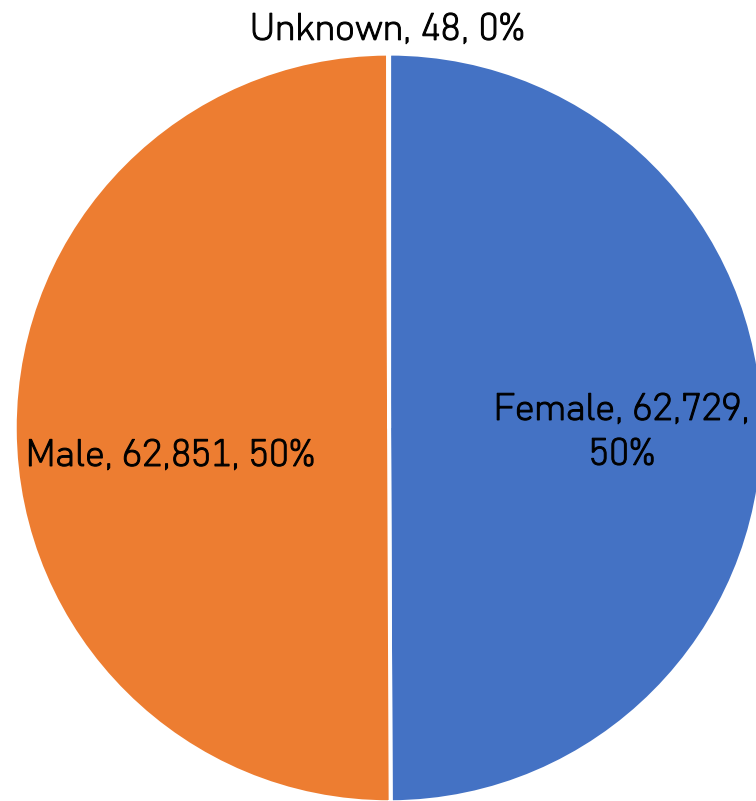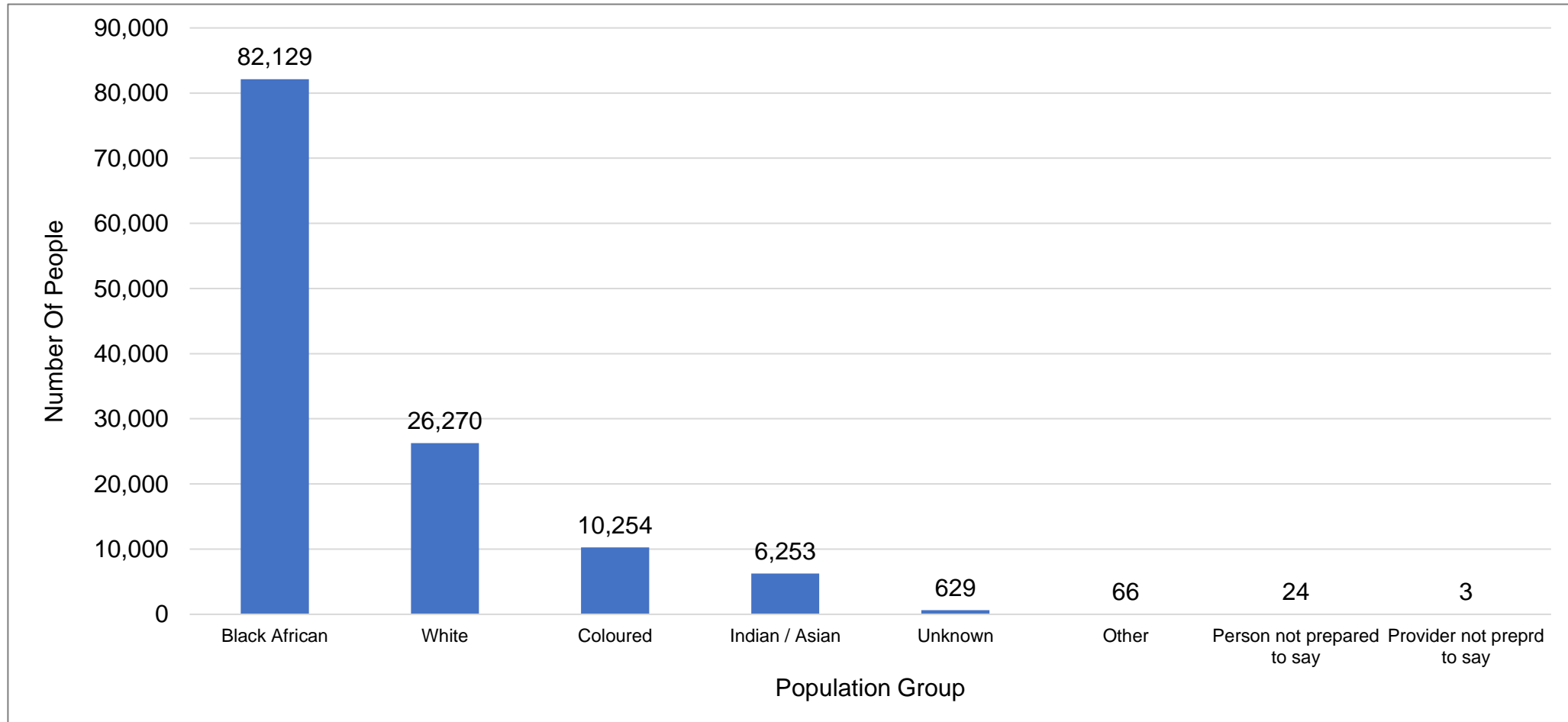|	Summary RPL Data	Total
Learners	Number of Learners who have achieved anything via RPL	125 626
	Number of Learners who achieved one or more Qualifications via RPL	42 890
	Number of Learners who achieved one or more Unit Standards via RPL	111 208
Records of Achievement	Total Qualification Achievements through RPL	49 598
	Total Unit Standards (part-qualification) Achievements through RPL	2 005 864
Qualifications	Number of Qualifications achieved through RPL	258

