



**Assessing the Implementation and  
Impact of the National Recognition of  
Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit  
Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)  
Policies, and other Elements of  
Flexibility in South African Education  
and Training**

**The 2021 NQF Impact Study Report**

**March 2023**

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this publication are based on the research conducted for the purpose stated in the report and are only those of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) once the SAQA Board has approved the report.

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## ACRONYMS

AQP	Assessment Quality Partner
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CET	Community Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DQP	Development Quality Partner
GFTEQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NAMB	National Artisan Moderation Body
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQFMIS	National Qualifications Framework Management Information System
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
QDF	Qualifications Development Facilitator
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDP	Skills Development Provider
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

## **FOREWORD**

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a democratic tool that has achieved remarkable success in its 25-year existence, and one that continues to achieve its objectives of enabling redress, access, mobility, progression, quality learning, and transparency in education and training.

As the country and the rest of the world navigate a post-pandemic era filled with new approaches, new technologies and new ways of doing and learning, the relevance of the NQF, and its capacity to tackle the challenges of the new era are being explored. Current debates on digital credentialing, micro-credentials, and the general move towards recognising all forms of learning - whether formal, informal, or non-formal - forces us to think ahead and help us to redefine our focus and outlook on how the NQF can enable equitable change.

While SAQA continues to lead the research and engagements around these topical issues, the emphasis on the existing pillars that support the NQF such as RPL, CAT and flexible pathways towards lifelong learning should not be lost. The 2021 NQF Impact Study examines the implementation and impact of the national Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policies, which are critical in supporting flexible learning provision, and other elements of flexibility in the system.

I trust that the NQF partners, stakeholders, and the public in general, will find this report useful as these findings and recommendations are important, not just for the continued advancement and implementation of the policies that are the primary focus of this research, but for the benefit of all learners in the country.

**Ms Nadia Starr**  
**Chief Executive Officer,**  
**The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

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The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as the custodian of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF), conducts research on issues of importance related to the development and implementation of the NQF as part of its mandate. Since the promulgation of the NQF Act in 2008, SAQA has conducted three NQF Impact Studies which focused on the work of SAQA, the Quality Councils, and the impact of the NQF objectives and select NQF policies, respectively.

This fourth NQF Impact Study builds on the previous impact studies and assesses the implementation and impact of the national Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy, the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policy, as well as other system flexibility initiatives undertaken by a wide range of NQF stakeholders. As the system diversifies the routes to achieving qualifications, part qualifications and the awarding of designations, the findings from this study will form a baseline for deepening RPL and CAT implementation and inform further policy alignment.

The following research questions are addressed in the 2021 NQF Impact Study:

1. To what extent and how, are RPL, CAT, and student support implemented in public and private HEIs and Colleges? What are the successes and challenges?
2. What are current professional body activities regarding RPL and candidate support?
3. What other means are entities using to support learners, learning, candidates and professional development, and make the NQF system flexible?
4. What advice do entities have, regarding RPL, CAT, learner and candidate support?
5. What RPL and CAT data are available in the system?

## **Methodology**

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The 2021 NQF Impact Study employed a mixed-methods research design. The primary tool for data collection was a survey questionnaire consisting of a mixture of structured and unstructured questions, which generated both qualitative and quantitative data. Fieldwork commenced in December 2019 and the data collection was formally closed in February 2021, owing to delays brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the survey and a total of 173 NQF partners/stakeholders (respondents) participated in it. To aid the analysis of the survey data, the partners and stakeholders were categorised into six stakeholder groups, namely: Delegated bodies, Colleges, Higher Education Institutions, Professional Bodies, Quality Councils and Skills Development Providers. To complement the data from the survey and to triangulate the results, a document review of various policies and guideline documents and an analysis of relevant quantitative data in the NQF Management Information System (NQFMIS) were conducted.

The qualitative data were analysed using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Using an inductive approach, thematic analysis was applied to the unstructured responses, and the responses were coded into broad themes based on the research objectives and survey questions. The themes and sub-themes from the original data were written up to ensure that the initial feedback was not lost in translation. Microsoft Excel was used to compile graphs and tables where applicable.

The analysis reflected the following broad thematic areas:

- Policy awareness,
- Policy implementation,
- Policy impact,
- Policy improvement,
- Flexibility elements, and
- Understanding relevant data.

## **Findings**

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The responses from the different questions by each stakeholder group were considered.

- When asked if they were **aware of the national RPL and CAT policies**, 88% of the respondents stated that they were aware of the national policies; 3% mentioned that they were unaware of the policies and 9% were partially<sup>1</sup> aware of the two policies. There were generally high levels of awareness and a positive impact of the national policies, as entities continue to use the national policies as a guide.
- Respondents were asked to describe the **RPL and CAT structures, processes and rules used in their institutions**. Stakeholders described the processes in detail, with varying degrees of explanations on how the processes were implemented. A review of the submitted institutional policies and related documents shows that while RPL is entrenched in the system, elements around CAT and how it is implemented remain ambiguous and incomplete. More than half of the respondents indicated that they used a combination of the national policies and their internal policies as a guideline during implementation.
- Overall, there has been substantial progress in implementing the RPL and CAT national policies. There is a robust policy framework in place and most stakeholders have aligned their institutional policies to these two policies. Concerning **aspects of RPL policy implementation**, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Professional Bodies were asked for their opinions on aspects of the policies namely: the **“50% rule”**, which states that no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required by the certifying institution for any higher education qualification, and the **“10% rule”**, which states that not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process.
  - For the 50% rule, most of the comments were generally positive, with respondents saying they thought the rule was “reasonable”, “fair”,

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<sup>1</sup> Only aware of one of the two national policies.

“sensible”, “relevant and necessary” and “satisfactory”. Asked if they would consider exempting students from more than 50% of the curriculum, about 60% of the respondents indicated that they support the rule and would not consider exemptions, about a quarter (25%) of the respondents indicated that they do not support the rule and 15% had no position on the matter.

- Regarding the 10% rule, the majority (88%) of HEIs and Professional Bodies indicated that they were aware of this rule. When asked if they would ever want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort, HEIs generally thought that the 10% cap was limiting and they would support instances to RPL more learners. Respondents who did not support the 10% cap cited a possible lack of quality if more than 10% were considered.
- Most respondents reported a positive impact when responding to the question on how the national RPL and CAT policies have **impacted** their organisation/ institution. Over half of the respondents noted that both policies had helped to inform, and provide guidelines for, organisational policies and practices. Other positive notable impacts of the national policies include the facilitation of student mobility, capacity building and improvement of administrative systems and processes. Some respondents noted that the policies had little or no impact on their organisation.
- Responses to the question on **what entities thought of the national policies**, were mixed – with some respondents describing the policies as very helpful, useful, informative, relevant, and fit for purpose. On the other hand, some respondents mentioned that the national policies were constraining, difficult to implement, not straightforward and needed simplification.

Respondents were asked to describe successes and challenges related to RPL, CAT and flexible learning provision:

- **Reported successes** included enabling learning pathways across faculties, institutions and/or different geographical areas, improved administrative processes, enhanced systems and procedures, personalised assistance for learners and enhanced student retention.

There were fewer reported successes related to CAT, compared to RPL, thus implying that RPL is more established than CAT.

- **Reported challenges** included a lack of cooperation and trust between institutions, the time-consuming nature and complexity of processes, the burden of responsibility on candidates, poor record management, a perception of ‘closed mindsets’, loss of quality, and the associated costs.
- Regarding **student/learner support**, blended learning, mentorship programs, Extended Curriculum Programs (ECP) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) were reported among a variety of ways in which **flexible learning pathways** (FLPs), and flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) were being implemented.
- When asked if their organisations were submitting **RPL data** to the national databases, 49 of the 66 HEIs (74%) indicated that they did not submit RPL data to any of the national databases; 13 (20%) said they did, while four respondents (6%) indicated that they were not sure. Databases that were mentioned include the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), the Higher Education Quality Committee Information System (HEQCIS) and the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD).

## **Recommendations and conclusion**

The 2021 NQF impact study speaks to SAQA’s five-year strategic focus on “A dynamic NQF that is responsive, and adapts to, and supports the changing needs of, lifelong learning”. Notwithstanding the low response rate to the survey, the results provide a snapshot of policy implementation and impact realities in the NQF system in South Africa. The picture that emerged shows high levels of awareness of the national policies for RPL and CAT, and implementation initiatives throughout the system – highlighting some leading practices and providing examples that show moderate or partial successes and challenges.

The recommendations from the study are as follows:

1. Developmental targets in the **three NQF Sub-Framework contexts should be set**, where the QCs report to SAQA on progress in achieving these targets. Such targets could include the following: aligned organisational RPL and CAT policies, collecting RPL and CAT data in a format compatible with the NQFMIS, recording and documenting successful cases of RPL, CAT, and other flexible learning practices, advocating and sharing information on the implementation of RPL and CAT and reporting on all this work, annually, to SAQA.
2. SAQA should lead and work with the QCs to **intensify system-wide communication around RPL, CAT, and FLPs through a systematic campaign of webinars and workshops**, including national campaigns to workshop and share successful initiatives, providing opportunities and platforms for documenting leading flexible learning models and best practices, and driving a system-wide capacity building initiative for RPL and CAT, etc.
3. SAQA, after consultation with the QCs, needs to **develop broad guidelines for the implementation of RPL and CAT**. The QCs need to develop the corresponding and detailed guidelines for use in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts – to align all guidelines.
4. **The NQF partners need to update and simplify aspects of the national policies that are confusing**. A key policy priority should be to enable the consistent application of CAT and RPL by including guidelines in the policies to help alleviate the challenges around onerous and time-consuming processes. An example of this could be to include requirements/standards in the CAT Policy, which will make the transfer of credits between various institutions accredited by the different QCs possible.
5. **SAQA and the NQF partners need to prioritise record-keeping and data management practices regarding achievements awarded through RPL and CAT**. This includes developing and publishing data requirements and data reporting guidelines, making provision for CAT data to be reported, recorded, and tracked at a national level, and educating stakeholders on what constitutes RPL and CAT data.

6. The DHET in collaboration with SAQA and the QCs should **explore dynamic funding models** that not only speak to the challenges highlighted by the stakeholders in the study but also progressively support the implementation of RPL in education and training institutions, including when RPL is for access, advanced standing and/or credit.
  
7. SAQA could **use the findings of this study as a baseline for subsequent research**, where the survey is repeated with the same stakeholder groups so that progress can be assessed. Including the voices of the students in the subsequent instalments of the research will provide a stronger basis for triangulation.
  
8. SAQA needs to **use the stakeholder responses** to substantiate its inputs to the CHE's HEQSF Review Report.

The results from the 2021 NQF Impact Study could inform other activities in the NQF system. Firstly, the results speak directly to the implementation of the NQF objectives of redress, access, progression, quality and transparency. Secondly, the study serves as a status check for SAQA, its partners and stakeholders, regarding their responsibilities as outlined in the DHET's policies for RPL and articulation and the SAQA-developed NQF policy suite. Thirdly, the results inform SAQA's internal structures regarding national and international qualifications, NQF advocacy and NQF data. Lastly, the study plays a developmental role as SAQA engages with a range of NQF stakeholders in their implementation activities. In this, the study has great potential to move the system further towards a shared understanding of the investigated aspects.

The 2021 Impact Study was conducted at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which renewed discussions in the NQF space on topics relating to digitalization and micro-credentials amongst others. The current study did not consider these dimensions, but as SAQA continues to lead research and engagements on contemporary issues, future instalments of the NQF Impact Study must consider these emerging trends that are linked to Qualifications Frameworks.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008 (Section 13[k]{i}) mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to among others: "Conduct or commission investigations on issues of importance to the development and implementation of the NQF, including periodic studies of the impact of the NQF on South African education, training and employment". The Act (2008: Section 13[k]{ii}) further requires SAQA to "publish findings of the investigations".

SAQA has conducted three NQF impact studies since the promulgation of the NQF Act in 2008. The first of these studies was conducted in 2010 and focused on the impact of the then-recently promulgated NQF Act and reflected on the work of SAQA and the Quality Councils (QCs). The second NQF impact study was conducted in 2014 (SAQA, 2017). It featured contributions from the QCs and focused on the impact of the NQF objectives on the educational system. The work of SAQA and the QCs are governed by the NQF 'System of Collaboration' – a system which binds the key NQF partners in a respectful, consultative, collaborative supportive and coordinated approach. The third study in 2017 was also conducted jointly with the QCs and focused on the impact of select NQF policies on the work of the NQF partners and selected stakeholders (SAQA, 2019).

## 1.1. RATIONALE OF THE CURRENT IMPACT STUDY

The study speaks to SAQA's need to understand the impact of its responsibilities as laid out in various policies. These responsibilities include:

- (a) providing overarching leadership to the QCs regarding the implementation of their NQF Sub-Framework RPL policies (DHET, 2016: Clause 34[b]; SAQA 2019: Clause 18[b]);
- (b) providing leadership to the QCs in terms of articulation processes and practices (DHET, 2017: Clause 19[c]);
- (c) providing advice, guidance, and support to the National RPL Coordinating Mechanism (DHET, 2016: Clause 34[c]; SAQA, 2019: Clause 18[d]).
- (d) addressing systemic challenges as they occur to produce a well-articulated system (DHET, 2017: Clause 19[e]);



- (e) coordinating the work of the QCs to ensure that articulation conflicts when they occur are eliminated (DHET, 2017: Clause 19[g]);
- (f) supporting the communications and advocacy initiatives of the National RPL Coordinating Mechanism as required (DHET, 2016: Clause 34[d]; SAQA, 2019: Clause 18[e]);
- (g) overseeing research to improve CAT in collaboration with the QCs (SAQA, 2014: Clause 23[h]);
- (h) conducting sector-wide research towards a feasible, sustainable model for the quality assurance of RPL across education and training institutions (DHET 2016, Clause 34[e]; SAQA, 2019: Clause 18[f]);
- (i) ensuring that the QCs develop certification policies which include RPL as a route to achieve qualifications and part qualifications (DHET, 2016: Clause 34[g]);
- (j) recognising professional bodies and registering professional designations that meet requirements in the Policy and Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Bodies and the Registration of Professional Designations, including an RPL route for the awarding of designations (SAQA, 2019: Clause 18[c]); and
- (k) advising the Minister (DHET, 2017: Clause 19[f])

One of the key findings from the 2017 Impact study was that “legislation and policy need to take account of the lived reality of the sector that they seek to regulate” (SAQA,2017). Thus, the 2021 NQF Impact Study seeks to assess the implementation and impact of the national Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policies, and system flexibility initiatives by a wide range of NQF stakeholders<sup>2</sup>.

The study also speaks to the need for a deep understanding of the enablers, barriers and benefits associated with these policies and initiatives. In line with the NQF objectives of redress, access, progression, quality and transparency, the intention is that the findings of this study will form a baseline that expands the understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> QCs; the public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), colleges and community/ adult education colleges; Development Quality Partners (DQPs), Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs), Quality Development Facilitators (QDFs); Skills Development Providers (SDPs) and SAQA-recognised professional bodies.

RPL and CAT implementation as some of the routes to achieving qualifications, part qualifications and the awarding of designations in the system.

## **1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are to assess the following:

- the awareness of the national RPL and CAT policies;
- the extent to which, and how national RPL and CAT policies are implemented and managed;
- the implementation and management of other aspects of flexibility in the system;
- the successes and challenges regarding RPL, CAT, and flexibility elements; and
- the existence of RPL and CAT data.

## **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The 2021 NQF impact study seeks to address the following research questions:

- To what extent and how are RPL, CAT, and learner support implemented by public and private providers of education and training? What are the successes and challenges?
- What are current professional body activities regarding RPL and candidate support?
- What other means are entities using to support learners, learning, candidates, and professional development, and make the NQF system flexible?
- What advice do NQF entities have, regarding RPL, CAT, learner and candidate support?
- What RPL and CAT data are available in the system?

## **1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The structure of the report is as follows: Chapter 1 outlines the structure of the report. Chapter Two contains a review of the policies that make up the NQF policy suite, with a focus on RPL, CAT and system flexibility. The methods of data collection and analysis are described in Chapter Three, while the findings are presented and summarised in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five outlines the main conclusions and provides some recommendations.

## 2. CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT EXPLAINED

This section explains the concepts of RPL, CAT and system flexibility and gives an overview of national policy development in South Africa. It also gives a summary of the relevant NQF policies.

### 2.1. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL):

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as “the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purpose of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development” (SAQA, 2019). From this definition, the following RPL elements are highlighted (SAQA, 2014):

- a) **‘Prior knowledge and skills’**: refers to all forms of learning including formal, informal, and non-formal.
- b) **‘Made visible and mediated’** refers to a variety of processes through which different types of learning are made available for assessment. These processes include but are not limited to: conversations around learning that have taken place, the development of portfolios of evidence, and adult learning workshops that assist learners to translate their non-formal and informal learning into the forms required for formal assessment, online sessions, and others.
- c) **‘Assessment’** is against the formal outcomes and needs to be valid, reliable, transparent, fair, unbiased, credible, cover the range of competences needed for a qualification, be sensitive to language, and have integrity.
- d) **‘Alternative access and admission’** refer to the processes that can lead to admission to studies/ professional designations, for which the formal access requirements are not met.
- e) **‘Recognition and certification’** refer to processes that can lead to the recognition of competences for employment/ progression in employment or credit, and qualifications/ part-qualifications that can be awarded in whole or in part, via RPL.

Two main forms of RPL are recognised, RPL for access and RPL for credit. RPL for access provides a pathway into a programme of learning, professional designation,

employment, and career progression. RPL for credit allows for the awarding of credits for, or towards, a qualification or part-qualification that is registered on the NQF<sup>3</sup>.

The national RPL Policy (SAQA, 2019) identifies ten principles/elements for a holistic approach to RPL:

- a) The RPL process is multidimensional,
- b) The processes for RPL must be credible, quality-assured and consistent,
- c) Qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF must provide alternative entry requirements through RPL,
- d) The purpose and context of RPL determine the practices and outcomes of the RPL process,
- e) The focus (of RPL) is on what has been learned and not on the status of the site where the learning took place,
- f) Assessment is an integral feature of all forms of RPL,
- g) Awarded credit must be based on the assessed evidence of knowledge and skills,
- h) There must be no distinction between records of learning achievements awarded through RPL processes and those obtained through conventional means, other than what is required for data analysis,
- i) All RPL recognition data are published as aggregated data and do not divulge how the learner received recognition, and
- j) The quality assurance of RPL must be undertaken with the explicit intention to protect the integrity of processes and outcomes.

Additionally, the National RPL policy (SAQA 2019) makes it clear that for institutions and stakeholders to implement RPL, there are basic requirements that should be followed. These standards must, among other things, clearly define the duties and obligations of the organisations that provide RPL, establish and publish clear evaluation criteria, charge reasonable and equitable costs when necessary, ensure mediated processes, and produce fair and trustworthy assessments.

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<sup>3</sup> In the OQSF context, RPL encompasses two forms: RPL for access and RPL for credit and includes an additional component of candidates sitting for an External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA) as testing of competency and as a final requirement for RPL certification.

Each of the three Quality Councils that manage the three NQF Sub-Frameworks is charged with developing policies that align with the corresponding National policies<sup>4</sup>. The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) which is responsible for the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) has developed and implemented RPL Policies that are in line with the National RPL policy (DHET, 2016; SAQA, 2019). This policy has been implemented in the OQSF sector, with differences across providers (SAQA, 2017). While RPL policy development and implementation in the other Sub-Frameworks has been progressive and incremental, some challenges remain.

As the Quality Council responsible for the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), Umalusi, mainly due to lack of funding, is currently unable to implement the forms of RPL outlined in the National RPL policy. Umalusi thus continues to focus on its implementation of RPL for access until funding is available for implementing RPL for credit.

In the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) context, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) - the Quality Council responsible for quality assurance of the HEQSF, identifies three main challenges regarding RPL implementation and the alignment of its sub-Framework's RPL Policy to the National policy: firstly, while the national RPL policy provides for the awarding of full qualifications solely through RPL, the CHE's RPL policy (CHE, 2016), recommends the awarding of qualifications based on specific stipulations in the Higher Education Act (101 of 1997), some parts of which conflict with the NQF Act (67 of 2008). Secondly, the national RPL policy makes provision for RPL for credits, but the CHE RPL policy does not. Thirdly, in the CHE's RPL policy is the 'popular' "10% rule" which stipulates that "Not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process" (CHE, 2016). HEQSF stakeholders are being engaged around these issues in current CHE-led research towards the review of the HEQSF.

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<sup>4</sup> The South African NQF comprises three NQF Sub-Frameworks, each overseen by a Quality Council: the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

## **2.2. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER (CAT)**

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) refers to the process 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 (SAQA, 2021). Alternatively, CAT can be defined as an arrangement where the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace (SAQA, 2020).

CAT is based on five principles that guide all related work of the organisations and institutions responsible for developing, quality-assuring and/or offering qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF (SAQA, 2021). These principles are:

- a. **Transparency:** The rules, regulations and any register of precedents that inform decisions concerning CAT must be valid, fair, reliable, transparent, and available to learners before enrolment,
- b. **Articulation by design:** Possibilities for articulation pathways must be included in the design of new qualifications and part-qualification,
- c. **Access to credit accumulation, the recognition of credit, and credit transfer:** All institutions must, amongst other things, facilitate credit transfer and the bridging of theory /practice to enable access (at appropriate points) to the qualifications and part-qualifications they offer,
- d. **Quality comparison based on credible methods:** Institutions must enable adequate comparison mapping dependent on the availability of information on accumulated credits. The comparisons must also be based on credible methods, take the purpose, level and credits into account, and consider the degree of similarity between the content and outcomes for which credits have been awarded,
- e. **Support for supplementary work needed to address process gaps:** In cases where the comparison process finds overlaps of less than 80% between the content/outcomes of awarded credits compared to the subjects for which CAT is sought, the relevant authority may choose not to recognise the accumulated credit or may require the learner to do some supplementary work.

The responsibility of developing and implementing CAT is jointly held by the DHET, the DBE, SAQA, the QCs and all registered providers who are accredited to offer education and training in the country. The three Quality Councils each have CAT policies that were developed in line with the national CAT policy and that apply to their respective NQF Sub-Frameworks. While there are no material differences between the CAT Policies of the Quality Councils and the national CAT Policy, there is one part of the CHE's CAT policy that is not stipulated in the national policy and is topical. Also known as the "50% rule" or the "50% clause", this phrase specifies that "*a maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification*" (CHE, 2016).

A study of flexible learning pathways (Bolton et al., 2020) found that CAT was more common between public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) than between HEIs and colleges. The study also noted that fewer credit transfers were happening between the occupational sector and the HEIs.

### **2.3. FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS (FLPs)**

Flexibility in the context of the research encompasses flexibility in terms of admission criteria and processes; teaching, learning and assessment systems; lecturer and learner support systems, and the administration systems that support other elements of system flexibility (Walters, 2015a; 2015b). In short, it refers to the mechanisms or means by which learners choose when, where and how they learn - often referred to as the pace, place, and mode of learning. The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) defines Flexible Learning Pathways (FLPs) as an umbrella concept that meets the need of diverse students (IIEP, 2021). In other words, it involves the understanding of what entities do to make the education culture/climate more flexible.

In South Africa, FLPs are a collection of policies, structures and practices aimed at broadening access, redress and progression for learning and work and are recognised as enablers of lifelong learning (Bolton et al., 2020; DHET, 2017; Walters, 2015a, 2015b). Key instruments that support FLPs in the country include the National NQF Policies, the evaluation and verification of qualifications, the National Career Development the Service (CDS), the National Qualifications Framework Management



Information System<sup>5</sup> (NQFMIS) and the system of collaboration between NQF stakeholders.

Learning-and-work-pathways (known as 'articulation') are linked with FLPs and are understood in three ways:

- a) Systemic articulation: Systemic learning pathways comprising 'joined-up' qualifications, part-qualifications, professional designations, and other elements that are part of the system,
- b) Specific articulation: Comprising arrangements such as RPL, CAT, Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) or Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and others, and
- c) Individual learning pathways: supported by flexible responsive systems that enable students to navigate and transition across barriers they encounter.

Mechanisms that support flexible pathways include student support services, Flexible Learning and Teaching Practices (FLTPs), Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs), Supplemental Instruction (SI), extended timetabling, weekend/repeat classes, part-time and full-time studies, online and blended learning, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), extended library hours, mentoring, partnering, as well as assistance regarding transport and accommodation and funding, and others.

## **2.4. A SNAPSHOT OF NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AS CONTEXT**

Education and training in South Africa are governed by a comprehensive set of policies, at the centre of which is the NQF Act (RSA, 2008) and related legislation for the three Sub-Frameworks of the NQF. These policies are nested within other national policies and plans including the National Development Plan (NDP) (RSA, 2011a), the National Growth Plan (NGP) (RSA, 2011b), the Human Resources Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDS-SA) (RSA, 2009; 2018), the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013c) and its implementation-oriented Draft National Plan for Post School Education and Training (NPPSET) (DHET, 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> Also known as the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)

The NQF Act (RSA, 2008) mandates SAQA to, among other things, develop and implement policy and criteria for: the development, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications, assessments, RPL and CAT, as well as those recognising professional bodies and registering a professional designation. The Act (67 of 2008) further mandates the QCs to comply with any policies determined by the Minister<sup>6</sup>, while developing and implementing policies for quality assurance within their respective sub-frameworks. Professional bodies are also required to co-operate with the relevant QCs concerning qualifications and quality assurance in their occupational field.

Access to, and progression in, learning and work pathways are prioritised in the South African system for education, training, development, and work – and flexible learning-and-work pathways play key roles. Flexibility in the NQF system is achieved through the policy suite and related mechanisms at national and institutional levels, including those developed by NQF partners and stakeholders (SAQA-UNESCO, 2020).

## **2.5. NQF POLICY SUITE**

Extensive legislation and regulations have been promulgated in South Africa, yielding a rich policy suite (Figure 1) that has informed the education and training sector, and the NQF Act is at the center of the policies for this sector.

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<sup>6</sup> The Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation(M:HESI)

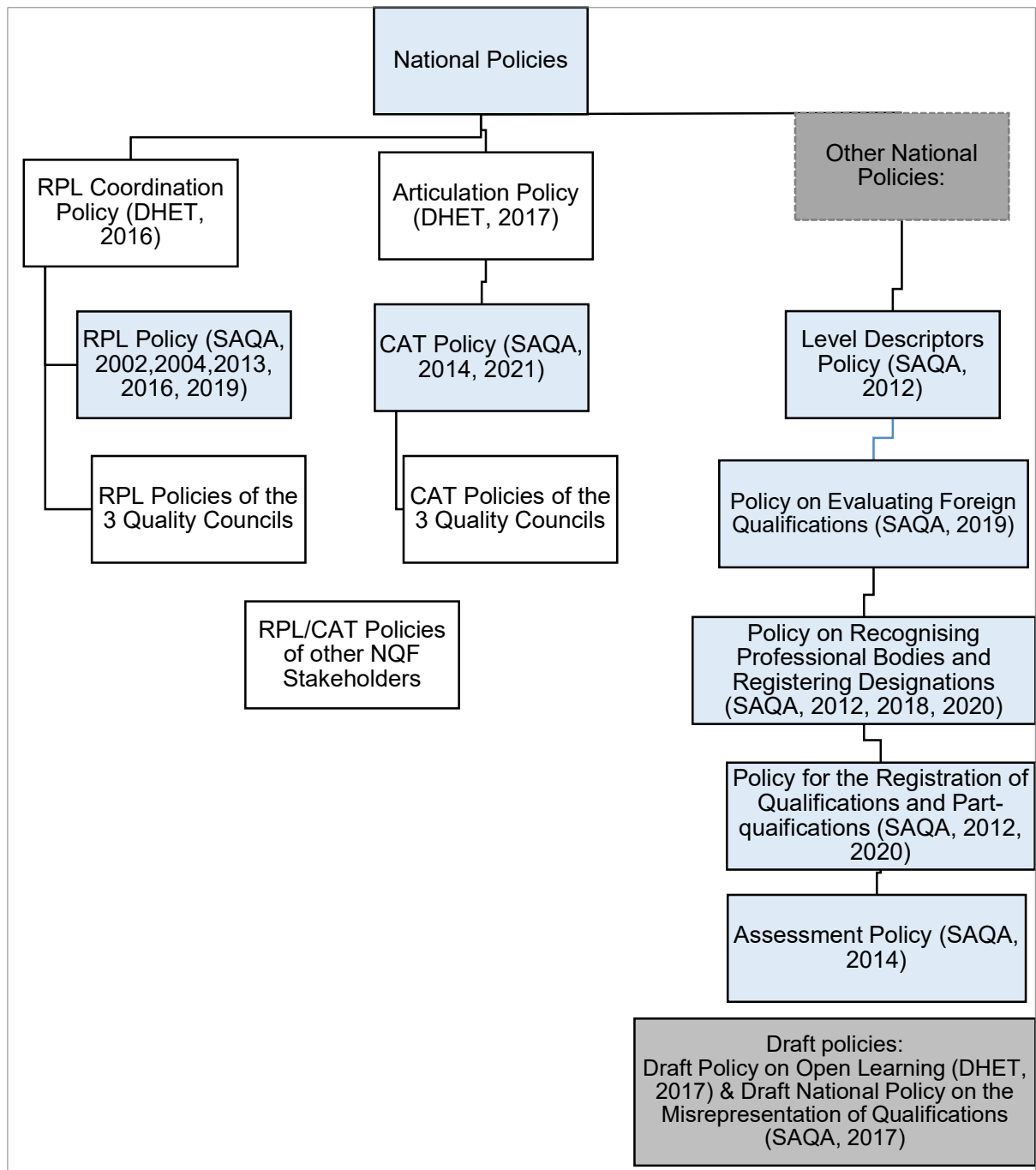


Figure 1: NQF Policy Suite

Although some of the policies were conceptualised in the SAQA Act (58 of 1995), they have since undergone reviews to align them to the NQF Act (67 of 2008). Between 2001 and 2021, SAQA developed, implemented, and updated some policies which have helped to further strengthen the NQF. This review process is cyclic and ongoing. A summary of the key policies that make up the NQF policy suite is given in the sections that follow – for easy reference in relation to the findings of this study.

### **2.5.1. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy**

The RPL Coordination Policy<sup>7</sup> (DHET, 2016) is a strategic national policy that was published in 2016 to provide an enabling environment for addressing the challenges and approaches to RPL implementation. The policy provides for the establishment of a national coordinating and funding mechanism for RPL in the country and is designed to strengthen the policy environment for the implementation of RPL, clarify the roles of key stakeholders regarding RPL and provide a high-level framework for the implementation of RPL.

### **2.5.2. The Articulation Policy for the Post-School Education and Training System of South Africa**

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) gazetted the Articulation Policy<sup>8</sup> for the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) System of South Africa in 2017. The policy is subject to the NQF Act and any revisions thereof, and according to DHET (2017), its overarching intentions are:

- i. To establish key articulation principles that enable the implementation of articulation and
- ii. To ensure that, among other things, articulation happens within and between the sub-frameworks of the NQF, and within and between qualifications and learning programmes offered by education and training institutions.

### **2.5.3. The National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

While RPL was implemented in ad-hoc ways before democracy in 1994, a more coherent RPL policy guiding RPL implementation has since emerged. SAQA first published a policy for RPL in 2002, followed by the 'Criteria and Guidelines for RPL' in 2003. Both documents were developed under the SAQA Act (58 of 1995). The 'National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning' was

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<sup>7</sup> Also known as the 'DHET RPL Policy' or the 'Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy'

<sup>8</sup> Also known as 'the Articulation Policy'

published in 2013, gazetted in 2014 and updated in 2016 to align with the DHET RPL Coordination Policy. This updated policy provided both the philosophical underpinning and operational strategies for the implementation of RPL in the country. In March 2019, the policy was amended to 'The National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (amended)' to further embed RPL in the national education and training agenda and ensure the clarity of roles and responsibilities of RPL role-players in the country (SAQA, 2019b). The policy provides more guidance on how RPL should be implemented and used in conjunction with the DHET's RPL Coordination Policy as well as other national policies.

#### **2.5.4. Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) within the NQF**

The first CAT policy was published in 2014 and was called the 'Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework' (SAQA, 2014b). The policy outlined the principles on which CAT was based and laid out the specific roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders. In 2020, SAQA reviewed the 2014 CAT policy to align it with the DHET Articulation Policy and include other criteria that were previously absent.

#### **2.5.5. Level Descriptors for the South African NQF**

Level descriptors are used in the development, generation, and evaluation of qualifications for registration on the NQF. Their purpose is to ensure coherence in the allocation of qualifications and part-qualifications to levels and to facilitate the comparability of national and international qualifications (SAQA, 2012). The level descriptors were published in November 2011 and were effective from December 2011.

#### **2.5.6. Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF**

This Policy describes the principles and criteria used to evaluate foreign qualifications within the context of the NQF. Published in 2018, the policy comprises two other policies: the SAQA Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Appeal Policy, which outlines

how SAQA receives and deals with appeals; and the SAQA Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Revocation Policy, which outlines the principles upon which decisions that are made in terms of recognising a foreign qualification are revoked.

#### **2.5.7. Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the NQF Act**

In 2012, SAQA published the 'Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008'. The policy was amended in 2018 (SAQA, 2018) to cater for the inclusion of certain definitions and clauses; and revised again in September 2020 (SAQA, 2020) to address issues related to application fees, transformation, and data submission, among others.

#### **2.5.8. Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-Qualifications on the NQF**

Working with the three QCs, SAQA developed the Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-Qualifications in 2013 (SAQA, 2013). This policy which is key for articulation was amended in 2020. To be registered on the NQF, a qualification or part-qualification must, amongst others, show the use of the NQF Level Descriptors, and indicate the 'horizontal, vertical, and diagonal' possibilities in the learning pathways where the qualifications (or part-qualifications) reside.

#### **2.5.9. National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa**

The first policy on assessment was developed in 2001. However, there was a need for revision and alignment with the NQF Act 67 of 2008. In collaboration with an assessment reference group, and after consultation with the QCs, SAQA developed the Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment in 2014. The purpose of the policy is to set minimum standards for effective, valid, reliable, fair, transparent, and appropriate assessment per the NQF Act (SAQA, 2014).

#### **2.5.10. The Policies of the three Quality Councils**

Various legislation provides for the quality assurance work of the QCs in the context of the NQF Act. The three QCs must develop policies for registering qualifications in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts, that are in line with SAQA policies (RSA, 1995: Clause 27[h](i)) and submit these qualifications to SAQA for evaluation towards registration on the NQF. The QCs must also, amongst others, develop policies for RPL, CAT and assessment after taking SAQA's policies into account (Ibid.: Clauses 27[h](ii) and [j](iii)).

#### **2.5.11. The Policies of Other NQF Stakeholders**

Other stakeholders in the South African NQF are required to develop policies that are in line with the National policies, and that support flexible learning and career pathways. These stakeholders include providers of higher education and training as well as professional bodies.

#### **2.5.12. Draft Policies**

Two more policies make up the basket of National Policies in South Africa, however, they have not been formally passed as legislation. The first is the 'Draft Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training (PSET)' which provides a framework for the implementation of open learning in the PSET system (DHET, 2017); and the second is the 'Draft National Policy on the Misrepresentation of Qualifications', which provides a framework for dealing with the misrepresentation of qualifications in the country (SAQA, 2017).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the research design, the sample selection, the data collection method, and the outline of the data analysis.

#### 3.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theoretical approaches inform the 2021 NQF Impact Study. Firstly, the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engestrom, 1987; 2001) enables the consideration of one or more of the analytical categories of subjects, objectives, tools, rules, communities of practice, roles, voices and snapshots over time within the (activity) system(s) of the NQF.

Secondly a realist approach (Pawson and Tilley, 2004; White, 2009) informs the analyses of the data gathered. This approach includes the following.

- **Mapping out the chain of developments** – including (1) the changes expected, (2) change drivers (variety of inputs, including activities), (3) the mechanisms that bring about change (Pawson and Tilley, 2004:6-7); (4) direct and indirect results of the activities, (5) changes observed, or outcome patterns (*Ibid.*:8-9), and (6) effects of the changes. Researchers need to move iteratively between these categories and the data. Programmes are embedded in contexts and are influenced by the actors who implement them (Pawson and Tilley, 2004).
- **Context** is part of the chain of development. Context is not separate from what takes place. It is integral to it and developments co-emerge, influencing each other (Fenwick, 2010; Pawson and Tilley, 2004).
- **Heterogeneity** is part of everyday realities. It is useful to use theory to generate categories of social groups/activities, as this provides a plausible explanation for differential impact (White, 2009:11).
- **A baseline** against which to contrast development and change.
- **Using mixed methods and rigorous analysis** – including, but not limited to focus-group discussions, document and literature reviews, observation, surveys, multivariate analyses, and so on.
- **Triangulation** is essential.



Other aspects considered in the research include **context-mechanism-outcome configurations** to make sense of the patterns observed. In other words, the RPL/ CAT/ FLP initiatives have been considered *in context*. The analyses attempt to assess links between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The 2021 NQF Impact Study employed a mixed-methods research design. Mixed methods involve combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative research and data in a study and can be used when one type of research is not enough to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The generated data may then be analysed mainly using qualitative methods supported by the quantitative findings.

The over-arching part of the research design was a survey of purposively selected respondents to assess among others:

- i. the overall implementation of RPL, CAT and other elements of education and training system flexibility, and
- ii. the specific enablers and barriers to the implementation of RPL, CAT and other elements of system flexibility.

#### **3.2.1. *Participants/stakeholders***

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is a technique where cases most likely to have a rich source of information about the questions of interest are selected to maximise the use of resources (Patton, 2002). As such, NQF partners and stakeholders that play a significant role in the South African education and training sector were selected. The NQF partners comprise the DHET, DBE, SAQA, and the QCs. The NQF stakeholders represent the following groups in existence at the time of the study, presented in alphabetical sequence:

1. **Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs):** An Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) is an entity, or a body delegated and appointed by the QCTO to manage the

qualification development process and coordinate the external integrated summative assessments for NQF registered occupational qualifications and part-qualifications.

2. **Community Education and Training (CET) Colleges:** These colleges are education and training institutions that target youths and adults who want to further their learning, improve their skills for employability, and progress into opportunities presented by Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and university education.
3. **Development Quality Partners (DQPs):** A DQP is a body delegated by the QCTO to manage the process of developing occupational qualifications, curricula and assessment specifications. Upon recommendation from a Community of Expert Practitioners, each DQP recommends an AQP that develops assessment specifications and manages external summative assessments to the QCTO.
4. **Private Colleges:** A Private College is any college that provides continuing education and training on a full-time, part-time or distance basis, and is registered or provisionally registered as a private college under Chapter Six of the Continuing Education and Training Act, 2006 (Act 16 of 2006), as amended.
5. **Private Higher Education Institutions:** These are institutions registered or conditionally registered as private higher education institutions in terms of Chapter Seven of the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997).
6. **SAQA-recognised professional bodies:** These are statutory or non-statutory bodies that set professional standards and register individual expert practitioners in an occupational field.
7. **Public Higher Education Institutions:** These are higher education institutions that are established, deemed to be established or declared as public higher education institutions under the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997).
8. **Quality Councils (QCs):** Quality Councils are sector-based structures responsible for the development and management of each of the NQF sub-frameworks. There are three QCs: UMALUSI, the QCTO and CHE.
9. **Quality Development Facilitators (QDFs):** A QDF is a person registered by the QCTO to facilitate the development of occupational qualifications.
10. **Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs):** A Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) is an entity established in terms of Section 9(1)

of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act 97 of 1998) to develop and implement sector skills plans and promote learning programmes, including workplace learning.

11. **Skills Development Providers (SDPs):** These are entities accredited by the QCTO to offer occupational qualifications or part-qualifications registered on the OQSF.

12. **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges:** These are education and training institutions that focus on vocational and occupational education and training designed to prepare students to become functional workers in a skilled trade. TVETs are established and operated under the authority of the Continuing Education and Training Act (16 of 2006).

The NQF partners and stakeholders were further categorised into six groups. The number of stakeholders per group, their population count and the intended sample per group are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Population and sample of NQF stakeholders

Stakeholder Groups	Stakeholders	Acronym	Population	Intended Sample
<b>Delegated Bodies</b>	Assessment Quality Partner	<b>AQP</b>	40	40
	Development Quality Partner	<b>DQP</b>	51	45
	Quality Development Facilitator	<b>QDF</b>	43	43
<b>Colleges</b>	Community Education and Training College	<b>CET</b>	9	9
	Private College	<b>PvtCo</b>	228	100
	TVET College	<b>TVET</b>	50	50
<b>Higher Education Institutions</b>	Private Higher Education Institution	<b>PvtH</b>	99	99
	Public Higher Education Institution	<b>PubH</b>	26	26
<b>Professional Bodies</b>	Professional body	<b>PB</b>	108	108
<b>Quality Councils</b>	Quality Council	<b>QC</b>	3	3
<b>Skills Providers</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority	<b>SETA</b>	21	21
	Skills Development Provider	<b>SDP</b>	364	119
	Total		<b>1 042</b>	<b>663</b>

In instances where there were one hundred or fewer stakeholders, the entire population was surveyed<sup>9</sup>, and where there were more than a hundred stakeholders, the selection was as follows:

- of the 228 registered Private Colleges, 100 were randomly selected,
- of the 364 SDPs, 142 were excluded because they were the same institutions with different sites/campuses and from the remaining 222 SDPs, 119 were randomly selected.

### **3.2.2. Ethical Considerations**

All survey responses were treated with the utmost confidentiality. The respondents were informed of the context of the study and where data/information was supplied, and they were analysed and reported in aggregated and anonymised formats. Care was taken to preserve the anonymity of the respondents and ensure that no entities and/or individuals were recognisable.

## **3.3. DATA COLLECTION**

The primary data collection tool was a survey questionnaire consisting of a mixture of structured and unstructured questions. The closed (structured) questions provided quantitative or numerical information while open-ended questions (unstructured) provided qualitative or text information. Each of the six stakeholder groups outlined in Table 1 had similar/different questions relating to their sectors<sup>10</sup>. There were 106 unique questions across all the questionnaires, and most of the questions were open-ended questions, with a few requiring direct 'yes' or 'no' responses. The survey data were complemented by a review of policy documents of participating stakeholders, and an analysis of the quantitative data in the NQFMIS.

### **3.3.1. Survey**

Data collection began in December 2019 with 663 questionnaires emailed to potential respondents between December 2019 and January 2020. Stakeholders with incorrect

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<sup>9</sup> An exception was made for DQPs, as only 45 could be contacted due to lapsed contact details.

<sup>10</sup> A copy of the questionnaire for each stakeholder can be found in Appendices A1 to A9 to this report.

or duplicate contact details <sup>11</sup>and those whose registration would lapse during the research were omitted. Respondents had until the end of March 2020 to complete the questionnaires. However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, there was a pause in the data collection process as the effects of the pandemic gripped the country. At the end of June 2020, only 126 of the intended sample of 663 (20%) had completed the survey. This low response rate led to an extension of the deadline for the submission of the survey responses to February 2021, with efforts to increase the response rates supported through extensive communication and follow-up. Data collection formally closed in February 2021.

### **3.3.2. Document Review**

Several documents (policies, guidelines, and data in various forms) relating to RPL, CAT and system flexibility imperatives/initiatives were sourced from the participating stakeholders.

### **3.3.3. The NQF Management Information System (NQFMIS)**

The National Qualifications Framework Management Information System (NQFMIS) was previously known as the National Learners' records database (NLRD) and serves as a repository for the collection and management of NQF-related data. . It is an electronic system which comprises registers of national qualifications and part-qualifications, learner achievements, professional designations and other associated information related to registration, verification, and accreditation. A quantitative analysis of trends in learner achievements obtained via RPL and contained in the NQFMIS complemented the survey data and document review.

## **3.4. DATA ANALYSIS**

Using an inductive approach, thematic analysis was applied to the unstructured (text) responses. An inductive approach involves analysing data with little or no predetermined theory, structure or framework structure (Burnard et. Al., 2008); while thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that entails identifying and

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<sup>11</sup> Contact details were sourced from SAQA's Stakeholder Database.

reporting repeated patterns (also known as themes) within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis consisted of six broad steps:

- i. Know and understand the data
- ii. Generate initial codes
- iii. Search for themes
- iv. Review themes
- v. Define and name themes
- vi. Produce/write the report

The data were analysed using the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to identify emerging themes, patterns, and meanings from the text of the responses. The themes and sub-themes were written up while referencing the original data to ensure that the initial feedback was not lost in translation. For the structured/ quantitative responses, summaries and frequencies were obtained for the relevant questions. All graphs and tables were compiled using Microsoft Excel. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation of the data was conducted by reviewing multiple document sources and analysing quantitative data from the NQF Management Information System (NQFMIS).

## 4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A total of 173 stakeholders (respondents) completed the survey for the 2021 NQF impact study. The overall response rate of the study was 26%<sup>12</sup>, with the highest response rates of 100% obtained for the three Quality Councils and 54% for HEIs and the lowest (9%) obtained from QCTO-delegated bodies, made up of AQPs, DQPs and QDFs.

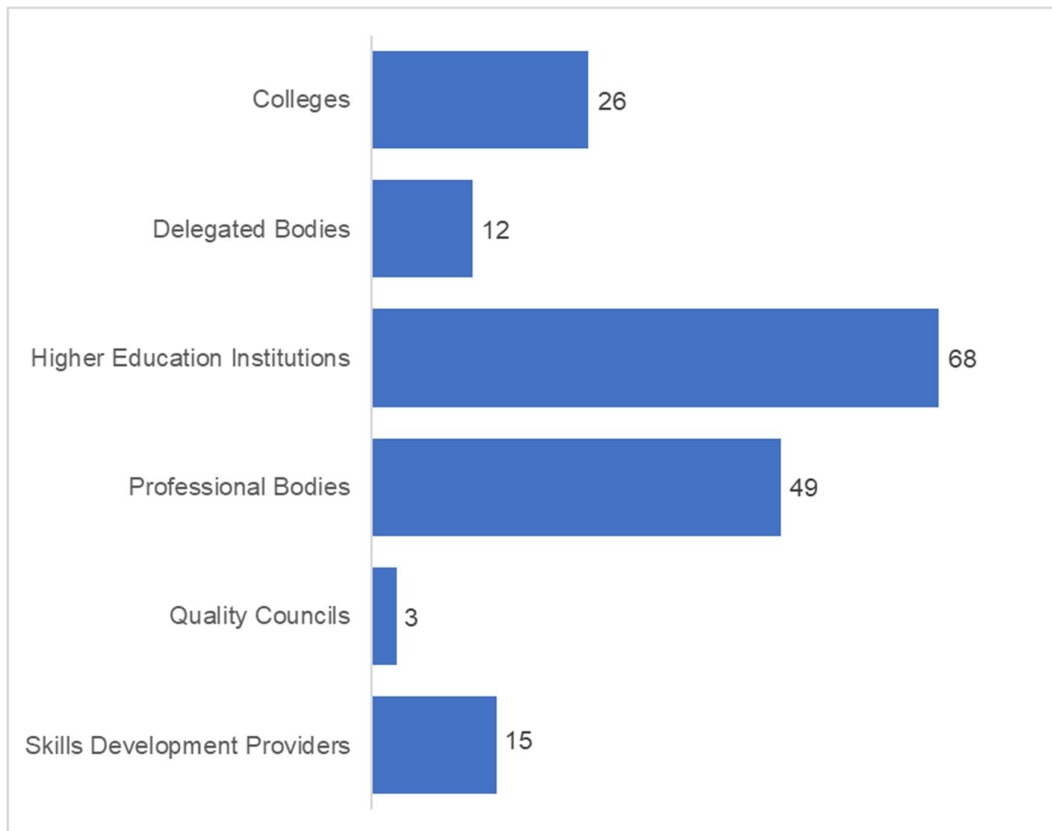


Figure 2: Number of responses by stakeholder group

Over half (57%) of the total respondents were from PvtHs and PBs (Figure 2). Each respondent was requested to state their position in their organisation in the survey instrument. A total of 171 of 173 respondents completed this question with 49% being heads of units/departments, managers, or directors (Figure 3).

<sup>12</sup> Research internal to an organisation typically elicits 30-40% response rates and, while external response rates yield 10-15% (Nulty, 2008), SAQA's surveys of NQF stakeholders usually leads to response rates of over 50%. The response rates in this instance clearly reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The extent and nature of the responses however remain useful and rich, and were triangulated further, through a document review process of the policies of the participating respondents.

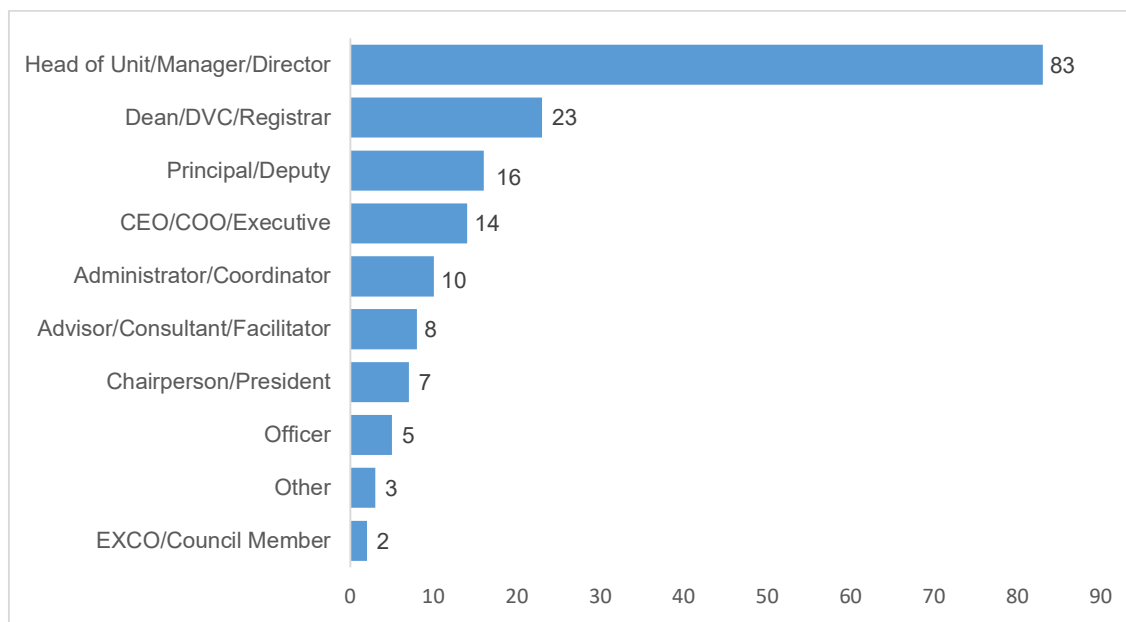


Figure 3: Job positions of respondents (n=171)

#### 4.1. CONTENT AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section examines the results from the completed questionnaires. The results are organised into the following broad areas or themes:

- Policy awareness,
- Policy implementation,
- Policy impact,
- Policy improvements,
- System Flexibility and
- Understanding relevant data.

Within each theme, the responses from each stakeholder group are analysed.

#### 4.2. POLICY AWARENESS: RPL and CAT

When asked if they were aware of the national RPL and CAT policies, most of the respondents (88%) stated that they were aware of the national policies; 3% were unaware of the policies and 9% were partially<sup>13</sup> aware of the two policies (Figure 4). There were 170 responses to the question.

<sup>13</sup> Only aware of one of the two policies



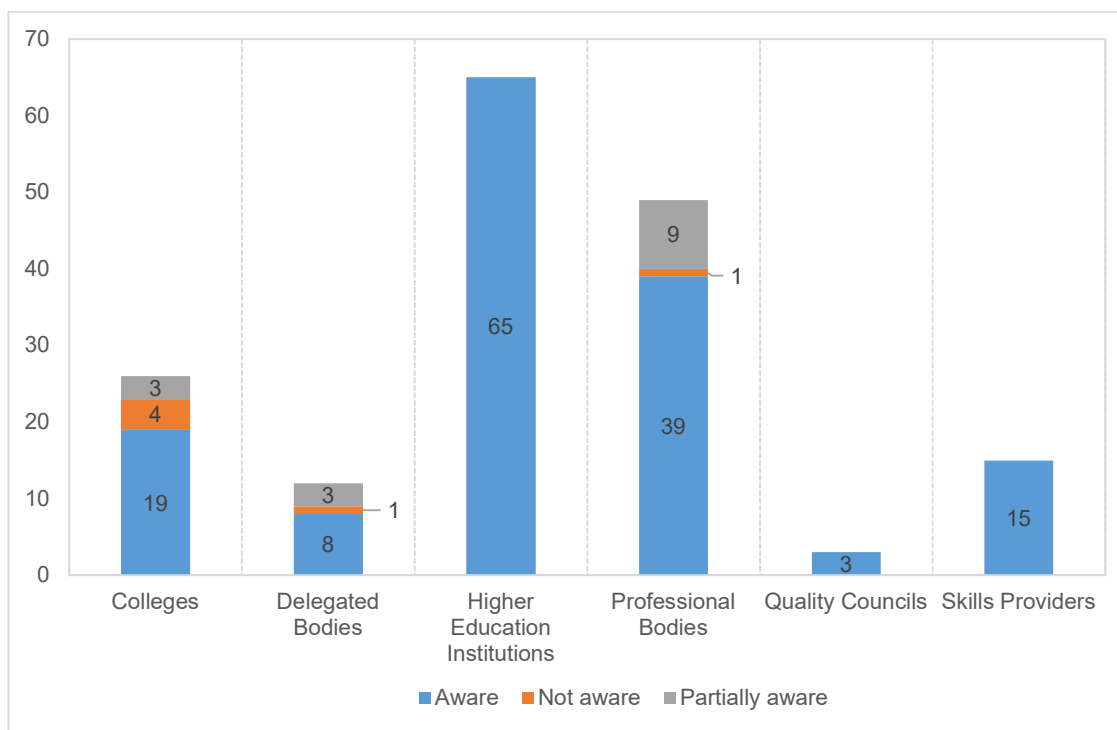


Figure 4: Awareness of the national RPL and CAT policies by stakeholder group

All the responding HEIs, QCs and Skills Providers were aware of both national policies, with one HEI noting that:

*“Yes, we have been using RPL and CAT for several years” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH12.*

Six respondents, four of them from colleges, indicated that they were unaware of both policies, with one QDF stating:

*“No I am not aware of it; however, I am aware that each SETA has its own RPL policy” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF5.*

Most of the respondents that indicated a partial knowledge of the national policies (9 out of 15) were from Professional Bodies, with all nine indicating they were only aware of the RPL policy:

*“Partially. More so the RPL policy than the CAT policy” – Professional Body, PB32.*

One delegated body explained why they think the RPL policy is better known:

“Yes, the ETQA is aware of these ... The CAT policy is, however, not known and applied as it should. This could be because of uncertainty in the quality of training across providers and workplaces” – **Development Quality Provider, DQP6.**

The follow-up question “If so, which national policies have you referred to for guidance?”, yielded multiple responses and Table 2 presents the list of policy documents cited by respondents and the number of mentions per policy. Generally, respondents mostly referred to the national RPL and CAT policies regardless of the year of publication or the year in which the policy was gazetted.

Table 2: National policies referred to for guidance?

Policy documents	No of responses	Category
National Policy for the Implementation of RPL (2014,2017)	27	RPL
National Policy & Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (as amended, 2019)	39	RPL
Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy/Ministerial RPL Policy (2016)	14	RPL
RPL Policy (No year/ reference)	58	RPL
CAT Policy (No year/reference)	25	CAT
Policy for CAT within the NQF (2014, 2017)	22	CAT
RPL/CAT policies of the three QCs (All drafts and amendments)	53	RPL/CAT
RPL/CAT Policies of Higher Education Institutions (All drafts and amendments)	4	RPL/CAT
RPL/CAT Policies of Professional bodies (All drafts and amendments)	6	RPL/CAT
Other National NQF Policies	18	Other NQF Policies
Other Non-National Policies	87	Others

Although there were mentions of the national RPL and CAT policies without reference to a specific year, there were more mentions of SAQA’s 2019 amended RPL policy than the earlier versions of the policy. While the question specifically asks for a list of national policies in use, the respondents also mentioned various Acts, guideline documents like the White and Green papers on Post-School Education and Training, and other non-policy documents. One PvtH also referred to two international policies: the South African Development Community (SADC) RPL Guidelines (2018), and the Draft Report on the Alignment of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) to the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) (2018) for comparative purpose.

Respondents from Colleges and HEIs were asked to describe the RPL and CAT policies used in their institutions, and indicate if they applied only the national policies or institution-specific policies.

Table 3 presents the summary of responses by both stakeholder groups: Nine of the 22 colleges do not use any policy relating to CAT, while six out of 22 colleges indicated that they do not use any RPL policy. This is either because they do not have internal CAT policies, or the institution has not implemented RPL or CAT:

*“The college has not implemented RPL” – Community Education and Training College, CET4.*

*“We do not offer Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) at this TVET College” – Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College, TVET5*

Table 3: Descriptions of the policies used

Categories of references in the responses	RPL		CAT	
	Colleges	HEIs	Colleges	HEIs
<b>External policies only</b>	3	1	4	7
<b>Internal and external policies</b>	6	39	2	33
<b>Internal policies only</b>	6	24	6	23
<b>No policy</b>	6	0	9	0
<b>Unspecified</b>	1	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>64</b>

For HEIs, most of the respondents reported that they used a combination of national policies and in-house policies. The HEI respondents describe the use of a combination of internal and external RPL policies, as the following text confirms:

*“We use internal RPL policies for access to qualifications. The only external RPL policy that is relevant is the national RPL policy which guides our internal policy” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH16.*

Other HEIs emphasised the use and relevance of external policies:

*“The institution has a comprehensive RPL policy founded on the National Policies of 2014 and 2019. The policy is reviewed annually for currency and comprehensiveness. Further to this, the RPL policies of other institutions are used as points of comparability to ensure that the institution’s policy is in line with common practices” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH49.*

*“SAQA RPL Policy was used to create the internal PubH4 Recognition of Prior Learning policy. Faculties and Schools have been encouraged to develop RPL policies that align with the University policy, and this is evident in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture RPL policy, The Faculty of Management and Law RPL policy, and those of various schools, such as the School of Education, and School of Physical and Mineral Sciences.*

*The University implements the CHE Policy for RPL.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH4.*

### **4.3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: RPL and CAT**

Policy implementation involves translating the goals and objectives of a policy into action (Khan, 2016). This section focuses on aspects of policy implementation including the processes, structures, and rules within institutional policies, which enhance the flexibility of the NQF system.

#### **4.3.1. Structures and processes**

Respondents from four of the six stakeholder groups<sup>14</sup> were asked to describe the RPL and CAT structures, processes and rules used in their institutions. Overall, more than 140 stakeholders described the RPL and CAT processes undertaken in their institutions, albeit with varying degrees of explanations on how these processes are implemented. More than half of the responding stakeholders indicated that detailed processes exist in their institutions, and in some instances, the stakeholders described the step-by-step procedure involved or referred to their submitted internal policies as proof. About one-third of the stakeholders outlined only a part of the process or gave

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<sup>14</sup> Colleges, HEIs, PBs and SDPs. This question was omitted from the questionnaires of the other stakeholder groups as it was not applicable.

a brief overview of the steps candidates go through before being awarded a qualification through RPL or CAT.

A review of the submitted institutional policies and related documents shows that while RPL is entrenched in the system, elements around CAT and how it is implemented remain ambiguous and incomplete. The following sections detail the RPL and CAT processes reported by specific stakeholder groups.

#### **4.3.1.1. Colleges**

Eighteen of the twenty-seven participating colleges responded to the question on the RPL structures and processes used in their institutions, and most of the eighteen were PvtCos. Eight colleges indicated that detailed processes exist, while five colleges, including TVET colleges and CET Colleges, indicated that they had no structures in place. Other stakeholders in this group noted that their processes were guided by the content of the external policies or provided components of the processes they followed. One of the most comprehensive processes was given by PvtCo18 which outlined the following steps:

*“Step 1: Candidate applies for RPL*

*Step 2: The candidate makes an appointment with an RPL Advisor*

*Step 3: During the Interview process the following is determined:*

- *Determine the reason for RPL*
- *Explain the RPL process to the candidate*
- *Identify the field of learning*
- *Identify suitable standards and outcomes*
- *Conduct a role and job analysis*
- *Conduct a competence analysis*
- *Identify possible credits toward qualifications*
- *Identify specific opportunities for RPL*
- *Determine the types of evidence required*
- *Develop an RPL action plan with the candidate*
- *Discuss possible assessors and assessment methods*
- *Ensure the candidate understands the assessment practice.*

*Step 4: Candidate collects evidence and compiles a portfolio*

*Step 5: Candidate submits a portfolio of evidence for assessment*

*Step 6: Assessor assesses the evidence, makes a judgment and a decision*

*Step 7: Assessor provides feedback to the candidate*

*Step 8: Assessment decision is verified and recorded*  
*Step 9: RPL results are submitted to the relevant ETQA for certification” –*  
**Private College, PvtCo18.**

Regarding CAT structures and processes in colleges, most of the respondents apply a combination of the National CAT Policy and the institutional policies, which are usually incorporated with their RPL policies.

#### **4.3.1.2. Delegated Bodies**

The twelve responding delegated bodies consisting of six DQPs, five QDFs and one AQP described how RPL and CAT feature in the work they do around curriculum, assessment and module specifications, proposing Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs) and managing the verification of occupational profiles.

While QDFs do not engage with RPL policies directly, insights from RPL are used when developing and designing curriculum and assessment models and module specifications, since entry and exit-level outcomes take RPL into account:

*“RPL is mentioned during the development of the Curriculum framework, which covers knowledge modules, practical skills modules and work experience modules, in these discussions. Most curriculums are new and with the new design of writing curriculum framework, it will mean that a learner will be RPL on learning outcomes that were done within the new developments unless agreed by industry based on experience.” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF5.*

With respect to CAT, the delegated bodies note that part-qualifications play a role here as they provide for credit accumulation towards a registered ‘parent qualification’, thus making transfers between and within institutions possible:

*“There is full credit transfer and articulation from module to part to parent qualification. Full articulation from employable skill to part qualification to qualification and master level qualification.” – Development Quality Provider, DQP5.*

*“The problem with CAT and RPL is that no matter how good the policies are or how well it is written into any document – The onus is on providers to implement and they don’t. It doesn’t work between different Universities (especially Universities and Universities of Technology). It can also not work between*

*qualifications within the QCTO as the QCTO change the module numbers of part qualifications from the parent qualification so it becomes a nightmare for providers even to obtain accreditation and try to link their existing learning material.” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF1.*

#### **4.3.1.3. Higher Education Institutions**

Forty-two of the 68 responding HEIs described the RPL structures and processes that exist in their institutions by referring to their specific institutional policies, and in some cases copying the processes verbatim from those policies. One of the PvtHs lists a step-by-step process this way:

*“There is not a separate structure for RPL. RPL is conducted by the academic staff of the institution with the collaboration of the Academic Head, Faculty and Campus Managers and administrative staff.*

*Process:*

*Stage 1: Pre-entry and information: The candidate submits a letter requesting RPL which includes a detailed motivation for the request. The candidate completes the RPL application form. A meeting with the candidate and CM/CH and HOD to obtain the academic history and background to support the RPL application and to provide information regarding the RPL process to the candidate. The supporting documents are reviewed to assess the viability of the RPL application.*

*Stage 2: Advisory: The candidate with the relevant objectives, assessment requirements and expectations for RPL and documents e.g. study material and book lists. Assessments are planned and negotiated. The roles and responsibilities of the candidate, assessor and moderator are clearly communicated to the candidate. The candidate is provided with an opportunity to peruse the RPL assessment plan and the study material provided and makes a decision as to the feasibility thereof. Then the student is registered.*

*Stage 3: Facilitation: The candidate is assisted with preparation for assessment.*

*Stage 4: Assessment: The candidate is assessed by a certified assessor who is registered with the relevant regulatory body as a constituent assessor according to the assessment plan agreed upon during the advisory stage.*

*Stage 5: Moderation: A designated certified moderator who is registered with the relevant regulatory body as a constituent moderator will conduct moderation of the assessment outcomes.*

*Stage 6: Feedback: Feedback after assessment is provided in writing and the candidate is advised, guided and supported to fill gaps where the RPL assessment shows gaps in the candidate's knowledge and skills. If the candidate is found to be not yet competent the candidate is informed regarding the appeal process to follow and the relevant regulatory body is informed on the outcome of the RPL as applicable. If the candidate is found to be competent submit the RPL application, accompanied by the required documentation to the regulatory body. A declaration is signed by the management which states that the RPL policy of the institution was followed and endorsed by both the assessor and moderator.*

*Stage 7: Evaluation: The candidate completes an evaluation of the RPL process. The assessor and moderator who were involved in the RPL process must conduct a reflection on the RPL process conducted and compile a report to the Academic Head to table at the Senate. This must include feedback from the candidate's response during the evaluation of RPL.*

*The process is concluded with a certification.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH2.*

In PubHs, RPL processes are noted as faculty-specific or faculty-based, allowing for devolved decision-making within the various departments and programmes.

The application and administration of CAT within HEIs generally follow the same principles in the National CAT policy. From the various institutional policies reviewed, credit transfer arrangements at various levels between institutions, departments/faculties and qualifications were noted. As one Public HEI stated:

*“Students requesting credit transfer from credits obtained from a previous qualification at another University apply for such directly to the faculty concerned on an appropriate application form. The Head of Department must evaluate the credits applied for in order to obtain equivalence. The University does not entertain part credits per module and a student must achieve either all the credits for the module or none at all” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH4.*

An extract from one of the PvtHs' CAT policies shows the process for applying for credit transfer:



*“Procedure for Applying for CAT*

- a. *Transfer credits have to be requested and are not processed automatically.*
- b. *Students should request the Registrar of the former institution to send an official transcript to PvtH10 after they have received a letter of acceptance. They are also to provide module outlines for the modules for which they are requesting transfer credits in order to evaluate their equivalence.*
- c. *The transcripts will be evaluated by the Programme Coordinator and Faculty Dean. Where applicable, credits will be identified either for transfer or exemption.*
- d. *During the registration process, the student needs to request the Dean to complete the Credit Transfer Form. The Academic Administration Committee ratifies and records transfer credits.*
- e. *A minimum average of 50-54% (letter grade C), which must also be a passing grade at the original institution, should have been earned in all previous College or university modules for which transfer credit is being requested. In order to evaluate equivalence.*
- f. *Appeals Procedure: Should the student not be satisfied with the outcome of the application for credit transfer, they may formally appeal to the Academic Administration Committee by completing a request form available at the Academic Administration Office” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH10.*

**4.3.1.4. Professional Bodies**

Generally, Professional Bodies (PBs) award designations to applicants in the sector in which the Professional Body operates. For the study, forty-six PBs comprising nine statutory bodies and thirty-seven non-statutory bodies described their institutional structures and processes relating to RPL. RPL for designations generally involves evaluating the candidate’s experience through a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE); or by evaluating the candidate’s competence through assessments, or in some cases, both. Responses indicate that while there are no substantive differences in how RPL is executed across statutory and non-statutory bodies, the implementation process typically covers four main phases:

- 1) Application: Applicants would generally apply using prescribed (physical or online) application forms. In some cases, an online submission would include

the submission of a Portfolio of Evidence consisting of documentation showing proof of work experience, among others.

- 2) Screening: In this phase, applicants' knowledge, skills and experiences are evaluated, typically through formal structures like written assessments and examinations. For some respondents, this phase includes oral assessments/interviews, and a request for a case study, project, or practical demonstration from the applicant- depending on the sector. In one particular instance, an RPL fee was paid by the applicant after the application phase and before an oral assessment was administered.
- 3) Evaluation: In considering an application for professional membership, a deliberation or decision is made based on the outcome of the screening. Several considerations made in this phase include the achievement of a certain range of scores in the assessment, or an interview process where an assessor goes through a series of questions with the applicant. In some professional bodies, this phase is also where the PoE is scrutinised carefully by assessors against set criteria.
- 4) Recommendation: This last phase is where the applicants are registered as members of a professional body, or awarded a professional designation based on the outcome of the previous phases.

An example of a high-level outline of a professional body RPL process is as follows:

*“Step 1: A person applies for a Professional Designation in which he/she is competent*

*Step 2: Assessment is conducted: through the assessment process it is deduced that the applicant does not have relevant qualifications in the Built Environment, and it is determined whether his/her experience is sufficient for RPL*

*Step 3: Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) is submitted by the applicant for RPL assessment*

*Step 4: RPL Fee is paid*

*Step 5: A briefing session is held where necessary to inform the applicant about the requirements of the PoE*

*Step 6: PoE is assessed*

*Step 7: The applicant is invited for an oral assessment*

*Step 8: If the applicant is successful, they are invited for a professional interview which equally applies to all applicants with relevant qualifications*

*Step 9: After a successful interview the applicant is registered” – Professional Body, PB18.*

Five of the responding PBs do not implement RPL and so, had no processes to share. Regarding questions about CAT, 32 of the 42 responding PBs either indicated that they were not involved in CAT processes, or that CAT was not applicable in their fields or 'environments'. The remaining 10 PBs relied on the combination of the National CAT policy and internal policies. One PB notes the following:

*“CAT is currently only applied to the learnership leadership qualification where the learners progress through a professional development continuum commencing with the functions of a clerk through to becoming a professional accountant (meeting the minimum requirements to entry the professional assessment). Each CAT level is based on competency functional areas which are approved with a competency assessment together with the portfolio of evidence which must be approved by the training supervisor” – Professional Body, PB26.*

Two of the responding PBs mention the use of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as a process used for CAT. As one of them notes:

*“We have a quota of CPD credits to be accumulated in every two-year period, and have a process in which designees submit credit claims for consideration by our office. Specific training and skills development events are assigned credits” – Professional Body, PB24.*

#### **4.3.1.5. Skills Development Providers**

Thirteen of the 15 participating SDPs described the RPL structures and processes in their organisations, and these processes were generally in line with their institutional RPL policies. One SDP noted that RPL assessments are conducted according to the assessment unit standard and outlines the following process in their institution:

*“a. The Employer/Company must submit a written request to SETA3, requesting an RPL test with the supporting documentation as per the criteria and guidelines.*

*b. The test will be arranged with Employer/Company on a date and an assessor and moderator will be assigned to the test.*

*c. The RPL test will identify the gaps or will confirm that the candidate is ready to be trade tested or formally assessed against the qualification.*

*d. A trade test certificate will be requested from QCTO on competency or the SETA3 will issue a learnership certificate on competency.”*  
– **Sector Education Training Authority Provider, SETA3.**

With regards to CAT, half of the responding SDPs reported not having structures and processes in place for accumulating and transferring credits. The other half of the respondents in this group said that they rely on a combination of broad steps in the National Policy combined with their internal policies.

#### **4.3.2. Rules**

The survey included questions about two aspects known to differ across the national RPL and CAT policies<sup>15</sup>. These survey questions were intended to obtain an idea of stakeholder views on these aspects. This section reviews the responses regarding the two prescripts in the CHE's (2016) RPL and CAT policies which state that:

- a) No student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any higher education qualification; and
- b) Not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process.

#### **4.3.3. The 50% Rule**

The question: *“What does your institution think of the ‘50% rule for RPL and CAT, where ‘no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any particular qualification’?”* was answered by almost all the HEIs and PBs respondents (105 out of 116 responses).

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<sup>15</sup> While SAQA's (2019, 2021) policies for RPL implementation and CAT are aligned with the DHET's (2016, 2017) policies for RPL coordination and articulation, the CHE's (2016) policies for RPL and CAT are not aligned with these policies – see Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this report.

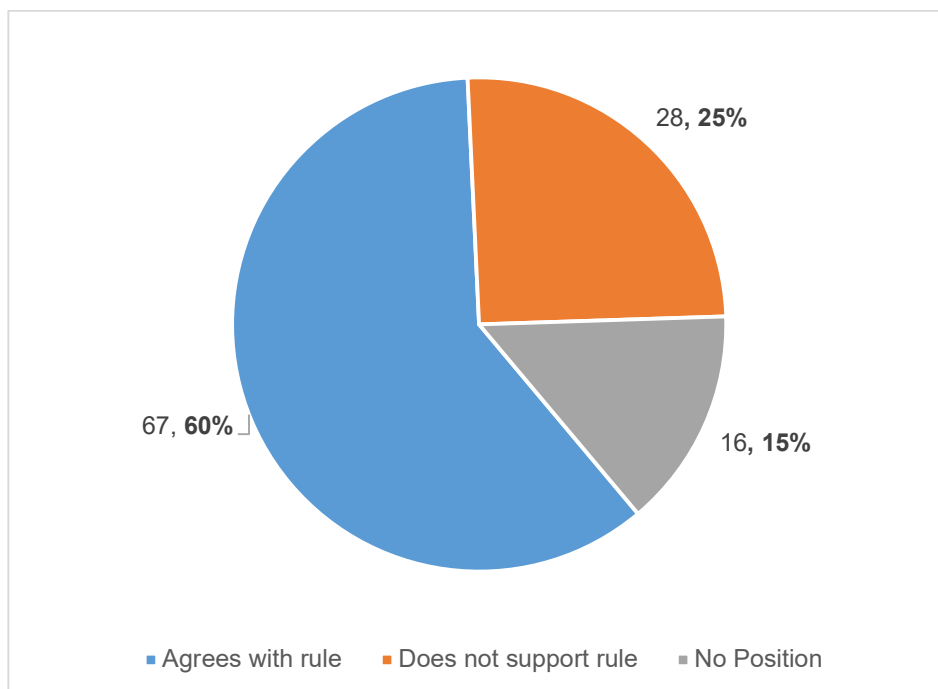


Figure 5: Thoughts about the 50% rule

As shown in Figure 5, more than half of the respondents agree with and support the rule and noted that the limit of 50% is “reasonable”, “fair”, “sensible”, “relevant and necessary”, “important” and “satisfactory”. Twenty-eight stakeholders do not support the rule, as they think it is “limiting” and “there should not be a cap”.

To the follow-up question on whether the respondents would consider exempting students from more than 50% of the curriculum and still be satisfied that their institution has control regarding quality, more than half (57%) of the 114 respondents indicated that they would not consider exemptions. Just over a third (32%) of the respondents indicated that they would consider exempting students from more than 50% of the curriculum and still be satisfied that the institution has control regarding quality.

#### 4.3.3.1. Higher Education Institutions

There was strong support for the 50% rule as 52 of the responding 69 Higher Education Institutions agree with this rule for a variety of reasons. One such reason is the perception that the rule provides a measure of quality and integrity in awarding qualifications:

*“In one way it limits the portability and of learning as principled in the National Qualifications Framework but on another level, it protects the integrity of qualifications as there should be some uniqueness in each qualification.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH14.*

*“The University is of the view that the 50% rule is sensible and prevents the ‘nesting’ of qualifications as a result of which students would be able to obtain more than one qualification for the same set of credits. Given that the HEQSF sets out clearly articulated purposes for the different types of qualifications, the 50% rule is a fair way of ensuring that credits obtained are transferable in terms of CAT while ensuring that the integrity of qualifications remains intact. It is in line with international practice” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH10.*

Another reason for the support is the perception that the rule helps to prevent possible duplication of previous studies:

*“We agree with this rule as it avoids the problem of the individual receiving the award and/or receiving more than one award based on the completion of the same qualification.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH39.*

*“The institution supports the notion of a “no more than 50%” rule. Whilst it is acknowledged that there may be instances where a greater degree of comparability between extant programmes may exist, the institution cannot necessarily account for the rigour of assessment practices at all institutions and thus it is necessary to ensure that a particular standard is maintained in ensuring that academic rigour and reliability are upheld” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH49.*

Some HEIs did not support the 50% rule and opined that the rule can be considered punitive while calling for institutions to have more discretion in how RPL and CAT are awarded. One respondent states:

*“We are happy applying this rule. It serves our quality assurance system well.” ...[However], “Students who complete a Higher Certificate in Theology (120 credits) often feel cheated that they can only transfer 60 credits into a BTh. This is the other side of the 50 per cent rule, which prevents students from transferring more than 50 per cent of a completed qualification into the next qualification. If someone has completed one full year of theological study at NQF 5, it does not seem right to prevent them from entering the second year of a Bachelor’s degree. We adhere to the current rule, but we do not agree with it and our students often protest” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH52.*

There were also a few institutions that expressed mixed opinions on the rule and indicated that although they adhere to the rule because it is stipulated in the CHE Policy, it may be beneficial to review the prescript as well as the threshold

*“A more flexible approach would be better for this particular institution depending on the programme, namely from 40% to 60%” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH31.*

*“This is an important rule because it ensures that students are not awarded another qualification for a programme that they studied in another institution. For quality purposes, and because institutions can be significantly different even though they offer programmes in the same field, perhaps the percentage should be increased from 50% to about 60%-70%. This will ensure that the qualification awarded reflects the awarding institution as much as possible.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH45.*

There was a suggestion from one of the private HEIs to review the discrepancies between the SAQA and CHE RPL requirements.

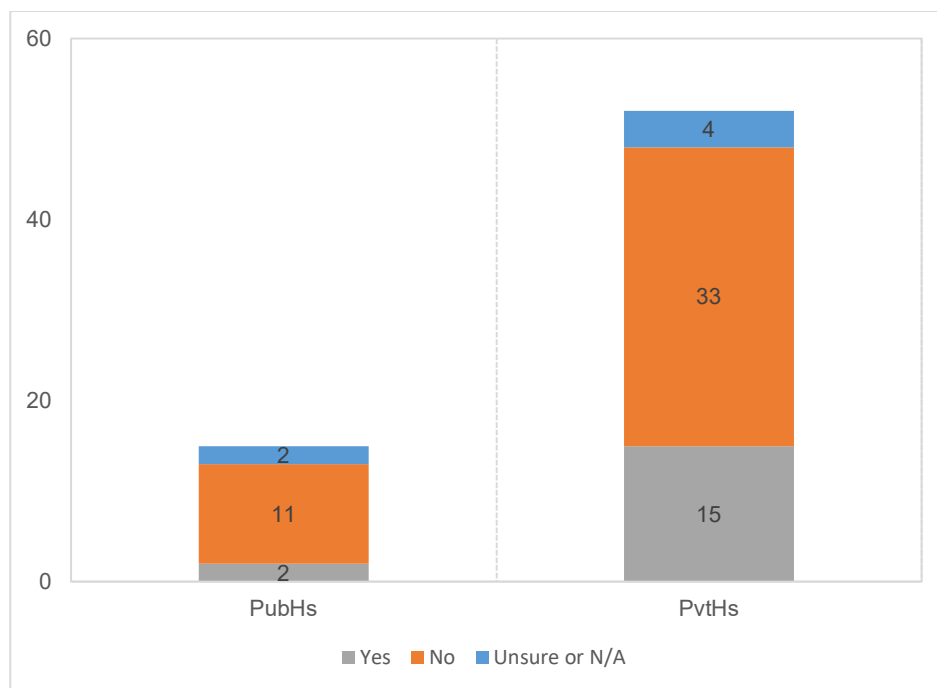


Figure 6: Would you consider exempting more than 50%...?

A majority of the HEI respondents indicated that they would not consider exempting students from more than 50% of the curriculum and still be satisfied that their institution

has control regarding quality (Figure 6). Respondents, mainly from PvtHs contextualised their response further:

*“NO. The institution has decided by majority vote that they would prefer not to grant exemptions for more than 50% of transfer credits because there is no guarantee that such a student would have acquired the institutional and programme graduate attributes upon completion of a particular qualification” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH10.*

*“NO. Prior to 2015, PvtH52 used to permit more than 50 per cent exemption in some cases. The 50 per cent limit is a big improvement. We are fully persuaded that the 50 per cent exemption limit is necessary to ensure that graduates meet our institutional standards and that their training is reflective of our uniqueness” Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH52.*

#### **4.3.3.2. Professional Bodies**

Fifteen of the 44 responding PBs did not have a position on the 50% rule, as they felt the rule does not apply to them or their professions/fields. On the other hand, fifteen PBs agree with the rule, noting that they understand where it comes from:

*“We agree with this rule. In addition, we do not apply this as a blanket rule but have specified those aspects of work experience of the compliance process that may be simulated” – Professional Body, PB9.*

The remaining 14 PBs do not support the rule, as they felt it was limiting and not in line with the principles and spirit of the NQF:

*“This is an unfair rule as we believe that it discriminates against people who would be able to obtain a qualification but because they already have more than 50% via RPL they cannot complete the qualification. It should make no difference how much the student has in terms of RPL 10%/50%/80% - they should still be allowed to complete the qualification. Completion is of course, in line with the student meeting all the necessary requirements for the qualification! No distinction must be made between qualifications awarded through conventional and RPL routes!” – Professional Body, PB17.*

*“Given the nature of the field of our operation, a higher percentage would be more becoming. We believe that accredited educational institutions are capable to do a proper evaluation of the prior learning and knowledge of a candidate. If it can be proven that the necessary learning has taken place, there can be no reason why an arbitrary limit to the percentage of knowledge which is acceptable for this purpose should apply” – Professional Body, PB9.*



When asked if they would consider exempting students from more than 50% of the curriculum where possible, 19 of the PBs responded “Yes”, 21 responded “No” and 7 indicated they were unsure or that it the question did not apply to them. Some of the reasons include:

*“Yes. Can’t see how increasing the exception percentage would affect professional bodies either positively or negatively” – Professional Body, PB29.*

*“NO – PB10 would be concerned that the quality and knowledge in certain areas which is needed for a professional accountant as an example will be adversely negotiated” – Professional Body, PB10.*

#### **4.3.4. The 10% Rule**

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the rule that ‘*not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a single Higher Education programme should be admitted via RPL*’. As presented in Figure 7 a total of 117 respondents from HEIs and PBs answered the question, and almost all HEIs were aware of this rule. Only one PubH indicated that they were unaware of this rule. The responses from the PBs show an almost even split between PBs who are aware of the rule and those who were not. Almost half of the PBs note that while they were aware of the rule, they did not think it applied to them.

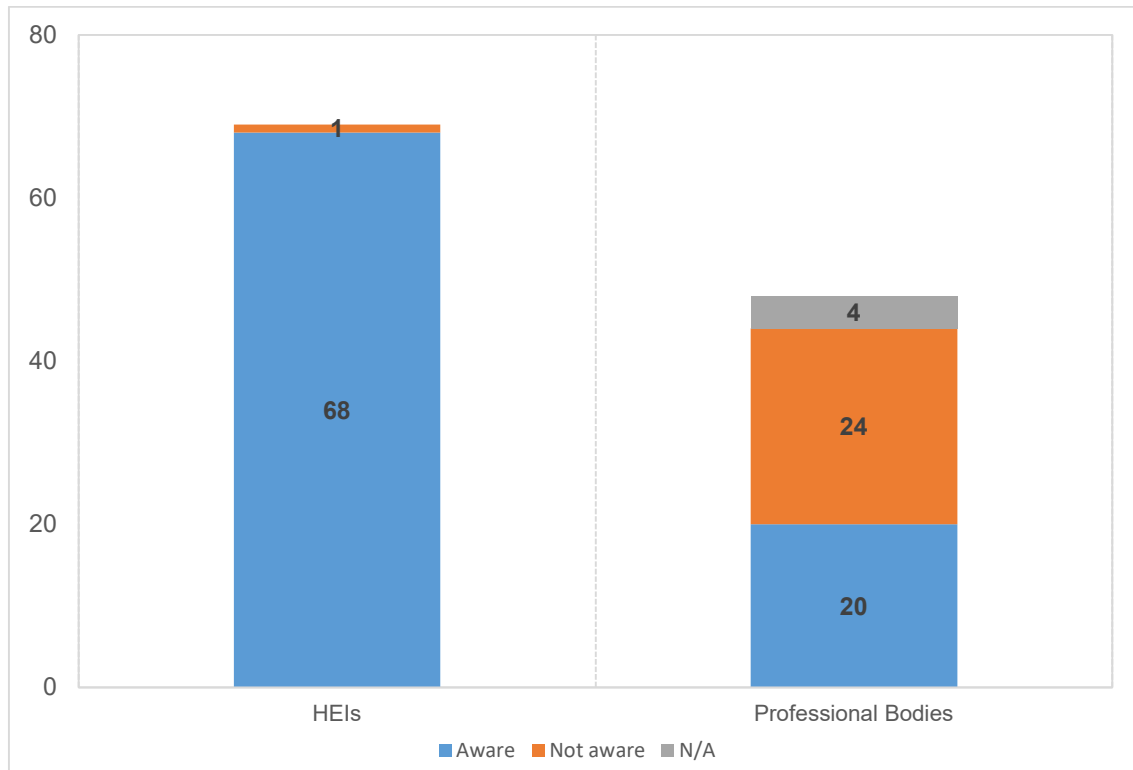


Figure 7: Awareness of the 10% rule

Respondents were also asked if they thought their institutions would ever want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort. A total of 115 respondents from HEIs and PBs answered this question and Figure 9 provides a summary of the responses per stakeholder. More than half (53%) of the respondents think their institutions would (possibly) want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort of students, and about 39% were emphatic about the opposite. Ten respondents, comprising 9 PBs and 1 PubH indicated that this rule was not applicable in their space.

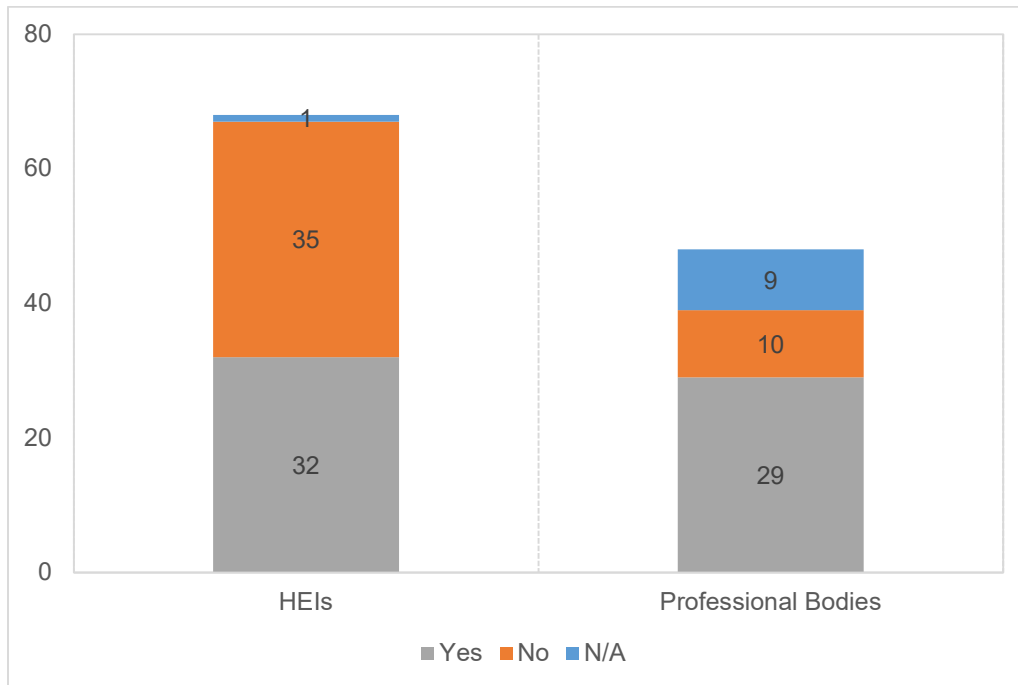


Figure 8: Want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort?

#### 4.3.4.1. Higher Education Institutions

Generally, respondents from PvtH and PubH think that 10% is limiting and would support situations where it is possible to RPL more learners because this would extend opportunities to access higher education to more learners. In addition, respondents note that there are benefits to having more ‘matured’ and experienced learners in a class, as this enhances learning opportunities for other students. One respondent puts it like this:

*“Sometimes the number of successful RPL applicants amounts to more than 10% of a particular cohort. These applicants have adequately proven their competence, ability and/or worth to enter into a qualification, but we are forced to take only the best of those candidates in order to comply with the 10% rule, leaving some candidates disappointed. The 10% limitation may impede the ease of access to higher education, where the purpose of RPL seeks to remedy it” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH11.*

A specific example where there is a high RPL demand in a programme was made:

*“In the case of nursing, there has been a four-year Diploma (regulation R425) that exits on an NQF 6. The students register with the same qualification at the Nursing Council as the four-year degree students who Exit at NQF level 8. Students with this 4-year diploma would now like to specialise as the specialists*

*in nursing in the HEQSF aligned programmes are PG diplomas (NQF8). These 4-year diploma students are unable to progress as there is no articulation for them. They already have an additional qualification in midwifery and it would therefore not make sense for them to do the Advance Diploma in Midwifery (Currently the only form of articulation between NQF 6 and 8. The solution may be to RPL these students into the PG Diploma, however, if only not more than 10% of a cohort is allowed, then we will be blocking access for a large number of professional nurses who did the 4-year Diploma at Nursing colleges”.*  
– **Public Higher Education Institution, PubH8.**

Half of the respondents do not think their institutions would want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort as they considered the provision adequate. One reason given for this is to guarantee the quality of the process:

*“Allowing unlimited numbers of students via RPL would open the door for unethical enrolment and business practices. With a limit on RPL enrolments, the candidates with the most potential can be selected while the others can be put on a trajectory”.* – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH39.**

#### **4.3.4.2. Professional Bodies**

There were mixed opinions among PBs on the 10% rule. Some PBs thought their institutions would like to RPL more than 10% of a cohort as opposed to less than that:

*“YES: if you are granting an academic qualification, however, this should not apply for professional qualifications as the emphasis is on developing competence (integration of technical and practical competencies”* – **Professional Body, PB26.**

Other PBs thought that the 10% is sufficient and should not be increased until it can be substantiated:

*“NO (At the moment we are not in favor of such a rule until further studies have proven the impact and outputs)”* – **Professional Body, PB21.**

One PB notes:

*“There are no reasons why HET institutes should only take 10% of learners/students on a programme. With the large numbers of the slightly more mature generation who have not had access to qualifications and have years and years of experience, they are ideally suited to RPL and simply fill in the gaps where they exist. They are also valuable in a classroom as they can give*

*real-life examples which facilitators sometimes battle with and this give the other students a far broader learning and development” – Professional Body, PB17.*

#### 4.4. POLICY IMPACT: RPL and CAT

The question “*How have these policies impacted your organisation/ institution?*” was posed to all the stakeholders and answered by most. Six sub-themes emerged from the responses (Table 4) and while most of the responses were positive, about 40 of the respondents felt the national policies either had a negative impact on their organisation or had no impact.

Table 4: Policy impact sub-themes

Sub-themes	Response Frequency
Informed organisational policies and practices	87
Facilitated/widened student mobility and access	49
Little/no impact	35
Aided with the administrative system	10
Aided/assisted with capacity building	10
Created anxiety	6

The majority of the responses showed that the national policies have helped to inform stakeholders’ organisational policies and practices because they are used as guidelines for their internal processes. As one PB puts it:

*“These documents have aided in the development of our RPL policy and processes to ensure fair processes, eligibility criteria and evidence required for assessing experience against our competence framework.” – Professional Body, PB15.*

This view was also shared by most of the HEIs, a particular instance being:

*“The policies have ensured compliance within the university and have assisted with the development of our own policy framework regarding RPL admissions and credit transfer of students from other higher education institutions.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH15.*

Other positive impacts of the national policies include:

a) Facilitating student mobility:

*“The impact has been phenomenal to date in the sense that it enabled some of the learners to be declared fully competent on fundamental Unit standards based on their performance on prior matric qualifications. A significant number of learners benefited from the application of CAT policy in all our courses except Human Resources the reason being the non-implementation by our QAP which is SABPP in this regard.” – Private College, PvtCo12.*

b) assisting with developing administrative systems:

*“All qualification development must have an element of RPL” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF4 and,*

c) enhancing capacity:

*“In the last financial year, we embarked on a project of capacitating some providers and their practitioners on developing and implementing RPL in line with the new SAQA amended policies.” – Sector Education and Training Authority, SETA6.*

Some respondents expressed concerns about the negative impact of the policies, indicating that:

*“Firstly, it created anxiety amongst staff members, that is academic and admin, within the multiple brands and campuses of PvTH19, since they were generally not conversant with the construct of RPL, and some members portrayed negative opinions on the validity of the RPL theory.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvTH19.*

*“It has made the process very long and much more time consuming – labour intensive.” – Skills Development Provider, SDP7.*

One professional body commented that,

*“The two policies have been instrumental in guiding the research and development of an RPL policy for PB14. However, there has been confusion as to the requirements of SAQA for membership of a professional body and the policies. SAQA’s criteria for membership of a professional body stipulates that the member must have an underpinning qualification before a designation can*

*be awarded, however, SAQA also states that professional bodies need to admit to the membership via an RPL process. However, professional bodies are not in a position to award a qualification via RPL to meet the requirements for the designation. This scenario needs further interpretation and discussions with relevant professional bodies” – Professional Body, PB14.*

One of the Quality Councils also emphasised this point:

*“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” – Quality Council, QC1.*

#### **4.5. POLICY IMPROVEMENT: RPL and CAT**

Respondents<sup>16</sup> gave mixed responses about their opinions of the national policies. Overall and on one hand, some of the respondents thought both policies were useful, with descriptions like “great”, “informative”, “necessary”, “well-structured”, “relevant” “fit for purpose”, “excellent” and “user-friendly”. On the other hand, a few of the stakeholders - mainly delegated bodies - found the policies “constraining”, do not think the RPL and CAT policies are straightforward, and call for a more simplified process as they were currently viewed as an “administrative nightmare”. One respondent notes that the policies could be clearer and suggests that policy implementers in certain areas would need more direction:

*“As a QDF I firmly support the introduction of RPL/CAT in occupational qualifications. It is one thing to publish policies but employers, employees, Skills Development Providers (SDPs), AQPs and assessment centres require much more support and guidance in implementing these policies in order to achieve the NQF objectives.” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF3.*

Other suggested improvements include clarifying specific aspects of the policies, as one delegated body notes:

*“As the system matures, comprehensive reviews could be conducted and tried and tested policies like RPL and CAT could be made a bit more explicit along the skills development and implementation value chain, i.e. from skills planning to monitoring and evaluation of training.” – Development Quality Partner, DQP6.*

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<sup>16</sup> Delegated Bodies and SDPs

Additional suggestions on improvements to policy are covered by the responses to the survey questions that relate to the successes and challenges that stakeholders face during implementation. The following subsections review the responses to these questions by stakeholder groups.

#### **4.5.1. Successes**

Across the stakeholder groups, respondents widely agreed that both RPL and CAT have helped with facilitating and supporting student mobility in the system because students could accumulate credits and complete qualifications by transiting from one institution to another, or from one programme or qualification to another. This theme of mobility was especially prevalent in the HEIs stakeholder group. Other themes related to the successes of RPL and CAT are improved administrative processes, and enhanced systems and procedures. Respondents also agreed that these concepts provide personalised assistance for learners and help with student retention.

##### **4.5.1.1. Colleges**

Respondents from Colleges acknowledge that RPL and CAT support the movement of students in the system:

*“The student/s is/are able to be credited from their prior accumulated credits towards the acquisition of their qualification or part qualification. No repetition of the same learning area/s that one already progressed in. Academic time is saved for the student/s.”* – **Community Education and Training College, CET1**

*“Its success has been prevalent and visible during the previous academic calendar when we witnessed hundreds of learners that were declared fully competent after the invocation of CAT policy.”* – **Private College, PvtCo12.**

##### **4.5.1.2. Delegated Bodies**

This category of stakeholders reported more challenges than successes. However, one important success for each of RPL and CAT was reported:



*“in collaboration with NAMB<sup>17</sup>, a comprehensive RPL toolkit was developed and implemented. The number of ARPLs performed to date against the requirements for the Occupational Certificate: Toolmaker = 250” – Development Quality Partner, DQP5.*

*“The Corporation does not have a CAT Policy. However, we negotiated for Credit Transfer and recognition of credits by Institutions of Higher Learning, for learners who completed qualifications at [Colleges] by using the principles in the National SAQA CAT Policy. To this extent, the corporation has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the [University of Technology] in this regard. The Corporation is also in the process of signing a similar MoU with [HEI 019]. Credit transfer and/or the recognition of modules by one of the private Institutions of Higher learning is also being considered by the Corporation at present” – Development Quality Partner, DQP3.*

#### **4.5.1.3. Higher Education Institutions**

HEIs, particularly PvtHs were emphatic about RPL, CAT and other student support initiatives being enablers of mobility and improving throughput:

*“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” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH51.*

*“Individuals who have only partially completed a qualification (due to circumstances outside of their control) are awarded the opportunity to meet the requirements of a formal qualification through CAT enrolment. Such students, when motivated, typically perform very well” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH48.*

*“Through CAT, the number of courses that candidates must complete to earn UP qualifications is reduced. This should, typically, lead to a shorter completion time and reduce the risk of student drop-out. CAT also supports student mobility across HE institutions and offers students with greater choice in choosing courses and institutions.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH2.*

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<sup>17</sup> National Artisan Moderation Body.

One of the PubHs gave specific details of such RPL successes per faculty, further highlighting the institution's progress:

- “ - *The faculty of Health Sciences reports that RPL applications are nearly non-existent, maybe one or two per year.*
  - *Faculty of Humanities reports on 2 or 3 RPL applications per year, and then mostly for advanced standing in an undergraduate qualification. In the past 5 years, only 3 such applications were successful.*
  - *The Faculty of Law reports that it has not had an RPL application during the past 10 years*
  - *Faculty of Theology reports on the relevance of RPL applications in their environment, specifically wrt non-formal learning taken into account for access and advanced standing.*
  - *For the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences very few applications are made – maybe one or two every five years. Each application is handled on merit.*
  - *The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences does not generally receive RPL applications. Two exceptions in this Faculty: a traditional ruler/healer who lodged an RPL application to study for a degree in Indigenous Knowledge Systems; a farmer who applied for the Bachelor (Agriculture) to gain access to this degree. Advanced standing applications via the RPL route have never been received.*
  - *Faculty of Engineering indicates that all successes fall within the ambit of RPL applicants to postgraduate qualifications with a successful completion. From 2015 to 2018 at least 20 students have gained access or advanced standing through RPL to complete a postgraduate degree in Engineering, and a number of them have already passed the degree with success.*
- Faculty of Education notes that they deal with RPL cases on a yearly basis, for both access and advanced standing” – **Public Higher Education Institution, PubH6.***

One institution identified poor compliance as a reason for non-success and states:

*“We are not yet able to show evidence of RPL successes in the context of admission to programmes because we have identified poor compliance to the systems that we have that can identify such candidates. As sites of delivery have not kept to a standard procedure, our data is not reliable. However, this survey has brought this problem to light so our student information system and learning management system are being evaluated for their ability to gather and report on this data for future research” – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH36.***

Several HEIs indicated that they did not have any RPL successes for two main reasons: there had been no applicants or applications, and the RPL/CAT process was new to the institutions thus proving too soon to determine.

#### **4.5.1.4. Professional Bodies**

PBs had more to say about RPL than CAT. Most PBs acknowledge that RPL enables the award of designations for members that have not achieved formal qualifications, and completed applications are considered a success:

*“Candidates who wish to assess an occupational qualification, either through RPL or otherwise are able to do so. Live-long learning is encouraged. Candidates are able to accumulate credits and receive recognition for it.” – Professional Body, PB14.*

*“Successes:- Avenues have been opened for people without qualifications for their competencies to be recognised; Helps people overcome the burden of not having a designation and qualification” – Professional Body, PB18.*

Concerning CAT-related successes, there were very few successes mentioned, as more than half of the responding PBs note that CAT is “not applicable” to their PB or it has “not yet been applied”. One PB notes that:

*“CAT process is managed by the Higher Education Institutions in accordance to their own statutes”. – Professional Body, PB25.*

#### **4.5.1.5. Quality Councils**

QCs reported more RPL successes than CAT successes. As one of the QCs notes, this is probably because RPL has been entrenched as an alternative route for access across institutions, and in the words of another:

*“Approximately 70% of learners that are admitted or achieved through RPL are learners from QC2” – Quality Council, QC2.*

Within the QCs, there is a continuous drive to align and standardise the internal RPL and CAT policies to the National RPL and CAT Policy and the QCs are at various stages of the process.

#### **4.5.1.6. Skills Providers**

The successes of RPL among SDPs range from capacity building for implementing RPL, to completion of RPL processes by students who are subsequently awarded certificates:

*“RPL has been successfully conducted in the sector, for water process controllers in particular...”* – **Sector Education Training Authority, SETA2.**

*“Over the past 3 years (2017/18 to 2019/20) 740 workers completed and received certificates for programmes implemented through RPL. On average the target set annually for RPL registrations is 200...In the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years, 15 Training Providers participated in skills development interventions aimed at supporting them to implement RPL programmes.”* – **Sector Education Training Authority, SETA6.**

About 10 of the 15 SDPs reported their CAT successes, with more than half reporting successes that related to student mobility. For example,

*“the candidate working towards a qualification within one sector can transfer to another qualification within the same sector should there be generic unit standards.”* – **Sector Education Training Authority, SETA3.**

#### **4.5.2. Challenges**

Challenges related to the implementation of CAT and RPL as listed by the respondents include complicated processes, lack of funding, struggling or inexperienced candidates and assessors, inflexible skills providers, and poor record-keeping. A summary of key challenges per stakeholder group is detailed in the sub-sections that follow.

##### **4.5.2.1. Colleges**

In general, the challenges for the Colleges were more around CAT than RPL. With respect to CAT, challenges were raised by the PvtCos, relating to blockages, parity of esteem and inconsistency of application.

The first challenge pertains to the difficulty in effecting transfers despite the existence of the supporting systems

*“Sometimes there is difficulty with transferring credits between the various SETA’s, as well as within the same SETA and being able to link the CAT achievement to the relevant qualification. [It is] a SETA system related issue, [and] time consuming as system developers need to resolve the individual learner queries” – Private College, PvtCo13.*

Parity of esteem was raised as a challenge by one college and echoes those raised by other stakeholders. PvtCo7 noted that:

*“CETA accredited institutions don’t always have the equivalent standard to our program. So even though technically they qualify their skills level is significantly lower and they struggle to keep up with our students” – Private College, PvtCo7.*

The issue of inconsistent application due to multiple interpretations of CAT was raised by one college:

*“SETAs are inconsistent in applying CAT. Different interpretations.” – Private College, PvtCo11.*

Respondents found the RPL process to be “lengthy”, “costly”, “frustrating” and “cumbersome”. Scenarios, where students provided incomplete applications, portfolios of evidence and other incomplete documentation, were also highlighted as the following quotes illustrate:

*“We found that candidates opted to rather do the entire portfolio of evidence, rather than looking for evidence they can present for assessment/recognition purposes. This made the process longer than the intended time envisaged.” – Private College, PvtCo16.*

*“Ignorance about the RPL processes is the biggest challenge.” – Private College, PvtCo12.*

#### **4.5.2.2. Delegated Bodies**

While the establishment of partnerships has been an important success factor for QDFs, some challenges around execution persist. For example, DQP3 noted that:

*“a challenge is experienced in that our MoU partners at university level informed the Corporation that they cannot provide direct credits to learners who completed the same modules at the [Colleges], as the [Colleges] are not registered [Institutions of Higher Learning]. Even though it is the same modules with the same training material, which have been compiled with the assistance of the same University. Recognition is done through RPL while direct credits will be more advantages”* – Development Quality Partner, DQP3.

Similar challenges were reported with respect to the difficulty experienced in transferring credits between HEIs. Recounting a personal experience, one QDF wrote:

*“My son studied for 2.5 years at [PubH3] and achieved upper 70% - 80% for all courses taken. Transferring to [PubH2] saw him practically “lose” the entire 2.5 years as almost none of his courses were credited. He virtually had to start his BSc degree from the beginning”* – **Quality Development Facilitator, QDF3**

The respondent suggested that HEIs may be the source of the blockages in the process:

*“It seemingly relates to HE institutional autonomy and business financial success. The fact that HE institutions can dictate that they will only accept a specific % of RPL candidates or a portion of a degree/programme of study has no basis in the integrity of the programme of study or the transferring institution but more directly the fees that would be due them or what charges they could impose for the course of study. This is absolutely against the CAT policy and the objectives of the NQF”* – **Quality Development Facilitator, QDF3.**

Another challenge that was raised was information management in and between systems:

*“QDFs don’t become involved in the implementation of RPL/CAT policies however I had the opportunity to engage with SDP projects which included RPL. The onus is on the employee/learner to gather the support information/documents. This becomes very difficult if the employee/learner changes from employers or the business closed down. Once that is done an assessment centre must validate the skills and knowledge and identify the gaps. It is filling these gaps that provide the biggest challenge to SDPs and becomes*

*extremely costly for the employee/learner*” – **Quality Development Facilitator, QDF3.**

#### **4.5.2.3. Higher Education Institutions**

More than 60 of the 68 participating HEIs discussed the challenges they have had with RPL and CAT.

For RPL, three challenges were predominantly mentioned, and these were:

- 1) **Cumbersome, inefficient processes:** Although the general feedback was that the RPL process was intensive and demanding, challenges with the process include the cost of running programmes or setting up a dedicated RPL office. The following quotes illustrate this point:

*“The RPL process is time-consuming and generally the policy is not well understood. There is little understanding of the academic rigors required to confirm that the applicant has the requisite proficiencies, and many people are looking for quick fixes and “easy” routes to obtaining a qualification.”* – **Public Higher Education Institution, PubH1.**

*“The main challenge lies with the lengthy process timelines and its lack of alignment to the University’s registration cycles.”* – **Public Higher Education Institution, PubH8.**

*“Cost factor in setting up a dedicated RPL office. Not too many RPL applications at private higher education institutions mainly due to funding. Students also seek financial aid and are mostly mature and elderly. Private higher education institutions normally cannot support financially RPL students.”* – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH21.**

- 2) **Challenges with the applicants:** Several issues were noted around applicants, especially concerning the incomplete documentation or incorrect information supplied during the application process. This invariably results in an arduous and frustrating process for both the student and the institution. In some cases, it was noted that students who were admitted through RPL processes struggled with the academic portfolio and/or literacy, and lacked fundamental or required knowledge:

*“One challenge we have experienced is that despite NOME assessment, some RPL candidate struggled with their learning. We do not know if this is because the original RPL assessment was inappropriate. This RPL test has since been*

*improved. The other challenge is students struggling with technology so, while they may have NSC, they have poor technology skills so have to go through extra training. Another area is academic discourse – but this is also additional training that we provide.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH36.*

- 3) **Poor implementation of RPL systems:** This includes challenges such as inadequate staff capacity to deal with a high number of applications, as well as staff’s lack of knowledge of processes and understanding of the policy and a general lack of resources:

*“A third challenge has been poor standardised implementation of RPL systems and gathering data for the purposes of impact studies.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH36.*

Concerning challenges with CAT, about half of the responses relate to institutional processes (for example, comparing institutional standards, qualifications, and programmes) causing delays in the process:

*“Huge challenge with public universities recognition of credits from private higher education institutions programmes/modules. Either they are not recognising our qualifications, or they doubt the quality in so far that they may even request examples of our assessments.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH14.*

*“Challenges of the CAT system occur where equivalence is not clearly defined, and some subjectivity is brought in due to the focus of the programme offered at the University in comparison to the focus offered at the initial University. This challenge is managed in the Departments evaluate the modules, and once a decision is made it must be consistently applied. Additional challenges occur when modules are offered at different year levels and thus the competencies obtained differ, particularly when credits are obtained at a lower level than what is being applied for. Due to CAT evaluations only being conducted Departmentally (for the expertise required), there is no broad evaluation down following the transfer of credits to assess whether students have obtained the expected outcomes. The University relies on the 50% credit transfer rule to be assured that students acquire all of the expected learning outcomes of the programme so designed to meet the purpose of the qualification.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH4.*

#### **4.5.2.4. Professional Bodies**

Three main areas identified by the PBs as challenges related to the applicants (especially with regards to incomplete applications), cumbersome processes and poor



implementation of systems. Inexperienced assessors, as well as the difficulty in matching skills to qualifications, were also noted:

*“adjusting to a formal learning programme by RPL candidates has proven challenging in some instances in that the candidates do not only have to demonstrate competence in the content of the competency framework but also familiarise themselves with the assessment methodology.” – Professional Body, PB3.*

There were very few CAT-related challenges reported by the PBs as more than half of the respondents noted that CAT did not apply to their work or field of practice.

*“Our professional body was not aware of the CAT policy and we do not follow any CAT-related processes. In addition, PB39 does not function as an education/training provider and therefore we cannot provide a satisfactory response to this question.” – Professional Body, PB39.*

#### **4.5.2.5. Quality Councils**

Three RPL challenges were noted by the QCs and they were: the need for consistent application, the monitoring of implementation and the need for funding:

*“The process initiated by the DHET to review all policies including RPL and CAT policies is welcomed. The [QC1] hopes that the positions that it will put across would be considered. It is not necessary for the DHET or SAQA to proceed with finalising policies without taking into consideration the concerns of the [QC1] as a key stakeholder” – Quality Council, QC1.*

*“The only foreseen challenge with regard to the implementation of the RPL policy will be funding for the implementation of the policy by [QC3] and its stakeholder (RPL providers). We need to deal with this challenge.” – Quality Council, QC3*

#### **4.5.2.6. Skills Development Providers**

SDPs reported challenges regarding barriers to implementing RPL and CAT at various levels, noting more RPL challenges than those for CAT. The RPL challenges included:

- Poor implementation, including cumbersome processes and poor communication,
- Inexperienced assessors, and

- Poor record management.

One SETA puts it this way:

*“The challenge that is being experienced is that the QCTO is not supporting the implementation of RPL, and its purpose is eroded, because QCTO expects RPL candidates to sit for an Exam (EISA) even for soft skills qualifications that [SETA4] is quality-assuring, after the collection of relevant evidence, support and observations...Several meetings were held between the HWSETA and QCTO to try and explain the purpose of RPL and how this requirement is discouraging, but the QCTO could not be convinced otherwise.”* – **Sector Education Training Authority, SETA4.**

Regarding CAT, the most frequently noted challenges were those experienced with institutional processes, especially during implementation. An instance where the difficulty experienced by students wishing to transfer between institution types was cited:

*“Sometimes it’s difficult for a learner to move from a private institution to a public institution. Learners are required to present their statement of results when applying for N5 or N6 but unfortunately, they are issued late after the registration period has lapsed”* – **Skills Development Provider, SDP6.**

One SDP reported delays in accessing vital information, stating:

*“When learners seek to transfer credits between institutions and sometimes even within institutions they can come up against credit transfer barriers”* – **Skills Development Provider, SDP1.**

A lack of understanding from providers, and blockages at certain levels were also reported as challenges:

*“There are challenges in implementation because of providers not being fully aware of the CAT process. Mostly confuse the process with RPL.”* – **Sector Education Training Authority, SETA6.**

#### **4.5.3. Advice**

The stakeholders were asked to share any advice they had for organisations that may want to implement RPL, CAT and student support initiatives. A total of 106 stakeholders responded to the question and the number of respondents per stakeholder group is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Number of stakeholders who provided advice

Colleges (n=26)	Delegated Bodies (n=12)	Higher Education Institutions (n=68)	Professional Bodies (n=49)	Quality Councils (n=3)	Skills Providers (n=15)	Total (n=173)
20	11	33	32	2	8	<b>106</b>

Four sub-themes emerged from the responses, with some stakeholders providing multiple pieces of advice and suggestions. Table 6 presents the frequency of responses by sub-themes, and a summary of each is detailed in the subsequent sections:

Table 6: Policy improvement sub-themes

Sub-themes for policy improvement	Frequency of responses
Clearly defined processes and procedures	70
Capacitation and training	30
Advocacy/Awareness of RPL	20
Good record keeping	10

### **Clearly defined processes:**

Respondents suggested that having easily accessible and clear processes/procedures in place would be beneficial to other stakeholders who want to implement these practices. Respondents noted that not only should the processes be in place, but they need to be consistently applied to make a difference:

*“Governance structures, regulatory documents and quality control processes must be in place and consistently applied - only then can RPL and CAT be a value-add when it comes to marketing for enhanced access and success –*  
**Public Higher Education Institution, PubH6.**

*“It is vital to have comprehensive policies in place and clear and well-reasoned processes to follow.” –*  
**Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH11.**

These processes should be fair and transparent to assist the students’ progress as intended. Following the national policies’ guidelines, having clear guidelines for curriculum mapping, developing robust assessment tools/methodologies, holding information sessions or workshops on compiling a portfolio of evidence and benchmarking against similar institutions were some of the recommendations given to other institutions who may want to implement these concepts.

One PvtCo notes that CAT policy may need to be clearer:

*“.... The CAT policies are sometimes vague. A number of providers for instance will only CAT 1st and 2nd Language and Maths if the candidate is doing an NQF level qualification and has relevant marks on a grade 12 certificate. These providers will not apply CAT for a learner doing an NQF 3 qualification as they are not sure whether they are allowed to or not” – Private College, PvtCo14.*

**Capacitation and training:** Another sub-theme on implementation suggestions was that of providing capacitation and training (relating to RPL, CAT and other flexible initiatives) to staff, assessors, practitioners, and employers. For learner support initiatives, respondents advised increasing the number of existing initiatives like extra classes, mentorship programs or tutorials for students as an example.

With respect to RPL and CAT, suggestions on having an independent office or division to cater for candidates were predominant, including creating structures like RPL coordinators where these do not currently exist:

*“It is important for an RPL office to facilitate the RPL processes of candidates (application, compiling of applicant’s portfolio, etc.) and provide the information to the academic department to consider possible accreditation or admission to formal studies or not. The RPL office must act as an ‘agent’ for the academic departments, conveying the outcome on behalf of the Department/Faculty to the applicant. If the RPL office communicates the information as the primary or final decision-maker, or in a position of authority, unsuccessful applicants will appeal or challenge the RPL office instead of the academic department who is actually the decision-maker.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH13.*

Similarly, the quality of staff and assessors, their knowledge of the framework as well as their certification was also raised by respondents:

*“[PB21] would like to suggest annual training to all professional bodies implementing an RPL policy. A clear understanding of the modular outcomes of RPL assessments are required before implementation. Therefore, a vast knowledge of the policy and education landscape should be taught before implementation.” – Professional Body, PB21.*

*“.... For each of the initiatives, appropriate resources need to be provided including training and staff complement. For example, students who use the Learning Management System Blackboard should be trained in its use. The initiatives have to be managed, implemented and monitored by staff who are responsible for these projects. Therefore, the recruitment, selection and*

*appointment of suitably qualified and experienced staff is necessary.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH16.*

**Advocacy:** Respondents generally agree that flexibility in education and training is very important and initiatives to highlight these should be well-planned and communicated appropriately. Suggestions for raising the awareness of RPL, CAT and other student support initiatives include awareness campaigns and personal interface through presentations and/or workshops for other stakeholders.

*“A well-documented and well-implemented RPL and CAT policy will always yield positive results. It is cumbersome but if systems are in place and qualified and experienced RPL advisers and Assessors are utilised in the process, the process will definitely work. A well-resourced institution should be able to apply the principles encapsulated in the policies. Stakeholder education or awareness campaigns are a must in order to ensure the smooth implementation of these policies.” – Professional Body, PB4.*

**Good record keeping:** The matter of record-keeping was also raised and respondents identified the need for finding effective solutions for managing data for RPL and CAT in institutions. For student support initiatives, well-recorded information would help with student monitoring:

*“Make sure that all the required data for the student is recorded properly upfront, which allows for better student monitoring.” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH8.*

Similar views were shared by other PvtHs and PvtCos:

*“It would be ideal for every institution to ... keep records both hard copy and electronic” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH44.*

*“...formalised and accurate records [to be] kept. [In addition] confidentiality needs to be maintained to create a safe environment for the students” – Private College, PvtCo1.*

**Suggestions for improvements:** Concerning improvements, most of the respondents indicated that the policies could benefit from more detailed and defined procedures, with two DQPs recommending that:

*“...the CAT Policy should include requirements/standards which will make it possible for the transfer of credits between various Institutions accredited by the different QC’s, for example: provide for the requirements which must be met*

*before a University of Technology may provide direct credits to a learner who completed a qualification/module at an Institution accredited by the QCTO” – Development Quality Partner, DQP3; and*

*“Best practices be obtained nationally and internationally, consolidated and presented at stakeholder forums and circulated to all relevant for input, implementation and on-going monitoring and evaluations” – Development Quality Partner, DQP6.*

Better communication in the system was highlighted, with one QDF stating that:

*“As die QCTO does not communicate to QDFs it is recommended that there is better communication between SAQA and the QDFs. If SAQA experiences any problems with any aspects regarding QCTO qualifications, we are never informed what the exact problems are. Personally, none of my qualifications has ever been returned as far as I know, but I have heard from other QDFs that even if they request to see the response from SAQA, the QCTO refused” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF2.*

The need for greater capacity and support was raised by two QDFs and one DQP:

*“institutions need to have ETD [Education and Training Development] practitioners who [have] the experience and knowledge of helping the learner to provide and to put together evidence needed for RPL and also ensure that the evidence generated is valid and authentic” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF4.*

*“Develop qualifications and with part-qualifications in a modular framework of competencies identified by your sector of current and future technology requirements i.e. train for the future not for the past” – Development Quality Partner, DQP5.*

Practical advice regarding how QDFs and the QCTO could be supported to facilitate mobility was also suggested:

*“because of the difficulties in registering occupational qualifications QCTO spends its time on those issues. Critical Issues in the design of curricula are not being addressed. Having more common modules would assist the system as a whole” – Quality Development Facilitator, QDF1.*

*“Compile an internal policy according to the external policies (e.g. CHE, SAQA) and follow it. Adhere to the rules” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH42.*

*“As a traditional, contact, research-led university, admission to a Bachelor’s programme mostly relies on the screening of matriculation results, with CAT being applied when students change from one programme to another or*

*migrate from one institution to another. At the postgraduate level, RPL for access or advanced standing is considered as part of the normal admissions process. The advice, therefore, would be to follow an integrated approach and devolve the decision-making to the programme level, giving access to a programme, only when students have a fair chance of achieving success” – Public Higher Education Institution, PubH6.*

Other recommendations for improvements include a call for good record-keeping and communication:

*“Consider providing Private Higher Education Institutions training opportunities to better implement and share RPL and CAT data with SAQA. It is not a requirement of the NLRD upload and is not always reported as part of the Annual Report. Sharing this information, would however be very helpful to better gauge and measure the impact of these policies in the Higher Education context” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH25.*

*“We would recommend finding an online solution to manage the data and measures needed for RPL and CAT” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH19.*

*“[Student Support] Initiatives need to be well planned, and communicated and should have a dedicated driver. The process requires a good understanding of the proficiencies needed to prepare for the levels of study for which RPL is being sought as it is time-consuming.” – Public Higher Education Institution, PvtH1.*

## **4.6. OTHER FLEXIBILITY ELEMENTS**

This section focuses on the responses to questions about other elements of flexibility in the system, with a focus on student support initiatives, how these initiatives are managed, recorded, and reported as well as the successes and challenges relating to them.

### **4.6.1. Student Support Initiatives**

Several student support initiatives and services were listed by the respondents as elements that support flexibility in the education system (Figure 9). These include:

- a) Blended learning: There are different definitions of blended learning, but one of the simplest definitions is the *“thoughtful integration of face-to-face classroom experiences with online learning experiences”* (Garrison and Hanuka, 2004). Although this definition is simple, the implementation and applicability of blended

learning can be quite diverse. Some PvtHs note that the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic hastened the implementation of a blended approach to learning, as most students did not have access to learning materials and services in the first phase of the nationwide lockdown, and online or e-learning approaches had to be adopted. Most courses offered by PubH12, for instance, comprise “*synchronous, asynchronous, online and electronic submission of work*”, while PubH9 uses a learner management system called ‘Moodle’- which allows learning to occur anywhere and anytime- as part of its ‘technology-enhanced teaching’.

b) Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP): Designed to equip students with the necessary competencies to successfully complete their studies, ECPs are employed as one of the student support strategies in many PvtHs and PubHs. Respondents cited many examples of how ECPs are used on campuses and in teaching/learning. One detailed explanation is given by PvtH13 who states:

*“Where students are battling with a course, or they have not met the duly performed requirements in order to sit the summative assessment, an additional opportunity is provided for the students to engage in an Intensive Programme. This is a specialised individual programme developed for each student in conjunction with the student's profile and areas of lack. The programme will specify the intended outcomes for the specialised programme as well as a daily plan to work against. The aim is to provide the student with the opportunity to improve / better their results. The programme will assist to solidify the foundation for the following year of study. The programme will enrich students in the following situations:*

- *Those students who have not attained 80% attendance during a specific course in contact mode programmes only.*
- *Those students who have not passed the courses with a sufficiently high enough formative assessment result / have not handed in assignments, or have not met the requirements*
- *For those students who wish to better their results or prepare for their supplementary examinations.*
- *Students who have failed a subject may, depending upon the subject, take the opportunity to improve their understanding.*

*The programme is either 1 or 2 weeks in duration depending upon the needs of the student, the Intensive programme runs in July and again in December of each academic year. All students will be notified of the programme well enough in advance to plan for it. It is a requirement that the student is successful in completing all outcomes required for the programme in order for the student to pass the course or gain access to summative assessment opportunities”.* – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvTH13.**



Extended hours of learning/operating hours including frequent use of Whatsapp chats and extended library times on weekends are examples of how this strategy is used.

c) Mentorship programmes: Mentoring, coaching, counselling initiatives and peer programs are used extensively in HEIs to support students enrolled in a new program or struggling to meet required academic standards. Students would usually be assigned a mentor at registration to support them during/throughout their studies. In some instances, an institution-level Committee is appointed to ensure that issues pertaining to mentors, mentees and the overall governance of the strategy is in place and is progressive. In PvtH45 for example,

*“Each student is assigned a faculty mentor – on average, the student is scheduled to meet with the mentor about five times a semester. These feature personal conversations on the student’s ministry, academic, and family life. Counsel is provided by the faculty mentor, and where help is needed from the institution, the matter is presented to the faculty in the monthly faculty meetings”.* One public university notes that *“The University has a very successful mentoring programme that provides peer support for mainly first entering students at the University. Mentors not only provide academic support but much needed social support for first-year students. The mentorship programme is supported by Academic Support and is managed by the CAE. It is facilitated by Student Mentors who are highly successful, motivated and caring students who are carefully selected and trained to support other students. Mentors volunteer their valuable time to assist you to succeed”* – **Public Higher Education Institution, PubH4.**

For PBs, these support initiatives are targeted at new persons or young professionals.

A good example is given by one PB who states:

*“...involved in peer mentoring programmes which are called CPD (Continuous Professional Development) sessions in all provinces, where mentoring in the form of presentations and Q&A sessions are held with members in order to mentor members which are convened by each regional committee of the province”.* – **Professional Body, PB10.**

Supplemental instruction also forms part of mentorship programmes, with most, if not all of these initiatives embedded in institutions’ learner guidance and support policies, which include information on how such programmes help students navigate learning.

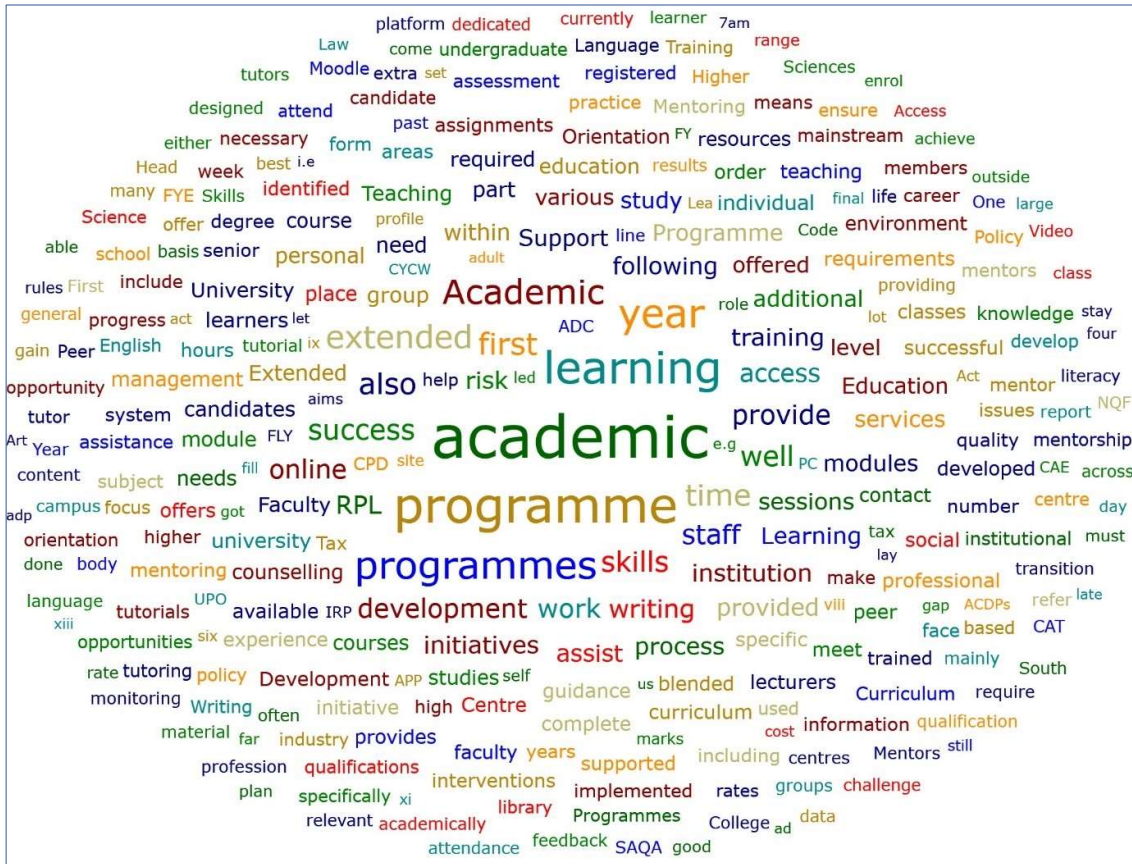


Figure 9: Word cloud of responses on student support initiatives

d) Other Support: This includes support tailored toward specific types of students like differently-abled students and the provision of centres such as writing centres, teaching and learning development centres that offer support to both students and teachers, centres for part-time studies and student “success centres”.

Table 7 presents a summary of the two broad ways that responding stakeholders reported managing or implementing the various initiatives. Firstly, and overwhelmingly, support initiatives were handled by a team of people, including but not limited to heads of departments, staff, project or programme coordinators, mentors and coaches, and specially designated committees designated to oversee specific initiatives. A second way in which support programmes were managed was through processes or tools which included the use of online teaching and study platforms, frequent tutorials and consistent monitoring of learner performance.

Table 7: How are student support initiatives managed?

	<b>Colleges (n=26)</b>	<b>Delegated Bodies (n=12)</b>	<b>HEIs (n=68)</b>	<b>PBs (n=49)</b>	<b>QCs (n=3)</b>	<b>SDPs (n=15)</b>	<b>Total (n=173)</b>
A team of people	13	0	45	22	0	9	<b>89</b>
Process or tools	9	0	10	10	1	3	<b>33</b>
N/A or None	1	0	0	4	1	0	<b>6</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>128</b>

Most of the stakeholders reported on the existing support initiatives to governance structures like Board Committees, faculty and departmental heads, internal online platforms (including records of minutes of meetings and mentoring logs) and social media. Reports were provided either on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual basis depending on the institution.

#### **4.6.2. Successes and Challenges: Student Support**

In describing the successes and challenges of student support initiatives, five of the six stakeholder groups and more than 100 stakeholders responded to the question. A breakdown of the number of responses by stakeholder group is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Number of responses by stakeholder group: successes and challenges

	<b>Colleges (n=26)</b>	<b>Delegated Bodies (n=12)</b>	<b>HEIs (n=68)</b>	<b>PBs (n=49)</b>	<b>QCs (n=3)</b>	<b>SDPs (n=15)</b>	<b>Total (n=173)</b>
<b>Successes</b>	19	0	50	29	2	12	<b>112</b>
<b>Challenges</b>	20	0	51	32	2	12	<b>117</b>

## **Successes:**

Three main sub-themes were identified from the multiple responses relating to the successes of student support initiatives. Stakeholders indicated that outputs such as increased access, retention, and improved academic performance were some of the accomplishments noted with support initiatives. Table 9 gives a list of the sub-themes.

Table 9: Successes of student support initiatives

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Frequency of responses</b>
<b>Increased throughput</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Improved systems and processes</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Personalised assistance for learners</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>N/A / None</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Unspecified</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>126</b>

About a third of the responses pointed to course completion and successfully completed programmes as success factors of student support initiatives. Although most of the responses for this theme were from HEIs, in the PB space, this translated to more professional designations being awarded, or permanent employment and retention in a sector.

*“Our students on completing their qualifications are generally hired by the salon they completed their mentoring programme. The majority of the students have passed their National and International exams – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH50.*

*“The pass rates in exams of students who have passed through the academy surpass those of similar students who choose not to use the Academy and the gap between their exam performance and that of native English speakers has started to narrow in subjects supported by the academy. A number of students who have made use of the academy are now qualified actuaries. In addition, those who have benefited from the wider support offered by the academy are more effective in the work environment.” – Professional Body, PB28.*

Stakeholders also stated that a successfully implemented initiative ( due to improved processes such as improved turnaround times and prompt query resolutions) is an important indicator of success. One SETA noted that “*employable learners after completing training, learning and employment opportunities and credible skills programmes and qualifications*” among others were some of the wins highlighted by enhanced systems in their institutions.

HEIs and Colleges noted personalised assistance and support rendered to students, using videos, one-on-one interviews and other similar communication tools as another success factor:

*“As students have one-on-one interviews with their lecturers, access to the Registrar who can refer them to the in-house educational psychologist or an essay-writing tutor, CAT students fare well in general.”* – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH28.**

*“It is closely knitted and functional, supported with good communication networks between facilitators, learners and management.”* – **Private College, PvtCo18.**

Twenty stakeholders did not report any successes or felt that the question did not apply to them.

### **Challenges:**

Five sub-themes were identified from the multiple responses provided by stakeholders about the challenges associated with student support initiatives (Table 10).

Table 10: Challenges with student support Initiatives

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Frequency of responses</b>
<b>Commitment from learners</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Resource constraints</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Lack of understanding</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Poor support</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Poor record keeping</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>116</b>

A lack of commitment to learning was the most frequent challenge. Stakeholders noted that students failed to complete their studies due to many reasons, including a lack of engagement and interest. Some PBs stated that members seemed to have conflicting priorities, paid little attention to criteria and were ill-prepared:

*“The main and important challenge is encouraging candidates to engage with all the resources available. We find that about 32% of candidates engage with all the material. The candidate support can only cater for areas of concern for the majority and not individuals. Candidates do not start their preparation on time.” – Professional Bodies, PB49.*

The second biggest challenge was identified as a lack of resources - inclusive of a lack of capacity, finances, equipment, data and even time. One PBs notes:

*“The primary challenges relate to time and people. That refers primarily to the time students have available to participate in the academy activities while still being able to be productive for their employers and have time for personal study. People refer primarily to the challenge of always having enough high calibre tutors and mentors to support all the students. With the aid of INSETA, some of the financial challenges have been alleviated.” – Professional Body, PB28.*

In HEIs and Colleges, this challenge included a lack of data or ‘good connections’, as one HEI details:

*“Students do not have internet or wifi at home [there is an] initial fear for technology, [and] some staff not being technology savvy” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH44.*

## **4.7. UNDERSTANDING THE RELEVANT DATA**

This section reviews stakeholders’ responses to questions about the availability of flexibility-related data in their organisations and what categories of data are available for submission to the national databases that are mandated to store these data.

### **4.7.1. Flexibility-related Data**

Respondents from four of the six stakeholder groups (colleges, delegated bodies, Professional bodies and SDPs) were asked if their organisation had any RPL, CAT, student support or other flexibility-related data they could share. The responses

showed that the stakeholders had more RPL-related data available, compared to CAT or learner support data (Figure 10). Thirty-nine entities reported that had RPL data to share while fifty-three entities said they did not have any RPL data to share for the study.

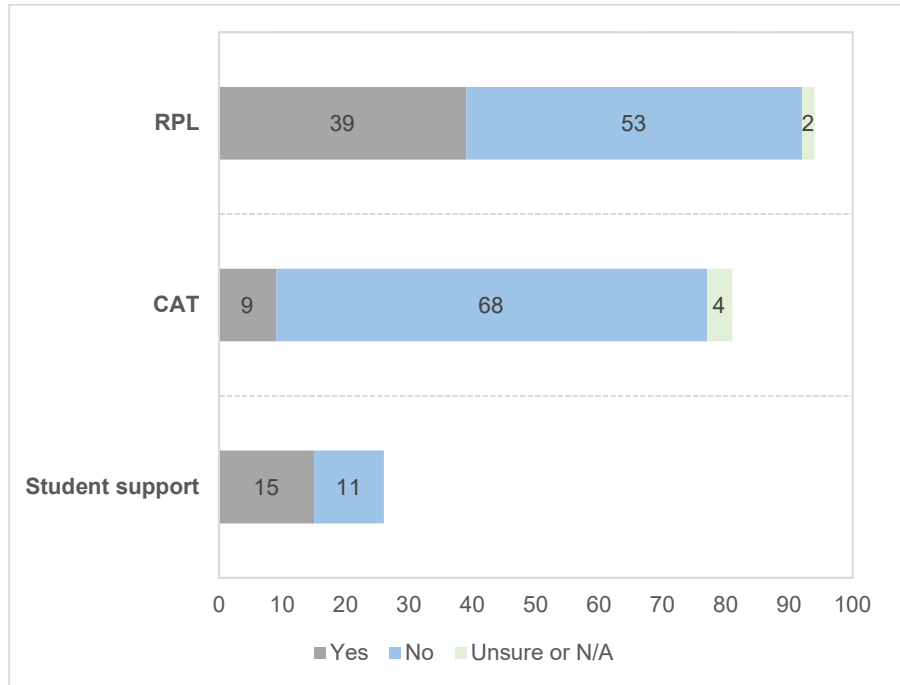


Figure 10: "Does your organisation have data it can share?"

**Categories of flexibility-related data:** The types or categories of data listed by respondents include:

- Candidate's information: Including candidate's name and contact details
- Applications or registration data: including programme enrolled for, year of enrolment, type of RPL (access, exemption) and assessment outcomes
- Success rates: Including the percentage of candidates who have completed (board) exams.

Table 11 gives an example of the type of CAT data reported by one of the PvtCos.

Table 11: Example of CAT data shared by a stakeholder

SETA	COURSE	NUMBER OF LEARNERS CAT Application

<b>SETA1</b>	NC Contact Centre Support 2	460
	NC Business Administration 3	249
	FETC Business Administration 4	544
	FETC Project Management 4	405
	FETC Marketing 4	330
		(1988+517) =2 505
<b>SETA2</b>	NC End User Computing 3	88
	FETC Technical Support 4	326
<b>SETA3</b>	FETC Public Administration	1 982
	NC Wealth Management	472

Eighteen stakeholders made up of 13 Private colleges, one CET College, three TVETs and one DQP echoed similar responses for the types of student support data they had. Pass rates, dropout rates, monthly progress reports and finance and medical support data were some of the additional categories of data mentioned.

#### **4.7.2. Data Submission**

HEIs were asked about their existing data submission processes. When asked if their institution submit RPL and CAT data to the national databases, 66 of the 67 participating HEIs responded to the question (Figure 11). A total of 49 of the 66 respondents (74%) indicated that they do not submit RPL data to any of the national databases while four respondents (6%) were not sure or indicated that the question did not apply to them.

Regarding CAT data, 48 of the 66 respondents (73%) do not submit CAT data to any of the national databases, 13 (20%) submitted data and five respondents (8%) were not sure or indicated that the question did not apply to them.



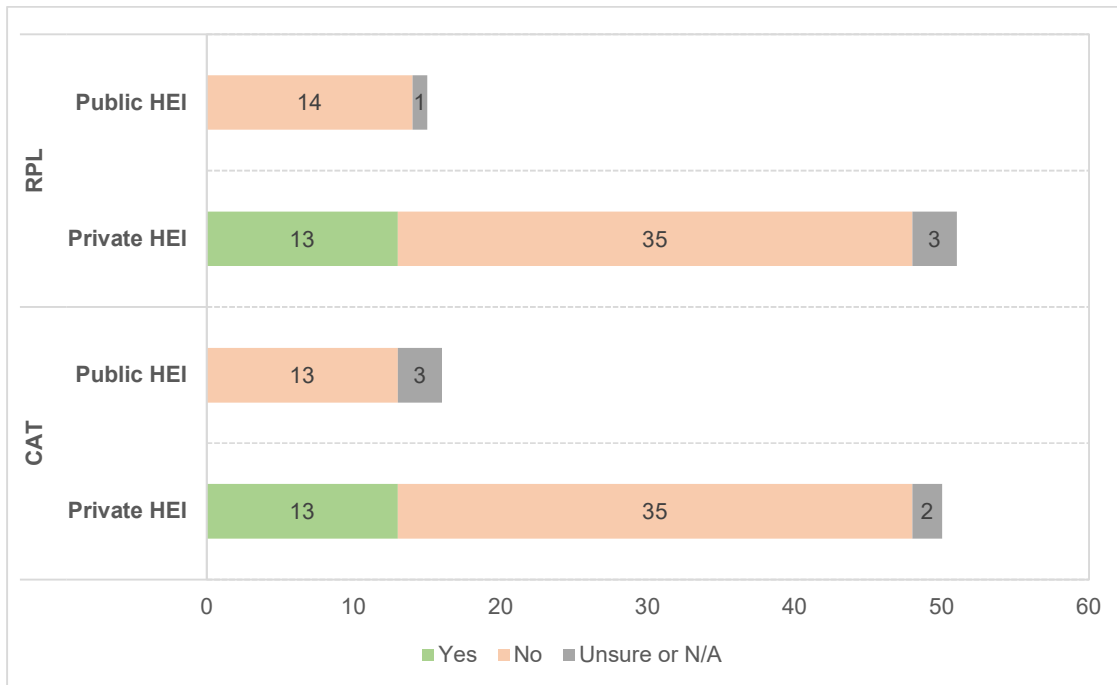


Figure 11: "Submitting RPL/CAT data to the national databases?"

A follow-up question required the respondents to mention the national database they submitted data to. Some respondents – all of them from PHs – mentioned more than one database, The HEQCIS and the NLRD were notably popular mentions for RPL/CAT data (Table 12).

Table 12: List of national databases respondents submit RPL/CAT data to

National Database	No. of mentions
Edudex	7
HEMIS	2
HEQCIS	15
NLRD	14
Other/Unaware	6

One respondent mentioned other databases like the Learner Management Information System (LMIS) for the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs), noting that:

*"We are aware that the system for capturing RPL learners and their achievements for the OQSF is currently through the CATHSSETA student data system. The CHE HEQCIS data system for students and graduates does not yet have a way of capturing data on RPL and CAT"* – **Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH36.**

*“We are not aware of a national system for capturing CAT data” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH36.*

Some respondents also indicated that they were unaware of such systems, with one respondent asking:

*“I am unaware of this being possible and to whom one would send this specific information” – Private Higher Education Institution, PvtH23.*

#### **4.7.3. RPL Data from the NQF Management Information System**

Since 1996, the NQFIS<sup>18</sup> has made provision for the submission of the records of qualification and part-qualification achievements via an RPL route. Several NQF stakeholders have made extensive use of this provision and have submitted relevant achievements to the NQFIS at least once a year. Others, including PubHs, despite implementing RPL do not submit their records to the NQFIS.

The RPL records that are recorded on the NQFIS between 1996 and to date are summarised in this section. The analysis focuses on the achievement of qualifications through RPL and the achievements of unit standards are excluded from the analysis.

A total of **35 802** learners on the NQFIS have achieved qualifications through RPL. The total number of qualification achievements via RPL is **40 022**, with some learners having more than one achievement through this route. A total of **251** qualifications have been achieved through RPL, as presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Achievements through RPL from 1996 to 2022

	<b>Summary RPL Data</b>	<b>Total</b>
Learners	Number of <b>Learners</b> who achieved one or more <b>Qualifications</b> via RPL	35 802
	Number of <b>Learners</b> who achieved one or more <b>Unit Standards</b> via RPL	114 599
Records of Achievement	Total <b>Qualification Achievements</b> through RPL	40 022
	Total <b>Unit Standards (part-qualification) Achievements</b> through RPL	1 967 085
Qualifications	Number of <b>Qualifications</b> achieved through RPL	251

<sup>18</sup> Also known as the NLRD.

More than half (51%) of the learners with achievements via RPL are males and 49% are females. Black Africans make up 62% of these achievements. Whites make up 24%, while Coloureds and Indians/Asians make up 8% and 5% of the achievements, respectively (Figure 12).

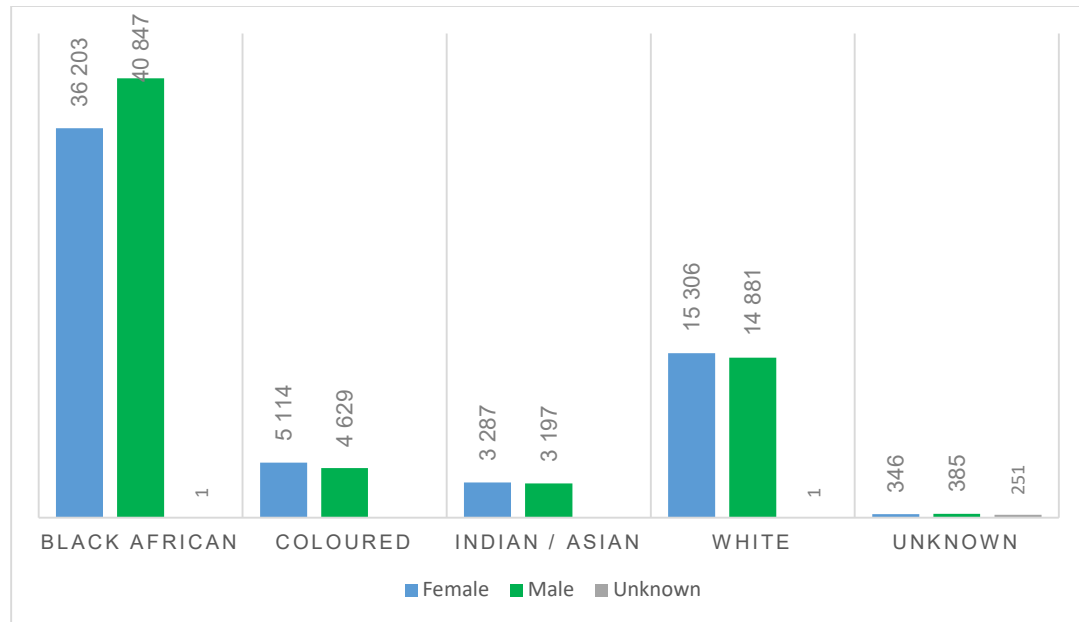


Figure 12: Achievements through RPL by demographics:1996 to 2022

The achievements via RPL by sub-Framework are presented in Figure 13. Overall, 97% of learning achievements through RPL were in the OQSF, and 3% were in the HEQSF. There were no learning achievements through RPL recorded in the GFETQSF.

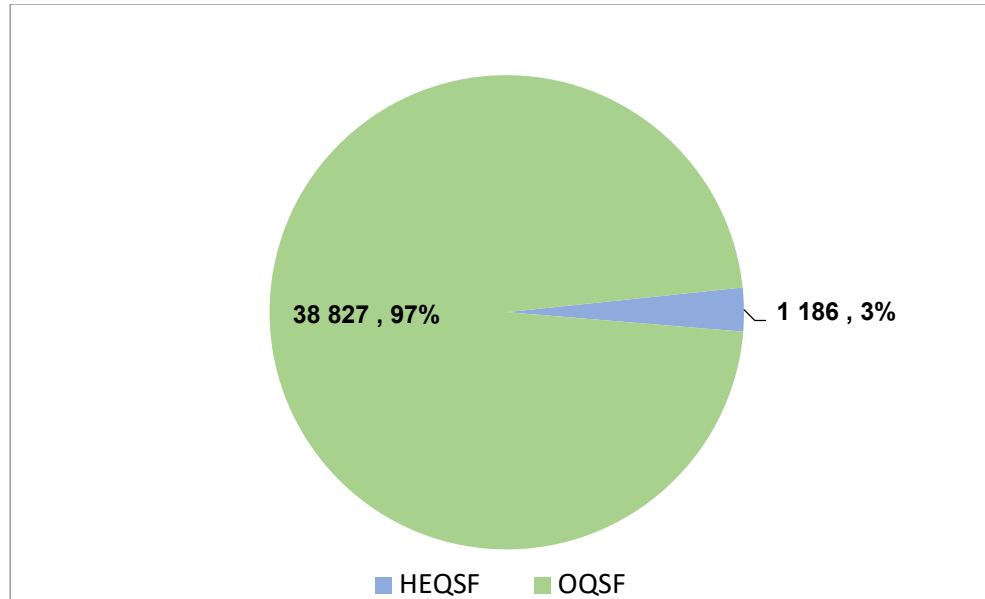


Figure 13: Achievements through RPL by Sub-Framework: 1996 to 2022

About **38%** of the learning achievements via RPL were achieved at **NQF level 4**, followed by achievements at **NQF Level 2 (28%)** and **NQF Level 1 (11%)**. Figure 14 shows that all the RPL achievements at NQF levels 7, 8 and 9 were from the HEQSF only.

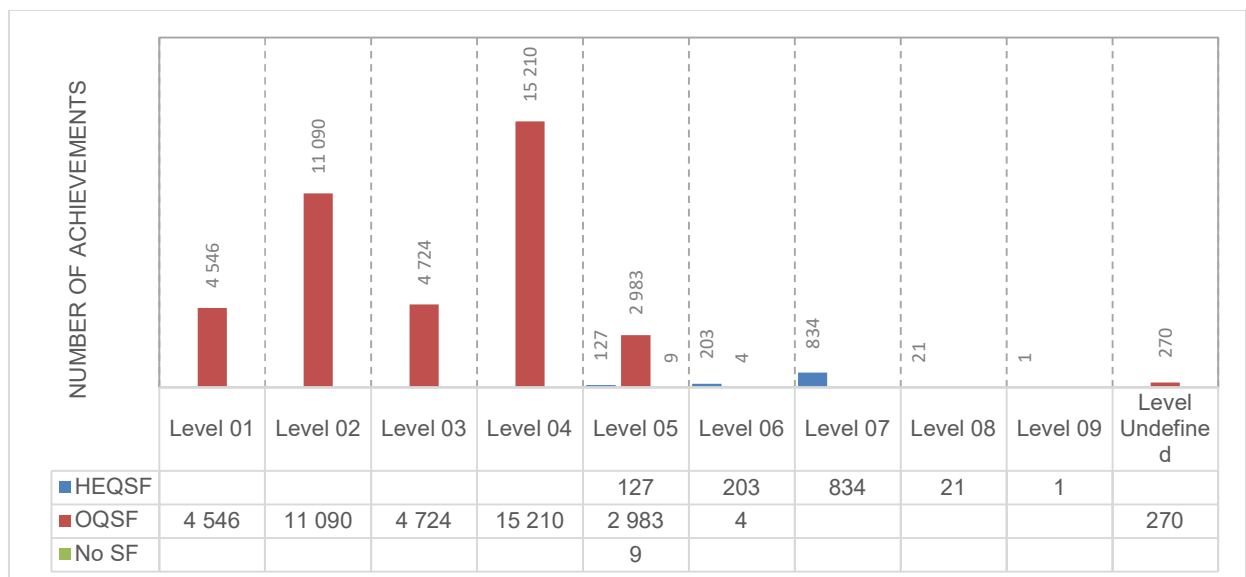


Figure 14: Achievements through RPL by NQF Level: 1996 to 2022

The qualification with the most achievements via RPL was the Further Education and Training Certificate in Real Estate with over **8 000** learners. **Figure 15** shows the top ten qualifications that had RPL achievements against them.



Figure 15: Achievements through RPL by top 10 qualifications: 1996 to 2022

Fourteen stakeholders, comprising 12 SETAs, one PB and one QC submitted the records of achievement of qualifications. While it is encouraging to note the utilisation of RPL by these fourteen entities, further work needs to be done to encourage the obtaining and loading of the records that exist but are yet to be submitted to the NQFIS. The submission of these records will show the true extent of learning achievements through RPL.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The 2021 NQF Impact study aimed to assess stakeholder information submitted on the overall implementation of RPL, CAT and other elements of flexibility, including specific enablers and barriers to implementation. The research objectives were to assess the awareness of the national RPL and CAT policies; the extent to which the national RPL and CAT policies are implemented and managed; the implementation and management of other aspects of flexibility in the system; successes and challenges regarding RPL, CAT, and flexibility elements; and the existence of RPL and CAT data.

This section provides a discussion of the findings in the previous section and links the findings to the five associated research questions.

### 5.1. RELATING FINDINGS TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The use of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engestrom, 1987; 2001) led to a deliberate focus on (1) the tools and (2) rules used in the implementation of RPL and CAT by (3) the different NQF stakeholder groups. The survey questions around policies, structures, processes, and rules were informed by the theoretical categories of 'tools', 'rules', and 'stakeholders' which framed and extended the scope of the questions. The idea of different communities of practice within the NQF Sub-Framework contexts was informed by the CHAT theory – leading to the development of customised questionnaires designed to 'speak' to the different stakeholder groups. Attempts were made to capture the voices of the various communities, by referring to direct quotations in the analyses.

To capture all the aspects needed in a realist approach such as that described by Pawson and Tilley (2004) and White (2009), to map the 'chain of developments' from policy to implementation and impact, it would have been necessary to conduct in-depth interviews following the surveys. The surveys however only comprised a broader view of reported policy awareness and developments (inputs), initiatives, successes, and challenges (outcomes) and reported impact. A 'results chain' is thus at least partially captured and being the result of independent responses captured in full, could be

argued to be robust.

Although the patterns found regarding the heterogeneity of responses with differences recorded within, as well as across categories of respondents – ‘differential impact’ (White, 2009:11) – are based on a small response rate, they are visible as presented in the preceding sections.

Attempts were made to look at ‘context-mechanism-outcome configurations’ to assess links between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact – by considering NQF Sub-Framework and entity contexts, policies, and processes and how these are used, and some of the results in the form of successes achieved and challenges experienced. In all, the theoretical categories informed the design of the research as well as the analyses and were useful as such.

## **5.2. DISCUSSION**

The concepts of RPL, CAT, and flexible learning are not stand-alone mechanisms for access and progression but are considered as complementary ways to make learning pathways flexible. Both RPL and CAT expand access routes and speed up progression by doing away with the repetition of learning.

**Research Question one (RQ1): To what extent, and how are RPL, CAT and learner support implemented by public and private providers of education and training? What are the successes and challenges?**

This set of questions explored how providers of education and training implement systemic flexibility elements and probed for the successes and challenges they encountered during the implementation processes.

The findings show that there is a robust policy framework in place regarding flexibility in the system, and implementation is well supported by providers of education and training. There were generally high levels of knowledge and awareness of the national RPL and CAT policies. The NQF stakeholders are not only highly aware of the national DHET, SAQA, and Quality Council policies, but they are also aware of the policies of other key NQF stakeholders. Most of the providers of education and training have established and developed internal RPL, CAT and student support policies; and have aligned their policies to the national policies, even mirroring those policies vis-à-vis changes or updates to the legislation.

There exist partial and/or detailed processes for implementing the national RPL and CAT policies across the participating colleges and HEIs. It must be noted, however, that RPL and CAT by and of themselves are not enough to ensure system flexibility and the mobility of learners within it. The findings from this study show that the NQF stakeholders have come up with innovative and creative ways to provide the necessary student support and ensure that articulation in the system is catered for, alongside RPL and CAT principles.

There has been notable progress in implementing the national RPL and CAT policies, as more than half of the respondents note that the National Policies have helped with their informing the creation of their organisational policies and aided with improving student mobility and access. Some respondents however mentioned that the national policies were constraining, difficult to implement, not straightforward and needed to be simplified. A document review of the institutional policies and related documents shows that while RPL is entrenched in the system, elements around CAT and how it is implemented remain ambiguous and incomplete; and RPL appears to be more established than CAT.

The study also notes some of the successes and challenges experienced by the responding institutions while implementing RPL and CAT within their institutions. Regarding the reported successes, stakeholders indicated that the ability to provide students with opportunities for access to programmes for which they may otherwise not have qualified is by far one of the biggest successes when it came to RPL implementation. Improved administrative systems and enhanced procedures and processes were noted by stakeholders as successes.



Several CAT-related challenges were noted including the issue of intellectual property ownership resulting in a lack of cooperation between institutions involved with CAT processes, the time-consuming nature and complexity of curriculum comparisons for CAT purposes, the burden of responsibility on CAT candidates, and the lack of trust in CAT processes and/ or the initial 'sending' entities.

In terms of RPL, stakeholders noted that cumbersome processes were one of the more prominent challenges in implementation. Contributors to the complexities of processes include the time and effort needed to assess, evaluate, and decide on RPL applications; expenses and inconsistent application of the RPL processes from one institution to another. Other reported challenges include the applicants' lack of understanding of the processes and their struggles to keep up with the demands of the application requirements, for example, providing the necessary documentation and Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), including completing application forms and following through on the process from end to end. Capacity constraints were also raised as a challenge, mainly due to inexperienced assessors and a lack of staffing. The perception of a loss of quality closed mindsets, and misconceptions about RPL were also mentioned. To a lesser extent, restrictions imposed by the 10% 'rule', as well as the difficulty in matching workplace knowledge with academic knowledge were noted as RPL challenges.

Other student support initiatives had similar challenges as noted for CAT and RPL. Respondents indicated that students did not take advantage of the opportunities afforded to them in terms of support, and there was a general lack of participation and engagement despite the multiple initiatives offered by institutions. Resource constraints - especially financial, human and technology resources - were mentioned as other challenges to successful student support initiatives.

A document review of the RPL and CAT policies of participating stakeholders showed that while most of the institutional RPL and CAT policies clearly state the objectives, target audience(s) and alignment to other policies; the policies do not provide sufficient information on resourcing requirements, roles, and responsibilities, how success will be measured or the consequences of non-implementation.

**Research Question two (RQ2): What are current professional body activities regarding RPL and candidate support?**

Based on the responses from the participating PBs, provision for mentorship programmes is one of the many ways that candidates are supported as part of the process of achieving a designation and this is usually achieved via one-on-one interactions with candidates. Another support activity is the process of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), where candidates are encouraged to participate and proactively take charge of their learning and development as part of their professional growth. Other activities include virtual support through blended or e-learning activities, RPL workshops, webinars, and feedback sessions.

**Research Question three (RQ3): What other means are entities using to support learners, learning, candidates, and professional development, and make the NQF system flexible?**

Other stakeholders use similar methods outlined by the PBs to support learning and flexibility. HEIs for instance favour blended learning, mentorship or peer support programmes and student counselling services. Most of the surveyed HEIs have student support policies that provide detailed and additional information on the type of support available for students. In several cases, dedicated departments and units provide both academic and non-academic guidance to students. Orientation programs, as well as extended operating hours and extended curriculum programmes (bridging programmes), were also identified as forms of support. These initiatives are managed, monitored, and reported at different levels of the institutions.

**Research Question four (RQ4): What advice do NQF entities have, regarding RPL, CAT, learner, and candidate support?**

Stakeholders were quite open and vocal about advice to other organisations that are considering implementing RPL, CAT and student support initiatives. One such piece of advice is to ensure that institutions have clear, well-defined, and consistent processes in place. This could happen with the development of guidelines that are in

line with National Policies. The need for the advocacy and promotion of these concepts using awareness campaigns was raised by several stakeholders. Some of the negative perceptions that have been built around RPL can be addressed through these advocacy campaigns and should be championed by a dedicated entity. Of course, these awareness campaigns should not only aim to address policymakers and policy implementers but should target policy beneficiaries too. Stakeholders raised the need to create awareness of CAT and RPL amongst learners.

Provider capacitation particularly in the form of improving the quality of assessors of RPL in HEIs was highlighted, as well as the need to recruit and select appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Other advice was centred around the need for good record-keeping, having clear and easily accessible policies, and having RPL-specific units and departments within institutions where they do not currently exist.

**Research Question five (RQ5): What RPL and CAT data are available in the system?**

Most stakeholders do not submit RPL and CAT data to the national databases. One possible reason for this is that entities do not have or do not record some of this information. Secondly, the data are not in the format required for submission. The NQFIS has specific fields or categories of information that it stores, and data submission follows rules that govern the data submission process. While some stakeholders generally keep personal information about RPL and CAT candidates like biographical data, year of enrolment, assessment outcomes and success/pass rates, this information is not complete without an achievement record. Regarding CAT, the paucity of data was notable, although a few stakeholders indicated that they record and store students' credit transfer records, as well as success rates and registration information. Stakeholder information is often aggregated, compared to the individualised records of achievement that are on the NQFIS.

### 5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study include the following:

- i. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic led to low response rates, an extended data collection period and ultimately, the shelving of interviews/focus group discussions/surveys with learners and candidates who had experienced RPL, CAT or other flexible processes. While the stakeholder surveys were sent out multiple times and followed up extensively, there were delays in receiving responses mainly due to COVID-19. The response rate did increase but remained lower than desired. The responses, however, provide rich and worthwhile data that point to ways forward in terms of enhancing RPL, CAT, and FLP policy and implementation, as well as presenting a valuable context of stakeholder experiences that could form the subject of a future study.
- ii. Secondly, the SAQA stakeholder database contained providers with incorrect or duplicate contact details and those whose registration would lapse during the research. In a data cleaning process, these stakeholders were omitted from the sampling.
- iii. While SAQA was able to obtain the RPL policies of almost all the recognised PBs, only the policies of those bodies that submitted fully completed surveys were included in the analyses and were considered in the context of the responses.
- iv. There was no baseline against which to compare the results of the 2021 NQF Impact Study. It is suggested that this study itself becomes the baseline for further study in five to ten years.
- v. The surveys did not capture the full range of aspects hoped for, including details such as 'the changes expected' and the full ranges of the 'variety of inputs' to a particular RPL, CAT or flexibility initiative, or 'direct and indirect outcomes'.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2021 NQF impact study speaks to SAQA's five-year strategic focus of a 'dynamic NQF that is responsive, adapts to, and supports the changing needs of, lifelong learning. Bearing in mind the overall response rate to the survey, the results need to be understood as a snapshot of policy, implementation, and impact realities in the NQF system in South Africa. The study set out to assess the implementation and impact of two of the most popular policies that support flexible learning provision across several NQF stakeholders. Notwithstanding these limitations, a rich and contextual picture of the implementation and impact of flexible learning emerged from the survey responses. There are high levels of awareness of the national policies for RPL and CAT, and implementation initiatives throughout the system – with some stakeholders pioneering leading practice, others experiencing more challenges than successes, and further examples that show moderate or partial successes.

The 2021 Impact Study was conducted at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which renewed discussions in the NQF space on topics relating to digitalization and micro-credentials amongst others. The current study did not consider these dimensions, but as SAQA continues to lead research and engagements on contemporary issues, future instalments of the NQF Impact Study must consider these emerging trends that are linked to Qualifications Frameworks.

The 2021 NQF Impact Study results could inform various activities in the NQF system. Firstly, the results speak directly to the implementation of the NQF objectives of redress, access, progression, quality, and transparency. Secondly, the study serves as a status check for SAQA, the QCs, recognised PBs as well as providers of education and training across the board, regarding their responsibilities as outlined in National policies for RPL and CAT – to which the revised QC policies for RPL and CAT are fully or almost aligned. Thirdly, the results inform SAQA's line functions regarding national and international qualifications, NQF advocacy and NQF data – and could inform the related policy development and implementation of the QCs. Importantly, the study itself plays a developmental role as SAQA engages with a range of NQF stakeholders in their implementation activities. To this end, the study has great

potential to move the system further toward a shared and diverse understanding of the investigated aspects.

The 2021 NQF Impact Study addressed five research questions, which possibly lent it complexity, but proved useful for the participating stakeholders and entities. In some cases, the response rates to the surveys were high within certain stakeholder groups and low in others. The research supports the articulation agenda in South Africa. The researchers urge NQF policymakers and implementers to address the recommendations for the benefit of all NQF beneficiaries in the country.

The findings of the study have several important implications for future practice, with the following eight recommendations.

1. Set **developmental targets in the three NQF Sub-Framework contexts**, based on a Theory of Change for the implementation of RPL, CAT, and flexible learning pathways, developed by SAQA in collaboration with the QCs, where the QCs report to SAQA on progress in achieving these targets. Such targets should include the following for entities reporting to the QCs.:
  - a. have aligned organisational RPL and CAT policies, criteria, and guidelines,
  - b. have RPL/ CAT/ articulation offices as well as champions,
  - c. collect RPL and CAT data in categories compatible with the NQF MIS
  - d. record and document RPL, CAT, and FLP success cases
  - e. advocate and share information on the implementation of RPL and CAT and
  - f. report on all this work, annually, to SAQA.
  
2. **SAQA should lead and work with the QCs to intensify system-wide communication** around RPL, CAT, and FLPs through a systematic campaign of webinars and workshops, where the topics focus on aspects highlighted in the study. Continued efforts are needed to ensure clear communication between the NQF partners (DBE, DHET, SAQA, QCs) and other stakeholders in the NQF system. This can be accomplished by the following.

- a. Providing opportunities and platforms for documenting and sharing leading flexible learning models and best practices in the country.
  - b. Creating national campaigns to strengthen learning pathways and articulation. SAQA, in collaboration with the QCs, can host periodic workshops that focus on successful RPL, CAT, flexible learning pathways and flexible learning and teaching provision initiatives with different stakeholder groups in ways that are developmental.
  - c. Continue and expand the work on documenting and sharing successful FLP initiatives. SAQA has already documented some successful RPL and articulation initiatives (SAQA, 2018; SAQA, 2019; SAQA-DUT, 2020; SAQA-UNESCO, 2020). This work needs to include successful CAT initiatives.
  - d. Initiate and drive a system-wide capacity-building initiative for CAT, including training initiatives and workshops.
3. SAQA, after consultation with the QCs, needs to develop **broad guidelines for the implementation of RPL and CAT**. It is recommended that SAQA draws on the good practice examples that exist, and after consultation with the QCs and other NQF stakeholders, develop national guidelines for the implementation of RPL and CAT. It is further recommended that the QCs develop the corresponding and detailed guidelines for use in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts – with the goal of aligning all guidelines.
4. **The NQF partners need to update and simplify aspects of the national policies that are confusing**: In collaboration with the QCs, a key policy priority should be to enable the consistent application of CAT and RPL across stakeholders by:
- Engaging with the relevant QCs on creating a balance between institutional autonomy and national practices.
  - Clarifying RPL and CAT structures and processes, especially within the PBs, and enabling consistent application of CAT across institutions.

- Including guidelines in the policies to help alleviate the challenges around onerous and time-consuming processes. An example of this would be to include requirements/standards in the CAT Policy, which will make the transfer of credits between various institutions accredited by the different QCs possible.
- Elaborate on what HEIs need to do in terms of the 10% clause, including the possibility of increasing the threshold

5. **SAQA and the NQF partners need to prioritise record-keeping and data management practices** regarding achievements awarded through RPL and CAT. This will include:

- a. SAQA and the QCs developing and publishing data requirements and data reporting guidelines and holding entities to account in terms of reporting in line with these aspects. These requirements and guidelines need to be consistent among the NQF stakeholders, to enable the tracking and monitoring of trends; and to enhance evidence-based decision-making.
- b. SAQA and the QCs making provision for CAT data to be reported, recorded and tracked at a national level.
- c. Educating stakeholders on what constitutes RPL and CAT data, emphasising the necessity of recording achievement via RPL and CAT routes, and not enrolment only.

6. The DHET in collaboration with SAQA and the QCs should **explore dynamic funding models** that not only speak to the challenges highlighted by the stakeholders in the study but also progressively support the implementation of RPL in education and training institutions, including when RPL is for access, advanced standing and/or credit.

7. SAQA could **use the findings of this study as a baseline for subsequent research**. The findings from the 2021 NQF Impact Study provide useful insights for future research and should be repeated with the same categories of stakeholders so that progress can be assessed. Including the voice of the



students in the subsequent instalments of the research will provide a stronger basis for triangulation, allowing the researchers to develop a view from the policy developer's/implementer's and policy beneficiary's perspectives.

8. SAQA needs to use the stakeholder responses regarding (1) the requirement that 50% of programs be completed at awarding institutions, and (2) limiting RPL and CAT to 10% of a learner cohort, to substantiate its **inputs to the CHE's HEQSF Review Report**.

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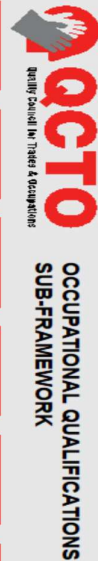
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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A: THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

		NQF LEVELS	
<b>HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS SUB-FRAMEWORK</b> 	DOCTORAL DEGREE DOCTORAL DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	10	-
	MASTER'S DEGREE MASTER'S DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	9	-
	BACHELOR HONOURS DEGREE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA BACHELOR'S DEGREE	8	SPECIALISED OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA
	BACHELOR'S DEGREE ADVANCED DIPLOMA	7	ADVANCED OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA
	DIPLOMA ADVANCED CERTIFICATE	6	OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA
<b>GENERAL FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS SUB-FRAMEWORK</b> 	HIGHER CERTIFICATE	5	HIGHER OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE
	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	4	NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE
	INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE	3	INTERMEDIATE OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE
	ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE	2	ELEMENTARY OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE
	GENERAL CERTIFICATE	1	GENERAL OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE



## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES PER STAKEHOLDER GROUP



SAQA is conducting the 2021 NQF Impact Study, which focuses on the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and other elements of flexibility in the system. The purpose of the study is to assess the impact of RPL and CAT policy and implementation, and flexibility elements, to date. The research results will be used to develop a baseline of these aspects.

The **research objectives** are to assess:

- awareness of the national RPL and CAT policies;
- the extent to which and how, national RPL and CAT policies are implemented and managed;
- the implementation and management of other aspects of flexibility in the system;
- successes and challenges regarding RPL, CAT, and flexibility elements; and
- the existence of RPL and CAT data.

The **research questions** are as follows.

- To what extent and how are RPL, CAT, and learner support implemented by public and private providers of education and training? What are the successes and challenges?
- What are current professional body activities regarding RPL and candidate support?
- What data are there, for RPL and CAT?
- What other means are entities using to support learners, learning, candidates and professional development, and make the NQF system flexible? (eg. Extended Curriculum Programmes, Student Support Centres, Peer and Mentoring Programmes; extended operating hours; blended teaching and learning; structured workplace learning opportunities, etc)
- What advice do NQF entities have, regarding RPL, CAT, learner and candidate support?

**All survey responses** will be treated with utmost **confidentiality** and **anonymity**. The only people who will see the responses are the **two researchers administering the survey**, and a **research assistant**. All of the data and information supplied will be analysed and reported in **aggregated and anonymised formats**. Care will be taken to ensure that **no entities and/or individuals** will be recognisable in any way whatsoever. We would appreciate **an authentic picture** of the realities, successes and challenges on the ground, and **thank you in advance**.



## Appendix B1: Colleges

Community Education Training Colleges (CETs), Technical Vocational and Education Colleges (TVETs) and Private Colleges.

### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of CETC:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Are you **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, which national policies have you **referred to** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on your organisation?
2. Please describe, for **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** in your organisation:
  - a) RPL policies that you use (external and internal);
  - b) RPL structures and/or processes used in your organisation;
  - c) RPL rules followed;
  - d) RPL successes;
  - e) RPL challenges.
3. Please describe, for **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** in your organisation:
  - a) CAT policies that you use (external and internal);
  - b) CAT structures and/or processes used in your organisation;
  - c) CAT rules followed;
  - d) CAT successes;
  - e) CAT challenges.
4. Please describe any **student support initiatives** in your organisation (eg Extended Curriculum Programmes, blended learning, extended operating hours, peer and mentoring programmes, etc), in terms of:
  - a) broadly, what the initiative is;
  - b) how the initiative is managed;

- c) how the initiative is reported/ recorded;
- d) successes;
- e) challenges.

(Continued below)

5. (a) Does your organisation have any **RPL data**?  
**YES      NO**
- (b) What categories of RPL data? (candidates, success in RPL, relative success in studies, etc – please list the categories)
- 
6. (a) Does your organisation have any **CAT data**?  
**YES      NO**
- (b) What categories of CAT data? (candidates, success in CAT, relative success in studies, etc – please list the categories)
- 
7. (a) Does your organisation have any **data on learner support**?  
**YES      NO**
- (b) What categories of learner support data? (learner demographics/ successes/ relative success in studies, etc – please list the categories)
- 
8. Please share with us, any **advice for other organisations** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and student support initiatives.

**SECTION C: PLEASE SHARE WITH US/ FEEL FREE TO REFER TO THESE IN YOUR ANSWERS**

1. Organisational RPL, CAT, and learner support policies and documents
2. RPL data for the last FIVE years (numbers, percentages, success rates)
3. CAT data for the last FIVE years (numbers, percentages, success rates)
4. Email details for a minimum of FIVE RPL/CAT/SUPPORTED students, who we could survey

Thanking you – we very much look forward to engaging with you,

Dr Heidi Bolton (SAQA) and Dr Liapeng Matsau (SAQA)

**Thank you!**

## Appendix B2a: Delegated Bodies

### Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs)

#### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of AQP in full:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

#### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Is your organisation **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, **which** national policies have your AQP **used** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on your AQP?
  
2. Please describe **if**, and in detail **how**, the **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** and **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** feature in the following aspects of your AQP work. For (a)-(n) below, please deal with **both RPL and CAT**.
  - f) Developing and recommending external assessment specifications to the QCTO.
  - g) Registering, and maintaining a national database of, external assessment instruments.
  - h) Publishing exemplars of external assessments.
  - i) Recommending the accreditation/ withdrawal of accreditation of Skills Development Providers (SDPs) to the QCTO.
  - j) Developing and recommending to the QCTO, the criteria for the accreditation/ withdrawal of accreditation, of assessment centres and sites.
  - k) Coordinating and managing external assessment processes.
  - l) Recording and uploading learner applications for, and achievements in, external assessments.
  - m) The moderation of external assessments.
  - n) Certification-related recommendations to the QCTO.
  - o) Implementing the external assessment appeals policy.
  - p) Conducting learner tracer studies.
  - q) Reporting to the QCTO.
  - r) Providing an RPL mechanism.
  - s) Other.

3. Please describe if, and in detail how, **other learner support/ system flexibility** features in the following aspects of your AQP work.
- a) Developing and recommending external assessment specifications to the QCTO.
  - b) Registering, and maintaining a national database of, external assessment instruments.
  - c) Publishing exemplars of external assessments.
  - d) Recommending the accreditation/ withdrawal of accreditation of Skills Development Providers (SDPs) to the QCTO.
  - e) Developing and recommending to the QCTO, the criteria for the accreditation/ withdrawal of accreditation, of assessment centres and sites.
  - f) Coordinating and managing external assessment processes.
  - g) Recording and uploading learner applications for, and achievements in, external assessments.
  - h) The moderation of external assessments.
  - i) Implementing the external assessment appeals policy.
  - j) Conducting learner tracer studies.
  - k) Reporting to the QCTO.
  - l) Providing an RPL mechanism.
  - m) Other.
4. What does your AQP think of the national RPL/ CAT policies used?
5. (a) Does your AQP have any **RPL/ CAT/ flexibility-related/ learner support data or information** that it could share with SAQA?  
**YES      NO**
- (b) If so, please attach the data.
6. Please share with us, any **advice for other AQPs** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and learner support initiatives – and any other comments.
7. Please tell us about your AQP's **status** – how long has it been an approved AQP in the OQSF context?

Thanking you – we very much look forward to engaging with you,

Dr Heidi Bolton (SAQA) and Dr Liapeng Matsau (SAQA)

**Thank you!**

## Appendix B2b: Delegated Bodies

### Development Quality Partners (DQPs) and Quality Development Facilitators (QDFs)

#### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of DQP/ QDF in full:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

#### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Is your organisation **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, **which** national policies have your DQP/ QDF **used** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on your DQP/ QDF?
  
2. Please describe if, and in detail how, the **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** featured in the following aspects of your DQF/ QDF work.
  - t) Curriculum and assessment specifications, and the verification process for these specifications.
  - u) Module specifications.
  - v) Developing/ managing the verification of occupational profiles.
  - w) Proposing Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs).
  - x) RPL-related successes and challenges.
  - y) Other.
  
3. Please describe if, and in detail how, **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** featured in the following aspects of your DQF/ QDF work.
  - a) Curriculum and assessment specifications, and the verification process for these specifications.
  - b) Module specifications.
  - c) Developing/ managing the verification of occupational profiles.
  - d) Proposing Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs).
  - e) CAT-related successes and challenges.
  - f) Other.

4. Please describe if, and in detail how, **other learner support/ system flexibility** featured in the following aspects of your DQP/ QDF work.
  - a) Curriculum and assessment specifications, and the verification process for these specifications.
  - b) Module specifications.
  - c) Developing/ managing the verification of occupational profiles.
  - d) Proposing Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs).
  - e) CAT-related successes and challenges.
  - f) Other.
  
5. (a) What does your DQP/ QDF think of the national RPL/ CAT policies used?
  
6. (a) Does your DQP/ QDF have any **RPL/ CAT/ flexibility-related/ learner support data or information** that it could share with SAQA? We would be very keen to see these data/ the information.  
**YES      NO**
  - (b) If so, what are the categories of the data/ information?
  - (c) Please attach the data.
  
7. Please share with us, any **advice for other DQPs/ QDFs** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and learner support initiatives – and any other comments.
  
8. Please tell us about your DQPs/ QDFs **status** – how long has it been an approved DQP/ QDF in the OQSF context?

Thanking you – we very much look forward to engaging with you,

Dr Heidi Bolton (SAQA) and Dr Liapeng Matsau (SAQA)

**Thank you!**

## Appendix B3: Higher Education Institutions

### Private Higher Education Institutions and Public Higher Education Institutions

#### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of HEI:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

#### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Are you **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, which national policies have you **referred to** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on your institution?
  
2. Please describe, for **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** in your institution:
  - a) RPL policies that you use (external and internal);
  - b) RPL structures and/or processes used in your institution;
  - c) RPL rules followed;
  - d) RPL successes;
  - e) RPL challenges.
  
3. Please describe, for **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** in your institution:
  - a) CAT policies that you use (external and internal);
  - b) CAT structures and/or processes used in your institution;
  - c) CAT rules followed;
  - d) CAT successes;
  - e) CAT challenges.
  
4. Please describe any **student support initiatives** in your organisation (eg Extended Curriculum Programmes, blended learning, extended operating hours, peer and mentoring programmes, etc), in terms of:
  - a) broadly, what the initiative is;
  - b) how the initiative is managed;
  - c) how the initiative is reported/ recorded;
  - d) successes;
  - e) challenges.

5. (a) What does your institution think of the **'50% rule'** for RPL and CAT, where 'no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any particular qualification'?
- (b) If it were possible, would you consider exempting students from **more than 50%** of the curriculum, and still be satisfied that your institution has control regarding quality?  
**YES NO**
6. (a) Are you aware of the rule that 'not more than **10% of a cohort** of students in a single Higher Education programme should be admitted via RPL'?  
**YES NO**
- (b) Do you think your institution would ever want to RPL more than 10% of a cohort?  
**YES NO**
- (c) Please feel free to add comments if you wish to do so.
7. (a) Is your organisation submitting **RPL data** to the national databases?  
**YES NO**
- (b) If so, please say which database?
- (c) What categories of RPL data? (please list the categories eg candidates, success rates, relative success in studies, etc)
8. (a) Is your organisation submitting **CAT data** to the national databases?  
**YES NO**
- (b) If so, please say which database?
- (c) What categories of CAT data? (please list the categories eg candidates, success rates, relative success in studies, etc)
9. Please share with us, any **advice for other organisations** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and student support initiatives.

**SECTION C: PLEASE SHARE WITH US/ FEEL FREE TO REFER TO THESE IN YOUR ANSWERS**

1. Organisational RPL, CAT, and learner support policies and documents
2. RPL data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)
3. CAT data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)
4. Email details for a minimum of 10 RPL students, who we could survey

Thanking you – we very much look forward to engaging with you,

Dr Heidi Bolton (SAQA) and Dr Liapeng Matsau (SAQA)

**Thank you!**



## Appendix B4: Professional Bodies

### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of professional body in full:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Are you **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, which national policies have your professional body **referred to** for guidance/used?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on your professional body?
  
2. Please describe, for **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** in your professional body:
  - a) RPL structures and/or processes used in your professional body;
  - b) RPL rules followed;
  - c) RPL successes and challenges.
  
3. Please describe, for **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** in your professional body:
  - a) CAT structures and/or processes supported by your professional body;
  - b) CAT rules followed;
  - c) CAT successes and challenges.
  
4. Please describe any **candidate support initiatives** of your professional body (eg blended learning, extended operating hours, peer and mentoring programmes, etc), in terms of:
  - a) broadly, what the initiative is;
  - b) how the initiative is managed;
  - c) how the initiative is reported/ recorded;
  - d) successes;
  - e) challenges.

5. (a) What does your institution think of the '**50% rule**' for RPL and CAT, where 'no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any particular qualification'?
- (b) If it were possible, would your professional body support the idea of exempting students from **more than** 50% of the curriculum, and still be satisfied that there is sufficient control regarding quality?  
**YES      NO**
6. (a) Are you aware of the rule that 'not more than **10% of a cohort** of students in a single Higher Education programme should be admitted via RPL'?  
**YES      NO**
- (b) Would your professional body support a Higher Education Institution if it admitted more than 10% of a cohort via RPL?  
**YES      NO**
- (c) Please feel free to add comments if you wish to do so.
7. (a) Does your professional body have any **RPL data** that it could share with SAQA? We would be very keen to see these data.  
**YES      NO**
- (b) If so, what are the categories of the RPL data? (please list the categories eg candidates, success rates, relative success in studies/ professional registration, etc)
8. (a) Does your professional body have any **CAT data** that it could share with SAQA? We would be very keen to see these data too.  
**YES      NO**
- (b) If so, what are the categories of the CAT data? (please list the categories eg candidates, success rates, relative success in studies/ professional registration, etc)
9. Please share with us, any **advice for other organisations** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and student/ candidate support initiatives – and any other comments.

**SECTION C: PLEASE SHARE WITH US/ FEEL FREE TO REFER TO THESE IN YOUR ANSWERS**

- 1. Organisational RPL, CAT, and learner/ candidate support policies and documents**
- 2. RPL data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)**
- 3. CAT data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)**
- 4. Email details for a minimum of 10 RPL candidates, who we could survey**

## Appendix B5: Quality Councils

### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Quality Council:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Are you **aware** of the QC roles in the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, which national policies have you **referred to** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on the work of your QC?
  
2. Please describe, for **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**:
  - a) QC initiatives to align RPL policies;
  - b) QC initiatives with accredited providers in the NQF Sub-Framework, for RPL policy development and implementation, and advocating RPL;
  - c) the development of standardised approaches/ ensuring consistency in RPL practices in the NQF Sub-Framework where applicable;
  - d) the development and sharing of RPL instruments in the NQF Sub-Framework;
  - e) monitoring RPL admissions and achievements in the NQF Sub-Framework;
  - f) ensuring that certification in the NQF Sub-Framework does not mention RPL;
  - g) RPL successes at QC level;
  - h) RPL challenges at QC level; and
  - i) QC provisions made for RPL data in the NQF Sub-Framework contexts.
  
3. Please describe, for **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)**:
  - a) QC initiatives to align CAT policies;
  - b) QC initiatives and collaborations towards CAT, including but not limited to encouraging articulation agreements; bridging programmes; networks; linked quality assurance; collaborative development of curricula and qualifications; advice to institutions; promoting the recognition of workplace-based learning, and others;

- c) CAT successes at QC level; and
  - d) CAT challenges at QC level.
4. Please describe any **student support initiatives** in your organisation (eg Extended Curriculum Programmes, blended learning, extended operating hours, peer and mentoring programmes, etc), in terms of:
- a) broadly, what the initiative is;
  - b) how the initiative is managed;
  - c) how the initiative is reported/ recorded;
  - d) successes;
  - e) challenges.
5. Please share with us, **any advice**, from the point of view of your QC, regarding RPL and CAT.

**SECTION C: PLEASE SHARE WITH US/ FEEL FREE TO REFER TO THESE IN YOUR ANSWERS**

1. **The latest QC RPL and CAT policies**
2. **Any documents linked to QC initiatives re RPL and CAT**
3. **Any QC data for RPL and CAT**

## Appendix B6: Skill Providers

### Skills Development Providers (SDPs) and Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs)

#### **SECTION A: PLEASE ADD DETAILS**

Name of SETA in full:

Name of respondent:

Position of respondent:

Email of respondent:

Landline of respondent:

Cell-phone of respondent:

#### **SECTION B: PLEASE TYPE INTO THIS INSTRUMENT**

1. (a) Are you **aware** of the national RPL and CAT policies?  
(b) If so, **which** national policies does your SETA **refer to/ use** for guidance?  
(c) How have these policies **impacted** on the work of your SETA?
  
2. Please describe, for **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** in your SETA:
  - a) RPL structures and/or processes used;
  - b) RPL rules followed;
  - c) RPL successes and challenges.
  
3. Please describe, for **Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** in your SETA:
  - a) CAT structures and/or processes used;
  - b) CAT rules followed;
  - c) CAT successes and challenges.
  
4. Please describe any **learner support initiatives** of your SETA in terms of:
  - a) broadly, what the initiative is;
  - b) how the initiative is managed;
  - c) how the initiative is reported/ recorded;
  - d) successes;
  - e) challenges.
  
5. (a) What does your SETA think of the national RPL and CAT policies used?  
(b) Could you mention any strengths of the policies?  
(c) Are there any aspects of the policies that could be strengthened?

6. (a) Does your SETA submit **RPL data** to the NLRD?  
**YES**      **NO**  
(b) If no – please could you share with us the reasons.
7. (a) Does your SETA have any **CAT data** that it could share with SAQA? We would be keen to see these data too.  
**YES**      **NO**
8. Please share with us, any **advice for other SETAs** seeking to implement RPL, CAT, and learner support initiatives – and any other comments.

**SECTION C: PLEASE KINDLY SHARE WITH US...**

- 1. Organisational RPL, CAT, and learner/ candidate support policies and documents**
- 2. RPL data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)**
- 3. CAT data for the last 10 years (numbers, percentages, success rates)**
- 4. Email details for a minimum of 10 RPL candidates, who we could survey**