RPL achievements by NQF Sub-Framework

48,254 , 97%   1,335 , 3%

■ HEQSF   ■ OQSF

RPL achievements by NQF Field

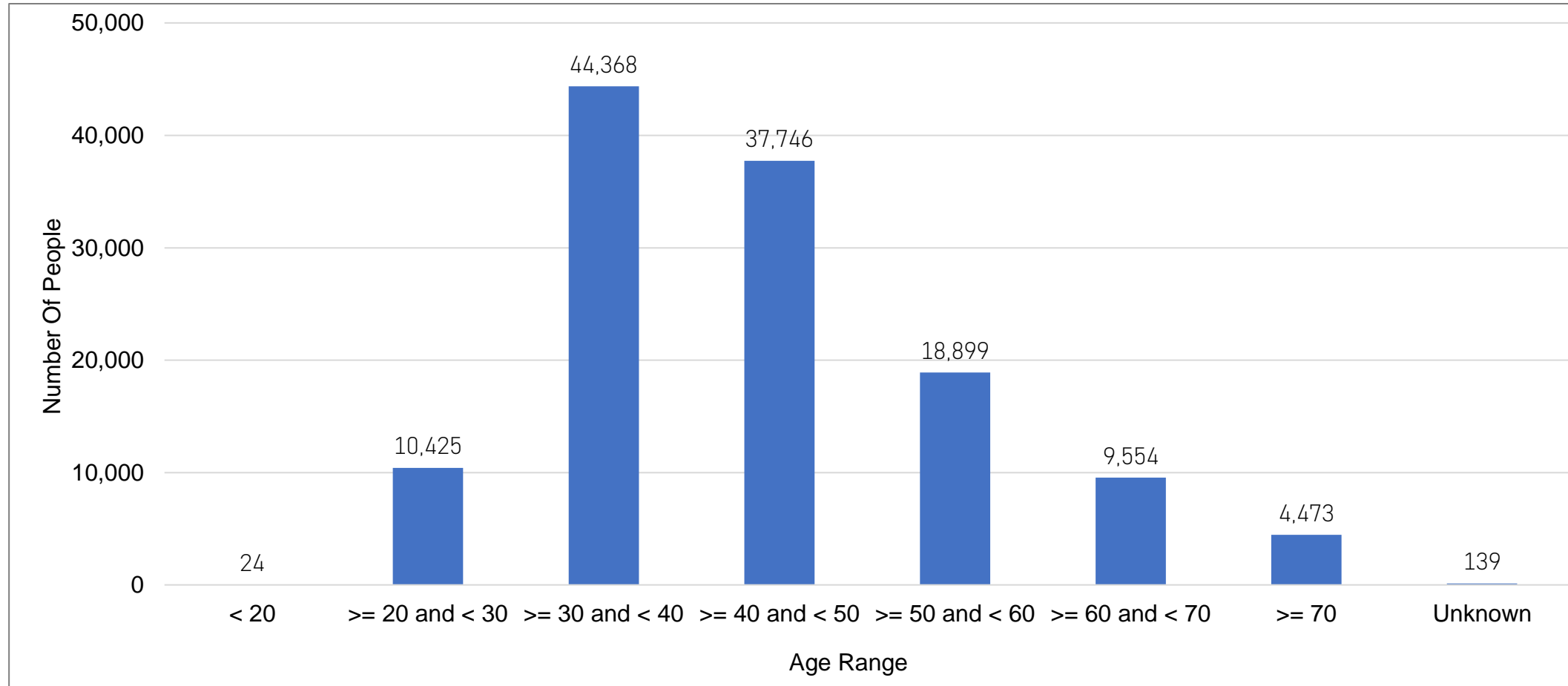| NQF Field	Value
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology	13,885
Services	13,808
Business, Commerce and Management Studies	12,255
Agriculture and Nature Conservation	8,093
Physical Planning and Construction	492
Culture and Arts	424
Undefined	270
Human and Social Studies	161
Law, Military Science and Security	131
Health Sciences and Social Services	37
Communication Studies and Language	33
Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences	8
Education, Training and Development	1

RPL Demographics: Gender

RPL Demographics: Equity

RPL Demographics: Age Ranges

Professional designations via RPL

- Professional bodies currently recognized by SAQA **= 103**

- Professional designations of these bodies **= 386**

- Professional designations achieved via an RPL route **= 18**

- **Statutory and non-statutory** professional bodies have submitted to SAQA designation achievements via an RPL route

People, validation and power: democracy in action?

8. Closing comments

Closing comments

- In closing, it is noted that **commitment to flexible learning pathways** (RPL, CAT, policy, implementation) **is embedded** in the SA system for education, training, development, and work.

- **Going forward, the priorities are to:**

❖ Set and work towards RPL targets (e.g. roll out RPL in the informal sector, targeting TVET Colleges – Kenyan model)

❖ Intensify communications and sharing good practice

❖ Develop RPL and CAT guidelines

❖ Enhance RPL and CAT record keeping / data management

THANK YOU

SAQA
SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY