




Understanding the Professional Designations of SAQA-Recognised Professional Bodies: Towards SAQA Guidelines for Professional Designations

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

Presentation to the Professional Body Committee, 1st December 2022



This presentation...

- 1. Background**
 - 2. Research questions**
 - 3. Sample and methods**
 - 4. Results**
 - 5. International practice (snapshot)**
 - 6. Recommendations (guidelines)**
- 

Background (1)

- Professional bodies (PBs) are **key role-players** in South Africa's system for education, training, development, and work: **(a)** professional registration and continuing professional development (CPD) are key for access to, and progression in, learning-and-work pathways, **(b)** PBs and their designated members protect the public, **(c)** PBs play a role in the quality assurance of qualifications – in collaboration with the QCs – and so enhance the quality/credibility of learning in their fields (nationally and internationally).
- The NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008), **mandates SAQA to recognize** professional bodies and register their professional designations – when the criteria for access, redress, progression, quality, and transparency are met (SAQA, 2020).
- SAQA's (2020) policy for professional bodies is **relatively silent on the naming, systems, and publication of professional designations.**

Background (2)

There are some confusing aspects; sometimes:

- designations have the **same titles as qualification names**
- designations have the **same occupational titles** as related occupations in the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO)
- designations include **historical terms** e.g., ‘Chartered’, ‘Royal’ that may be inappropriate for South Africa
- professional bodies have few designations (**under five**); others have many (**over 25**)
- while the designations of some professional bodies are hierarchical, requiring enhanced studies, work experience and professional development over time, the designations of others are **not sequenced in systematic ways**

Research questions

- 1) Current **naming practices**? Patterns? (statutory & non-statutory)
- 2) How many designations with **same titles as NQF-registered qualifications**/ part-qualifications? Patterns?
- 3) How many designations with **same titles as occupation titles** in the OFO? Patterns?
- 4) How many designations include **'inappropriate' terms**? What terms used? Patterns?
- 5) How many bodies have **high numbers of designations**? What are the numbers? How many sequence/ do not sequence their designations? What **'systems' of designations**? Patterns?
- 6) **International practices** to consider in clarifying SAQA's criteria for professional designations?
- 7) Features for **SAQA guidelines** for naming, ordering, communicating systems of designations?

Research question (Extra)

8) How many professional bodies use their **membership categories** as designation titles? What are the patterns?

Sample (No sampling)

- Started: 31 Aug 2021 (Completed 31 July 2022)
- At the start: 103 SAQA-recognised professional bodies
- Two bodies de-recognised in the research period
- Analyses focused on **all 101 bodies**
- And **their 373 designations** registered in the NQF MIS
- **19 statutory** bodies with 112 (30% of) designations
- **82 non-statutory** bodies with 261 (70% of) designations

Methods

- To address the first five questions, designation data were extracted from the NQF MIS and professional body websites, and cleaned, coded, and analysed using Excel spreadsheets.
- Patterns were sought within the categories ‘statutory’ and ‘non-statutory’, and overall, as appropriate. Information in the NQF MIS and on professional body websites was compared.
- First level analyses showed clear and less clear systems of professional designations – so the international counterpart professional body systems for some of the ‘less clear’ systems were considered, the idea being to identify alternative possibilities for the less clear systems.

Results

(Designation naming)



Designation naming practices

Designation titles were found to consist of a wide variety of terms. Sometimes combinations of prefixes, descriptors and suffixes are used. In other instances, only one or two of these components are used.

Examples of prefixes: • Accredited (descriptor) • Advanced (descriptor) • Associate (descriptor) • Associated (descriptor) • Associated Chartered (descriptor) • Associated Principle Certified (descriptor) • Certificated (descriptor) • Certified (descriptor) • Certified Associated (descriptor) • Certified Senior (descriptor) • Chartered (descriptor) • Chartered Certified (descriptor) • Credentialised (descriptor) • Executive Professional (descriptor) • Fellow (descriptor) • Fellow Chartered (descriptor) • Graduate (descriptor) • Licenced (descriptor) • Licenced Qualified (descriptor) • Licentiate (descriptor) • Master (descriptor) • Professional (descriptor) • Professional Certified (descriptor) • Professional Senior (descriptor) • Registered (descriptor) • Senior (descriptor) • Senior Associate (descriptor) • Senior Professional (descriptor) • Specialist (descriptor) • Technical (descriptor)

Examples of suffixes: • (Descriptor) Associate • (Descriptor) Certified Practitioner • (Descriptor) Certified Professional • (Descriptor) Fellow • (Descriptor) Junior • (Descriptor) Licentiate • (Descriptor) Master • (Descriptor) Professional • (Descriptor) Senior Associate • (Descriptor) Specialist

Appropriate/ Less appropriate naming

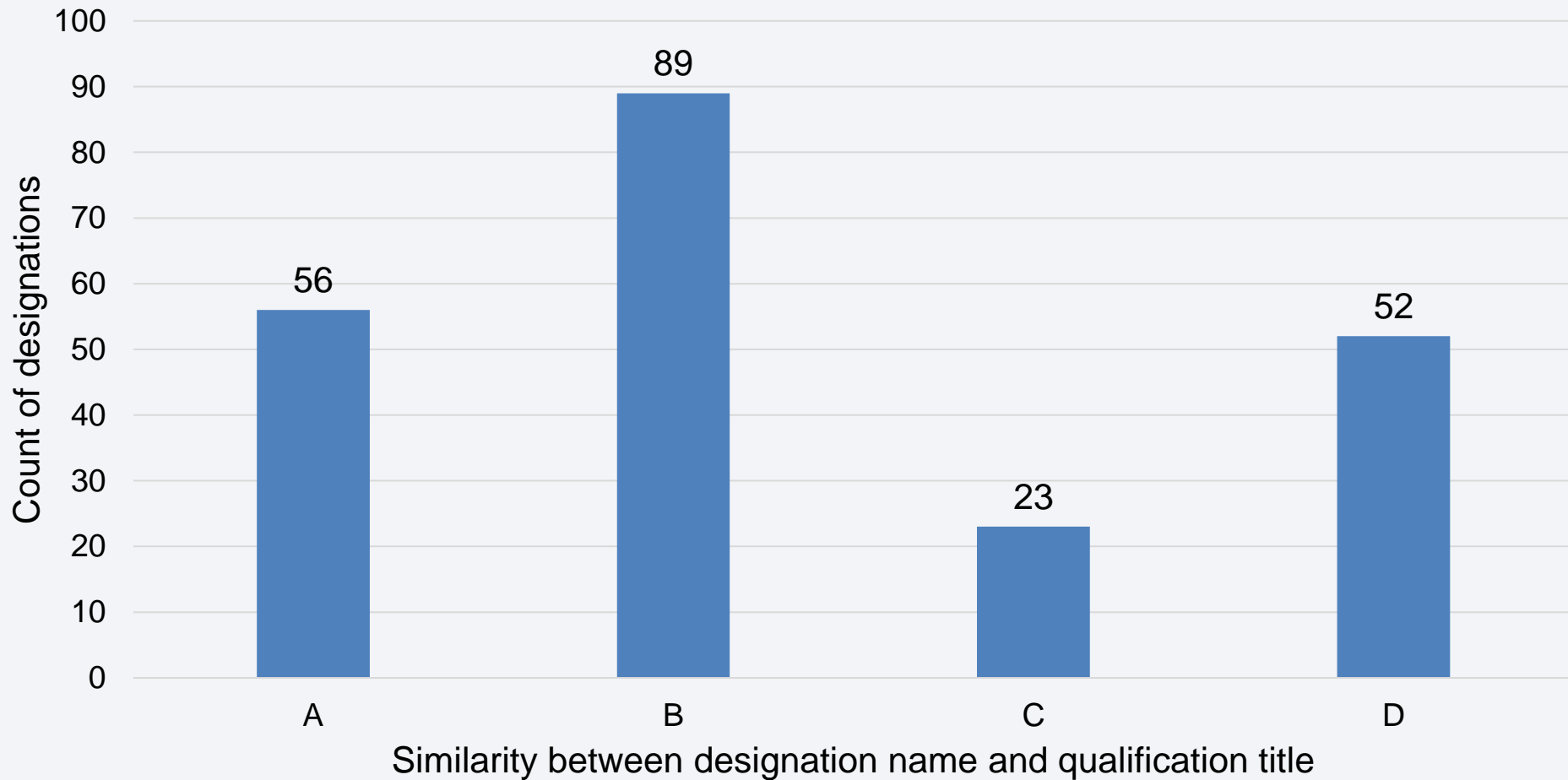
- Complex naming (e.g., Associated Principle Certified)
- Using 'Graduate' – which can be confused with the qualification status of the designation holder (2 of 373 designations – both of non-statutory bodies).
- Using 'Accredited' which can be confused with the quality assurance status of qualifications (4 of 373 designations – all of non-statutory bodies).
- Using acronyms in the PB name (3/ 101 bodies) and/or PD title (19/ 373), that is confusing.
- Using 'Chartered' – in PB name/ PD title in absence of Charter (legal document [Act] granted by a sovereign/ legislative power of a country (in **21/373 or 6% of designations** – all but one for non-statutory bodies – and **nine** non-statutory professional body titles).
 - ❖ 18 bodies use 'Chartered' in body and/ or designation titles, **two have official South African** documents entitled Charters, **five are linked** to international bodies with Royal Charters, and for **eleven, no Charters** were found.
 - ❖ 'Chartered' **also means** (1) 'professional competence', (2) a document containing the vision, mission, objectives, philosophy, responsibilities, funds, stakeholders, education professional registration, and other matters, of the body, (3) Constitution, Code of Conduct, Disciplinary Procedure of a body.

Results

(Designation patterns and numbers)

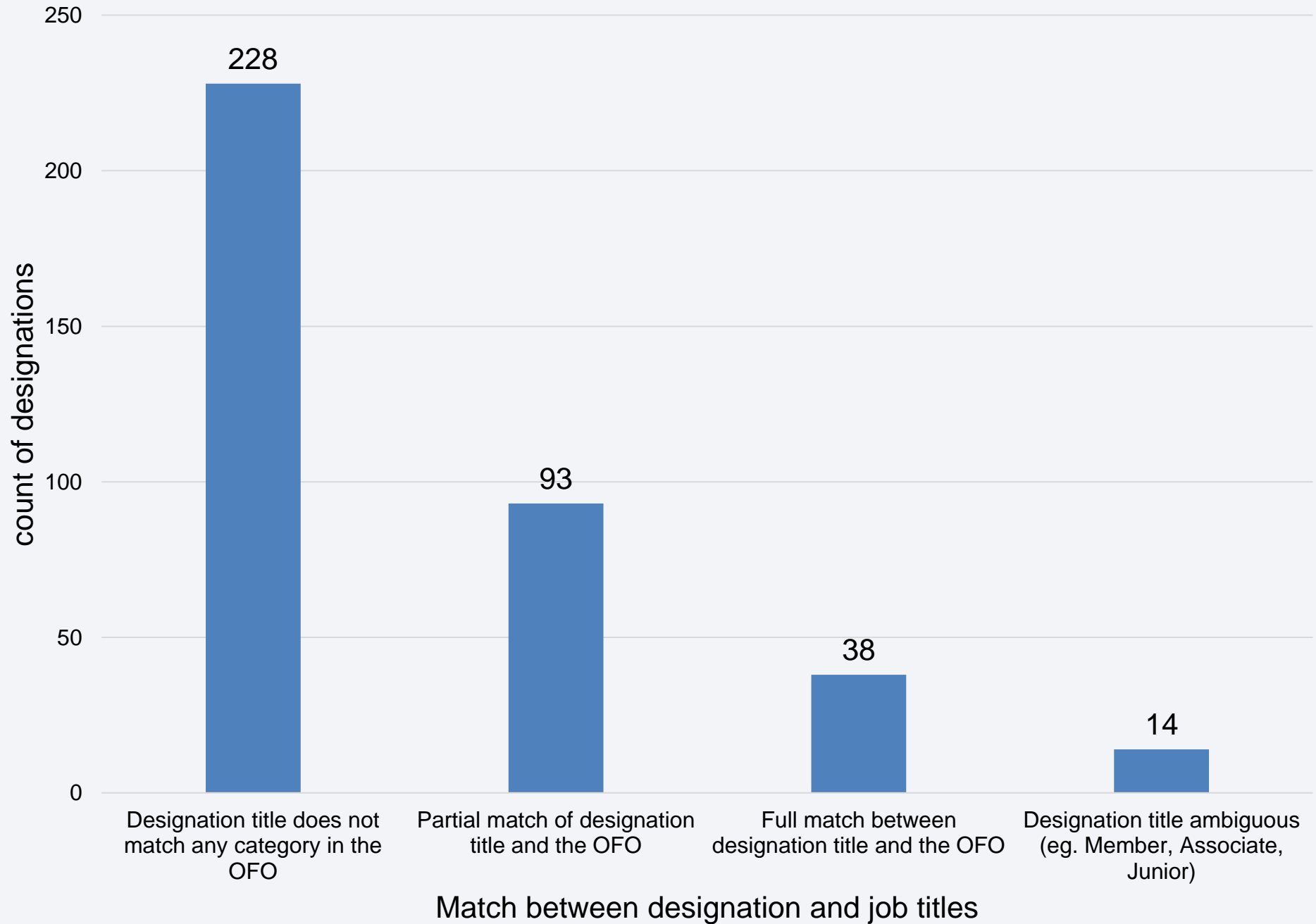


Extent of similarity between all designation names and qualification titles

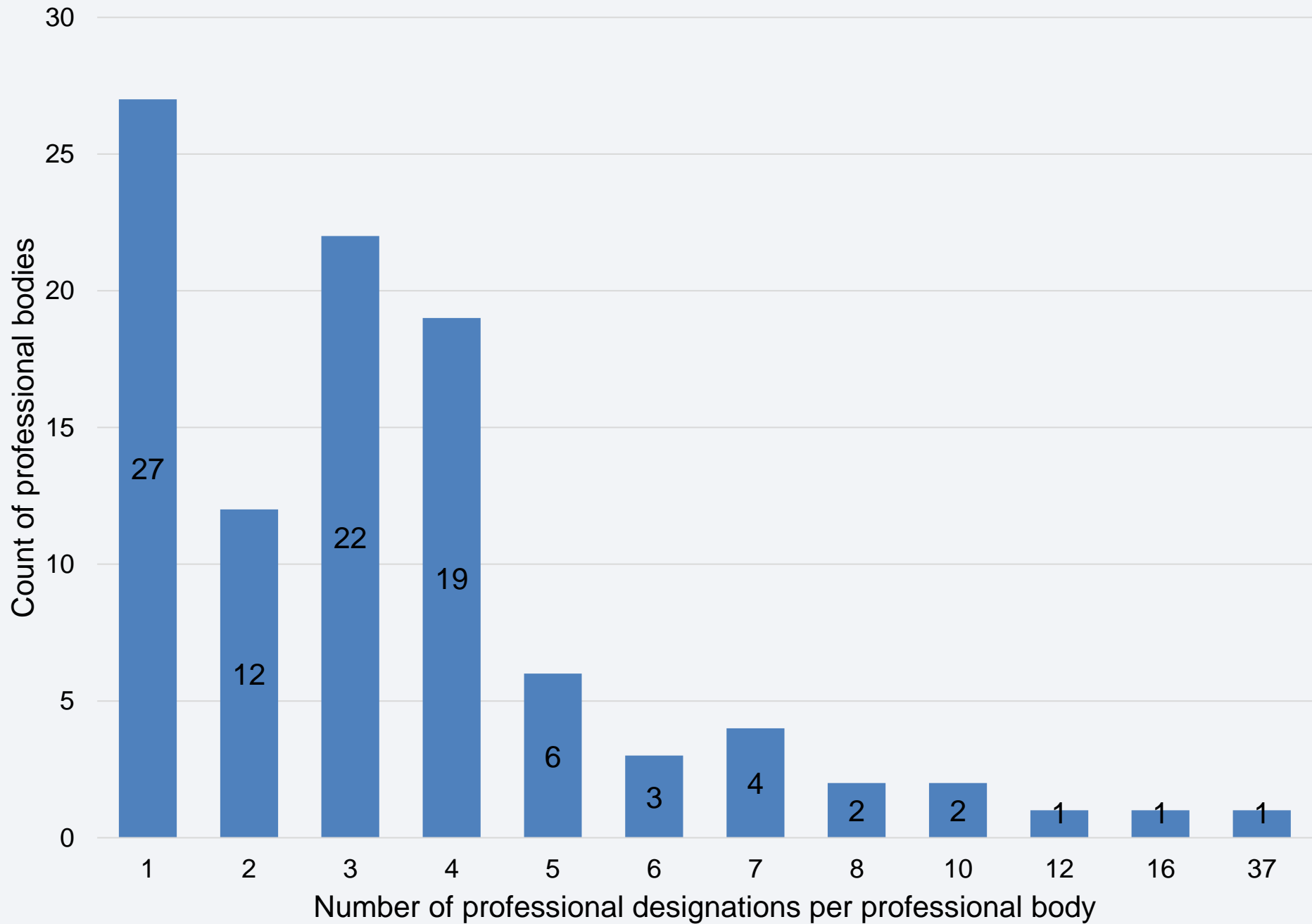


A	General qualification terms (e.g., 'BSc' or 'three-year degree')
B	Specific qualification titles dissimilar to designation
C	Designation close to qualification title and additional qualification titles possible
D	Designation identical/ almost identical to qualification title

Analysis of designations and job titles



Number of professional designations per professional body



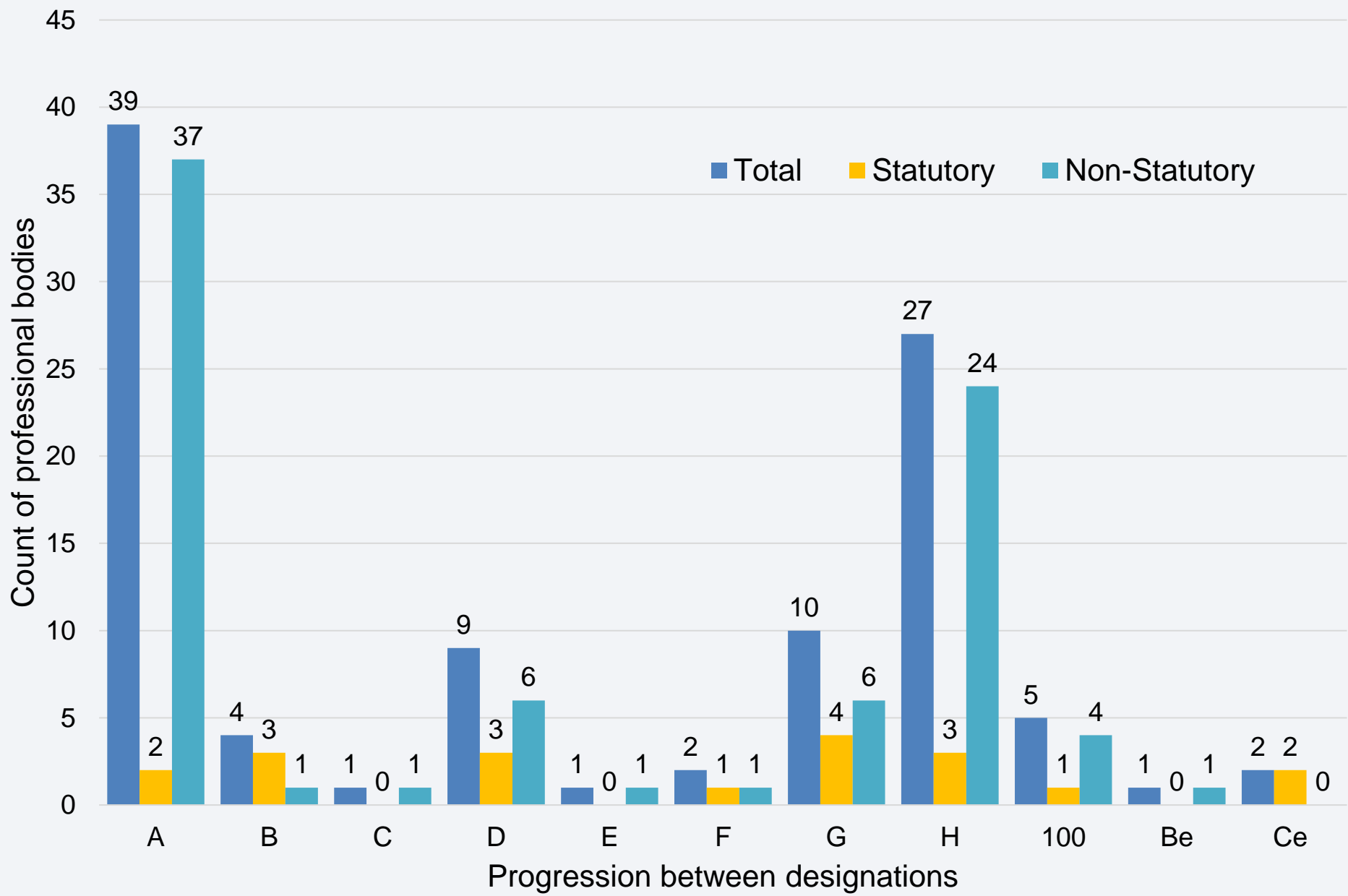
Results (Designation systems)



Hierarchy and progression between designations

- A:** Body has **single** progression pathway between its designations.
- B:** Body has **two** progression pathways/ sub-systems between its designations.
- C:** Body has **three** or more pathways/ sub-systems between its designations.
- D:** Body has '**mixed** progression pathways' comprising a single progression path as well as independent designations.
- E:** Body body has '**mixed** progression pathways' comprising two or three progression paths as well as independent designations.
- F:** Body has '**mixed** progression pathways' comprising four or more progression paths as well as independent designations.
- G:** Body has **no** progression pathways between its designations.
- H:** Body has a **single** designation.
- 100:** The progression information was **not clear**.
- [e]:** Progression information was **unclear/appeared incorrect**: categorised as error [e]

Analysis of progression within professional designation systems



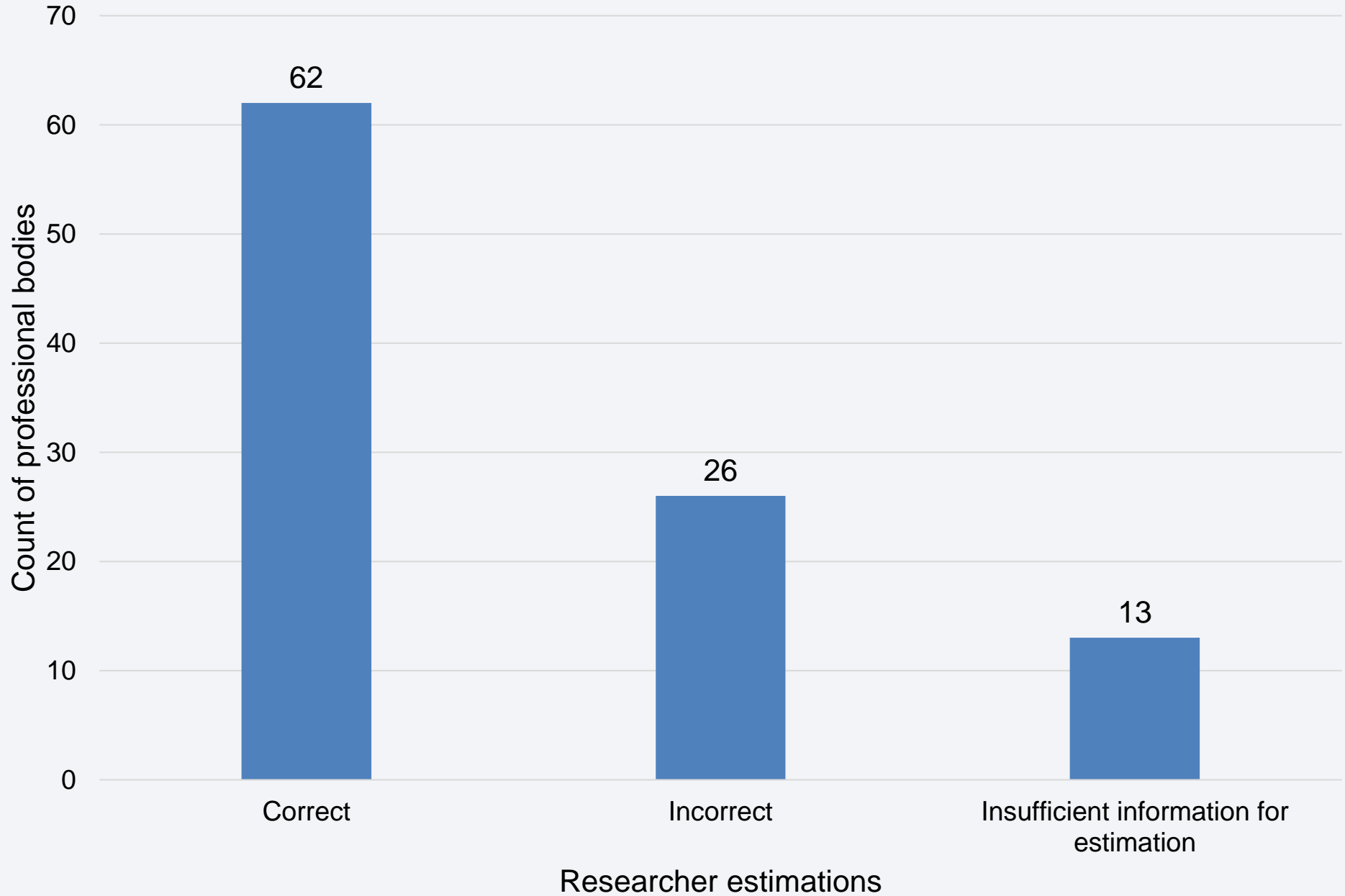
So, what next?

- Researcher '**estimations**'
- (Focus on **hierarchy and progression**)

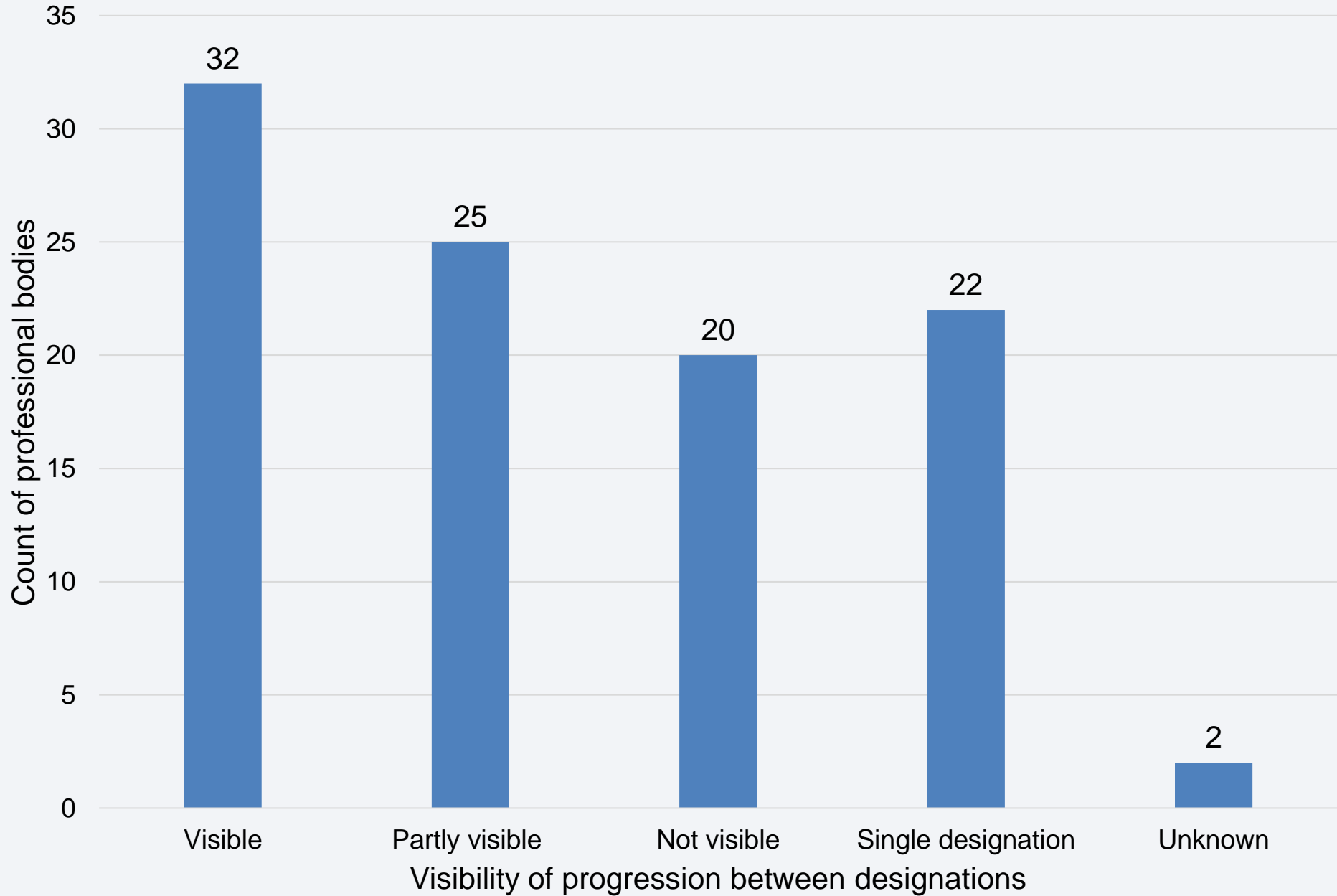
Then started collecting and recording information on hierarchy and progression/ trying to understand '**designation systems**' of each professional body – by analysing/ triangulating information within and across the NQF MIS and professional body websites

- **Afterwards, categorised estimations as:** Correct/ Incorrect/ Insufficient info.
(Exercise showed (1) clarity of designation system (2) quality of info.)
- 

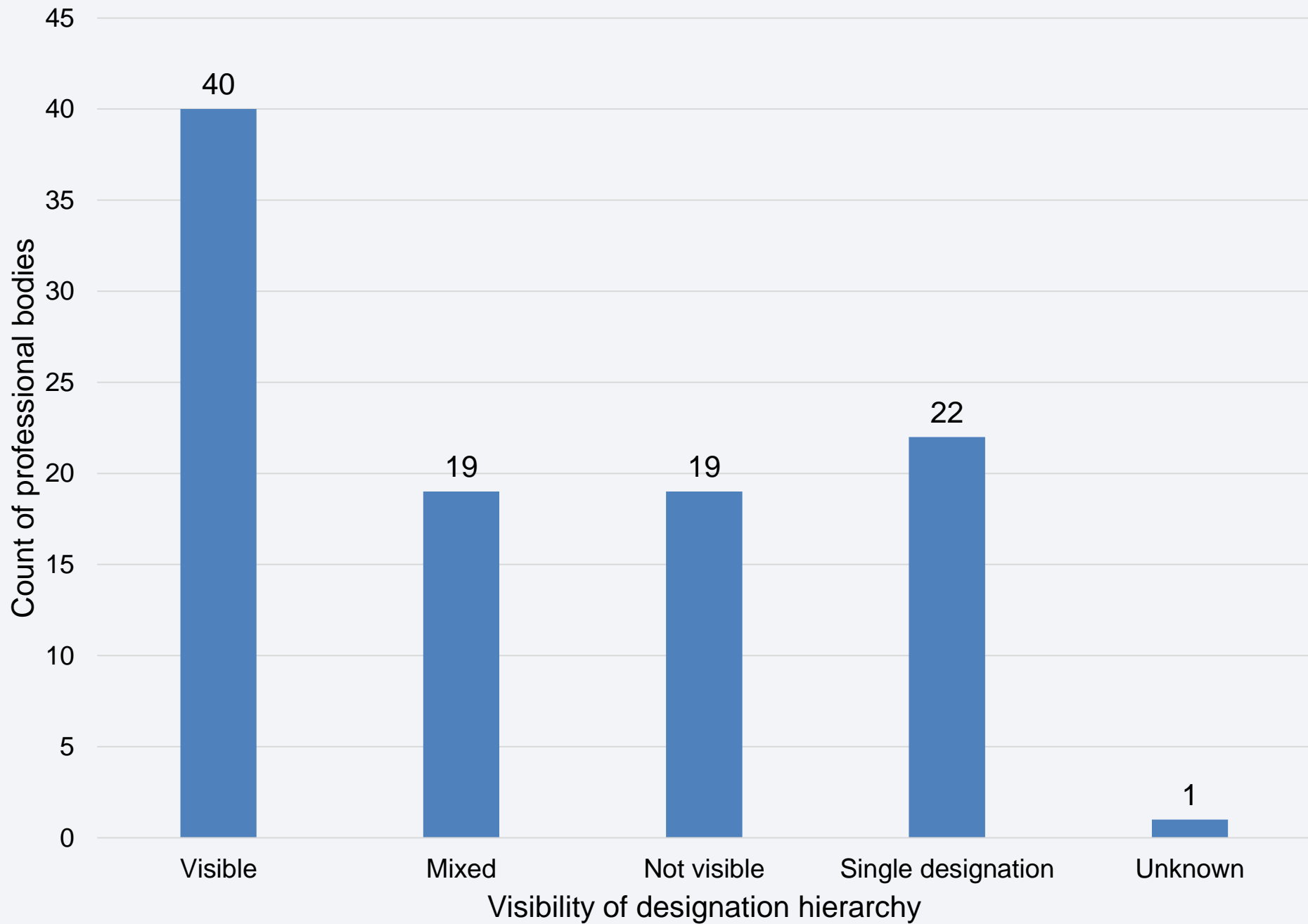
Researcher estimations of hierarchy and progression based on designation titles



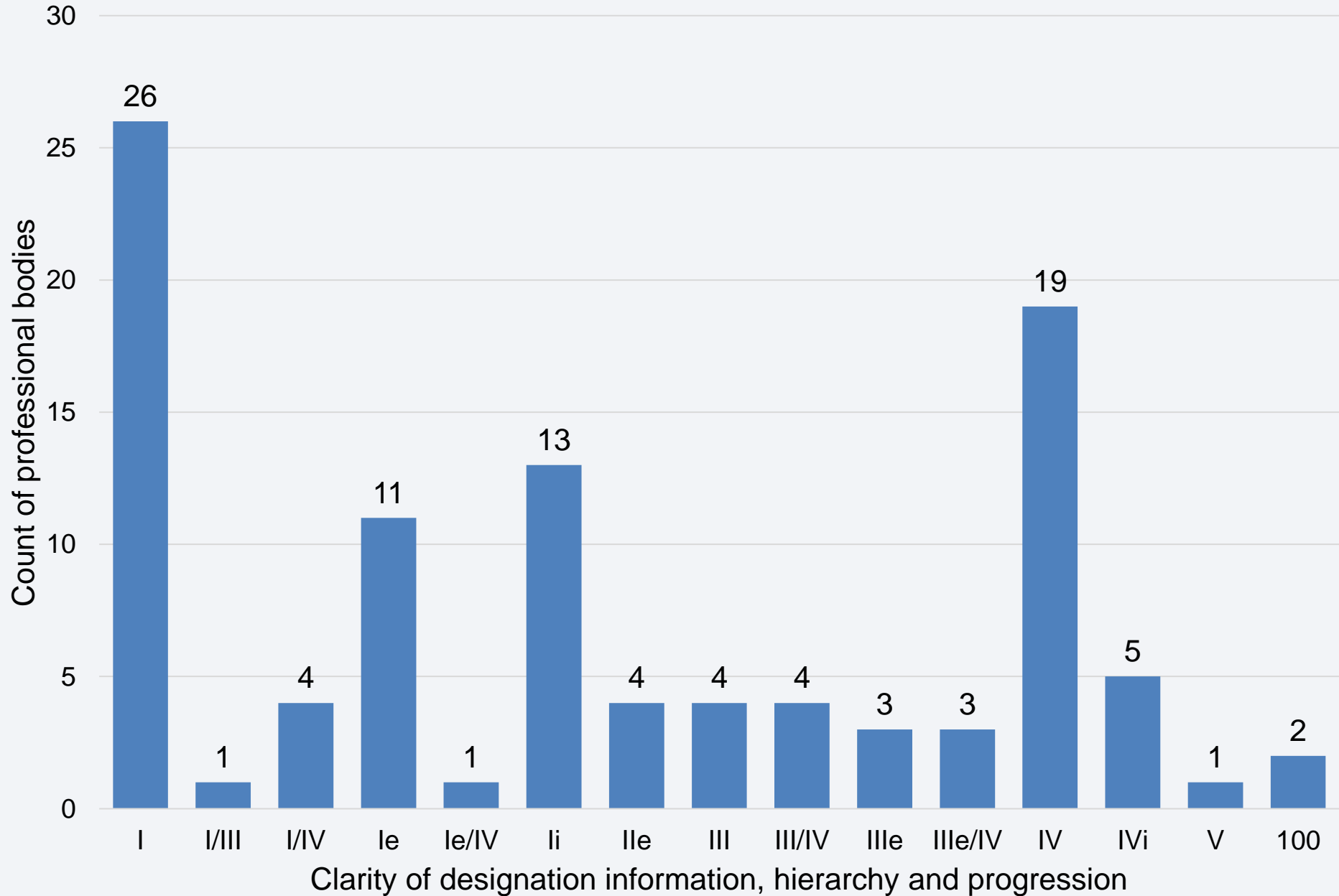
Visibility of progression between all designations on professional body websites



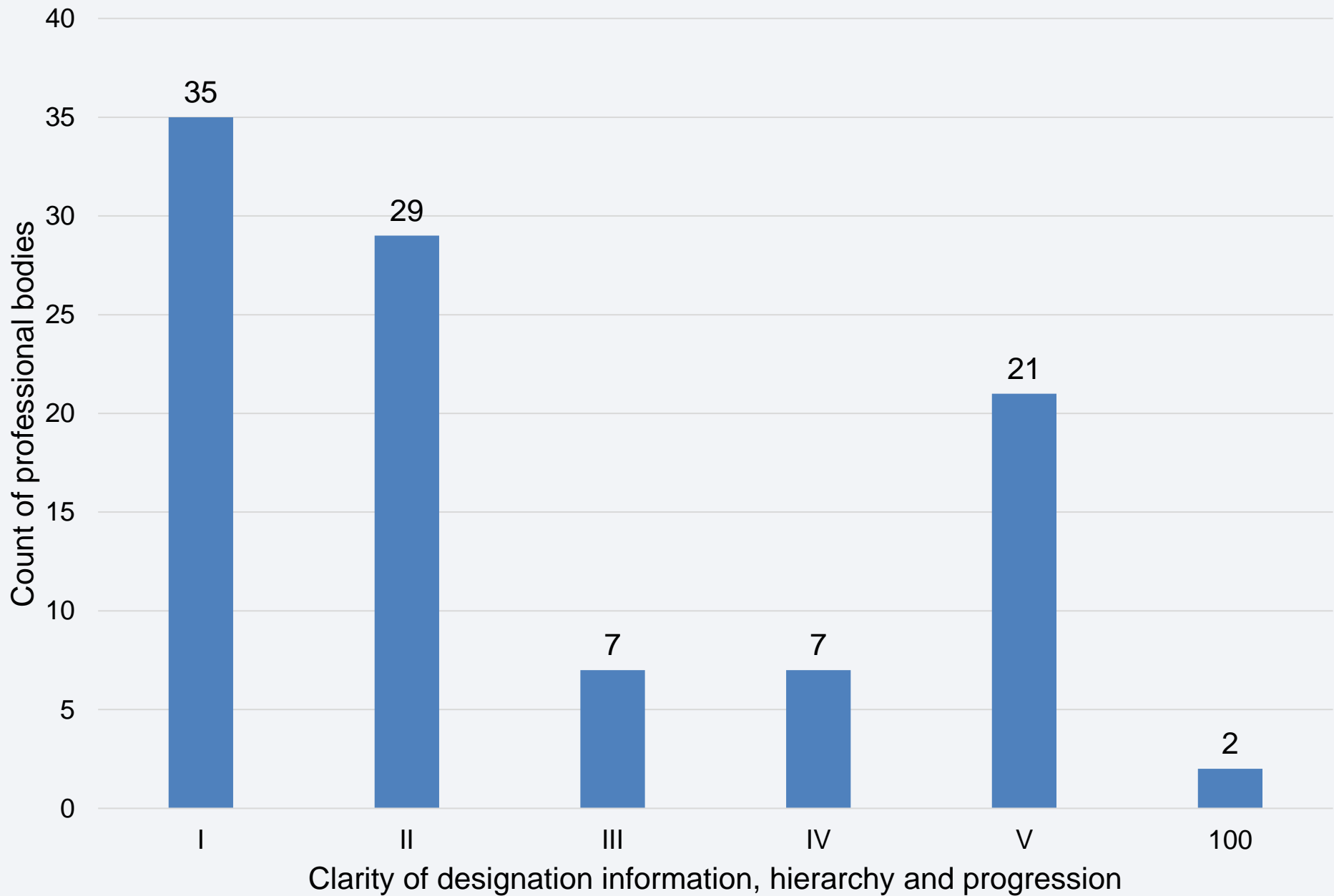
Visibility of designation hierarchy on professional body websites



Clarity of designation information, hierarchy and progression in NQF MIS



Clarity of designation information, hierarchy and progression on professional body website



Meta analyses

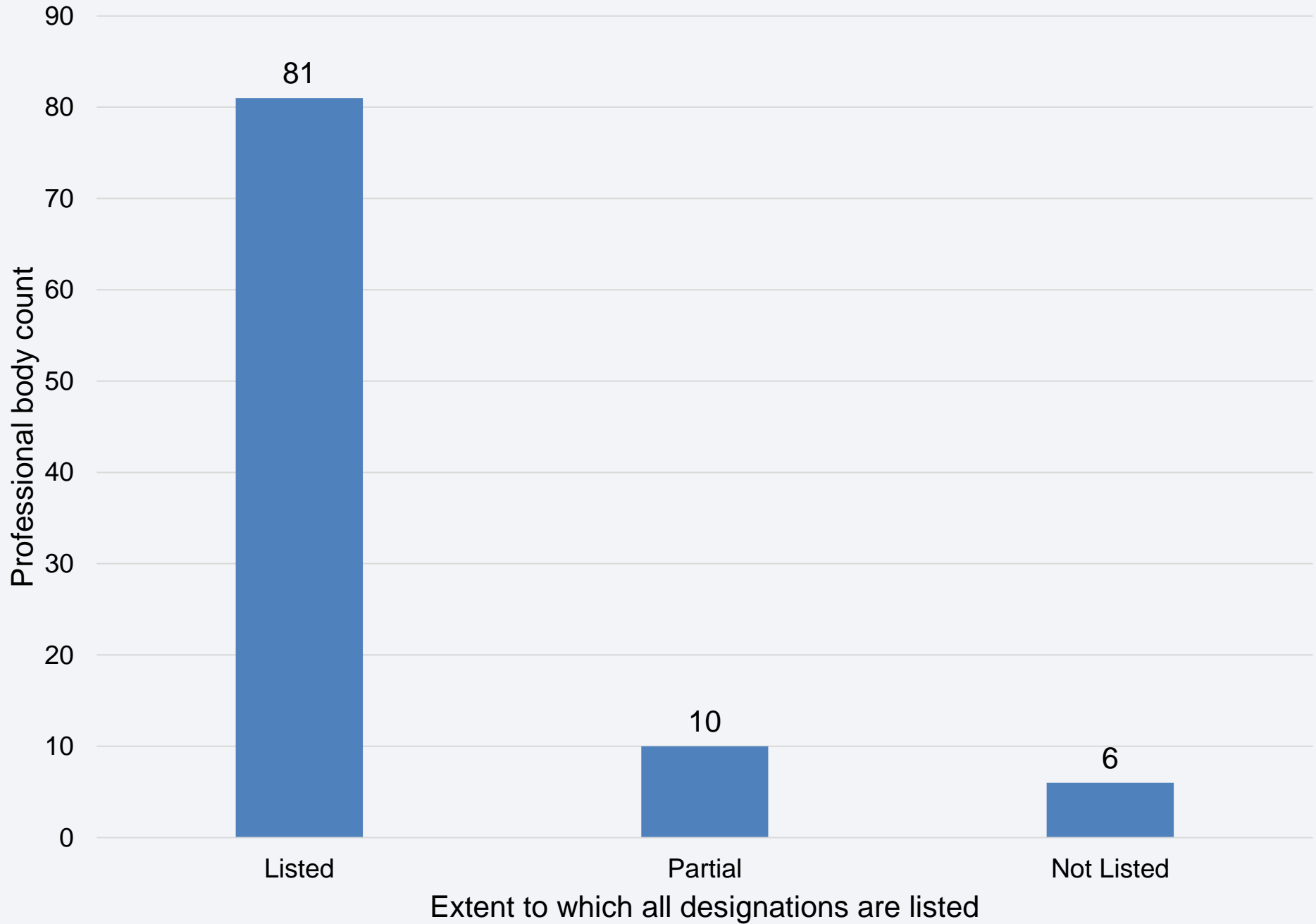


Information category	No. of designations	% of all designations
Total professional designations (PDs)	373	100.0
Statutory body designations	112	30.0
Non-statutory body designations	261	70.0
Statutory body PDs with qualification information in the NQF MIS	39	10.5
Non-statutory body PDs with qualification information in the NQF MIS	194	52.0
Total PDs with qualification information in the NQF MIS	233	60.0
PDs with designation title only in NQF MIS	140	39.9
Statutory body PDs with designation title only in the NQF MIS	73	19.6
Non-statutory body PDs with designation title only in the NQF MIS	67	18.0

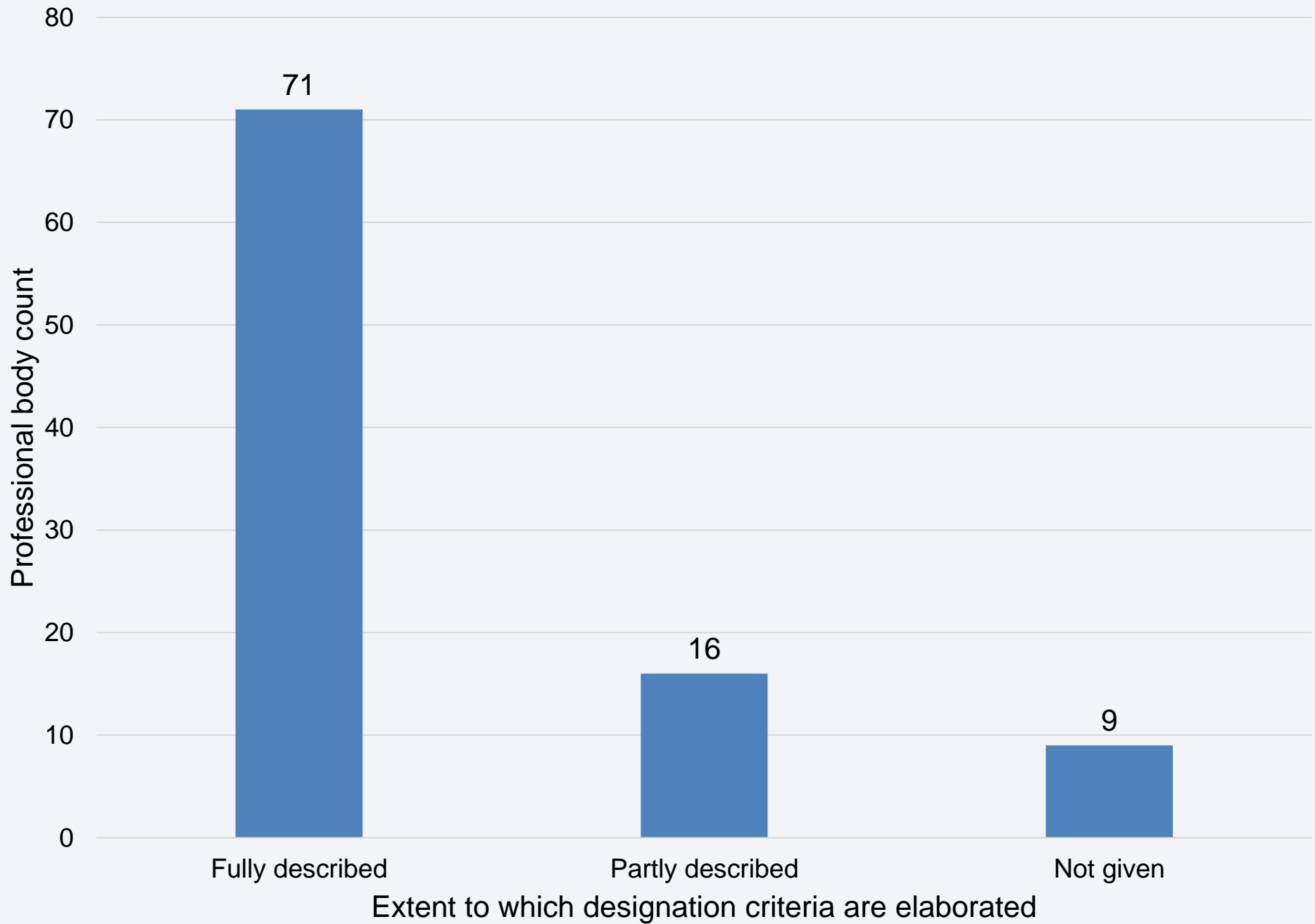
Information on professional body websites

- Count of professional bodies with **designations listed** on their websites
 - Count of professional bodies with **designation criteria** elaborated on their websites
 - Count of professional bodies with **designation systems** elaborated on their websites
- 

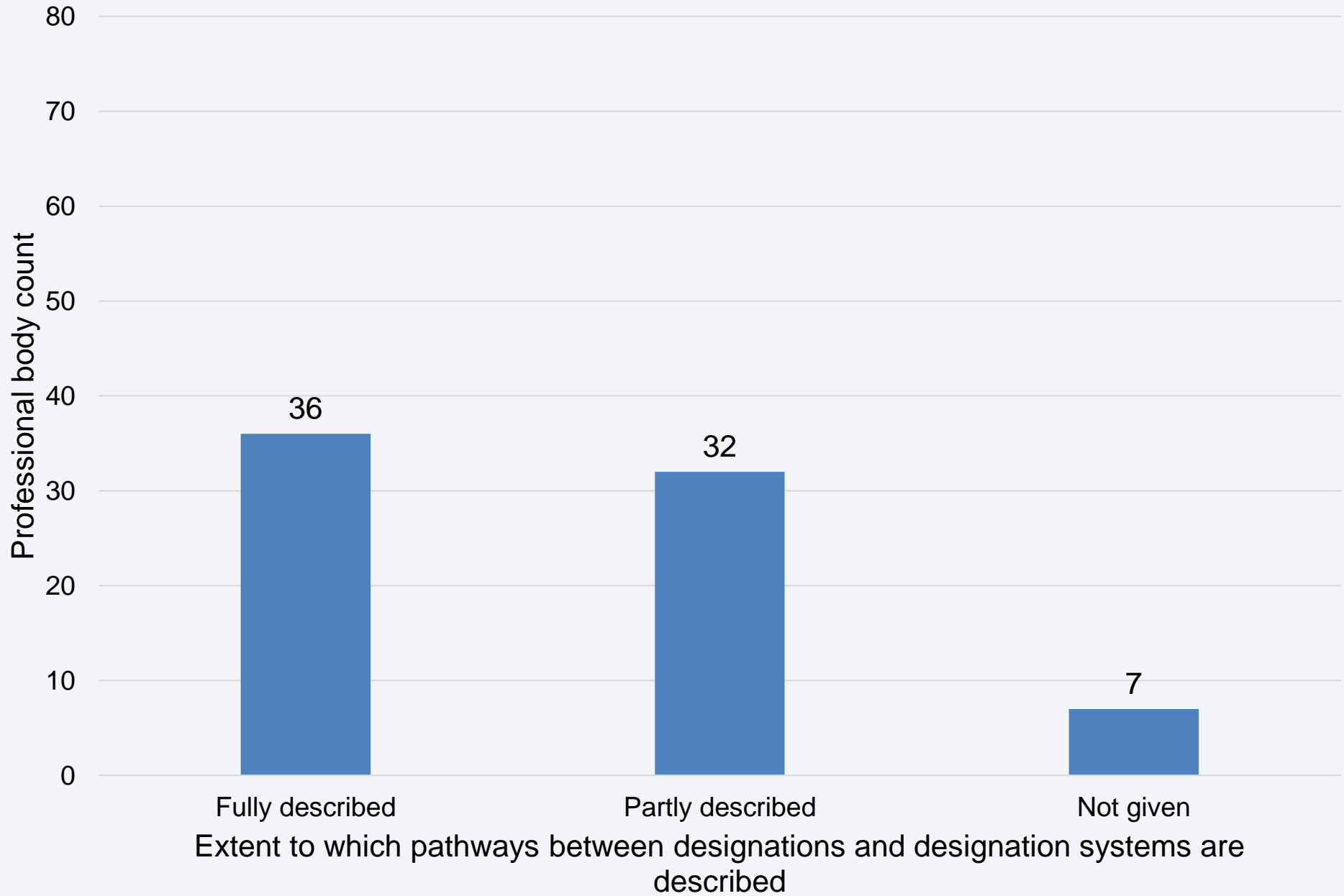
Count of bodies with listed designations



Count of bodies with elaborated designation criteria



Count of bodies with elaborated designation pathways and systems



Visibility of designation information on professional body website

1. **Inconsistent information** (36/101)
2. **Progression towards, and between, professional designations: 'complete details'**
 - Progression towards and across designations where there are formalised structures such as boards or associations, or informal 'streams' (4/12 with formal structures had all info, 8/12 had some info) (8/62 with >1 PD and no formal structures had all info)
 - Clear information for individual professional designations but less clarity around progression between designations (11/62)
 - Apparent hierarchy but lack of progression routes (3/62)
3. **Currency of information** (terminology, NQF MIS)
4. **Missing or partial information**
5. **Confusing information**
6. **Naming of professional bodies** (duplicated acronyms)
7. **Links with international bodies** ('chapters', qualifications, validity)
8. **Ease of website navigation** (ten types of challenges)
9. **Website being 'down'**
10. **Good examples** (16/101)
11. **Several similar bodies within fields**
12. **Details to address** (errors)
13. **On offering training** (offering, accrediting, blurring CPD/ training)
14. **Other aspects to note** (non-statutory bodies with underpinning legislation)

International practices



Choosing fields to explore internationally

In the **Accounting and Commerce** field in South Africa, an unusually high number of professional bodies were found, and the designation criteria, progression information, and hierarchy of designations were not necessarily clear.

In the **Nursing** field in South Africa, there were five legislated designations, six designations on the body website, and regulations for 15 categories of nurses. Professional designation criteria and progression routes were partly clear.

In the **Plumbing** field in South Africa, the system of designations was not clear in the NQF MIS and was partly clear on the body's website. Progression routes were partly clear.

In the **Veterinary** field in South Africa, there was an unusually high number of designations: 37 in the NQF MIS, 33 of which and an additional two were on the professional body's website. Designation criteria and progression routes were partly clear.

In the **Work at Height** field in South Africa, sub-sectors are clustered into chambers, each of which has several licensable professions. Designation criteria and progression routes were partly clear.

Which countries to look at internationally?

For the fields of **Accounting, Nursing, Plumbing**, the **Veterinary field** and **Work at Height**, countries were scanned across the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe, for professionalisation systems, to see the ‘governing bodies’ and how these systems were structured. This information was most readily available for **Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, United Kingdom (UK), and Vietnam**. Thus, the professional body systems for Accounting, Nursing, Plumbing, the Veterinary field, and Work at Height were considered in these eight countries.

Accounting

The point of research interest for the accounting field, was the numbers of professional bodies in the field. To consider accounting body systems worldwide the database of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) was used. IFAC is the largest global across-country accounting body with 180 member organisations, including four in South Africa. IFAC operates in 135 jurisdictions globally and keeps information on accounting legislation, and practice, for each member body as well as all the accounting bodies of which they are aware, that are not members. The IFAC database showed that in the sample countries (except UK), **there are several but a small number of accounting bodies** (two to three bodies overseeing practice and legislation). The larger number of accounting bodies in the UK (nine bodies), can be explained partially by the inclusion of the independent regions of England, Scotland, and Ireland (the accounting bodies found are described in the research report)

Nursing

The point of research interest in the nursing sector was the structuring of the professional designation systems. The sample countries for which information was readily available, appeared to have between three and six designations for nurses within their professional bodies, **a similar number to that in the NQF MIS** for nursing in South Africa (Research report shows the nursing bodies and designations found in the selected countries)

Plumbing

The point of research interest in the plumbing field, was how plumbing is governed, and how professional designations are structured. In the sample countries, how plumbers were designated differed considerably.

Systems with **levels for plumbers (e.g., Plumber and Master Plumber) accompanied by technical assistance (e.g., Registered Plumbing Worker)** appeared to be common; these categories were found in Australia, Hong Kong, and the UK – and some of these designations had **non-designated specialisations**.

Less common were systems that had designations for specific plumbers (e.g., Water Plumber or Sewerage Plumber), found in Malaysia.

The **plumbing bodies presented very differently** in the sample countries with some being statutory entities (UK, Hong Kong, Malaysia), some being separate local entities that work within a state or province (Australia, Canada, Germany), and some that appear to use international accreditation (Vietnam) (Further research would be needed to confirm the patterns).

South Africa's system appears to be like those in Australia, Hong Kong, and the UK, with levels of plumbers and technical workers, but also appears to have additional designations for specialisations. Some of the **designation system diagrams** on the international websites visited were very clear.

Veterinary field

The point of research interest in the veterinary field, was how the professional designations are structured. The veterinary body in South Africa was selected for its large number of designations (37). While handled differently, evidence of this pattern was seen in all sample countries. The field appears to be commonly separated into two major 'streams': a 'veterinarian stream' (or 'Veterinary Surgeon') and a 'technical stream' (with designations related to laboratory work, technicians, assistants). Within these streams there are specialisations. In South Africa, this is handled by providing separate designations for all the types of work, however **in the sample countries it is more common to have fewer stream-specific designations with specialisations for the main designations.**

Work-at-Height

The point of research interest in the work-at-height field, was the structuring of designations. In the sample countries, work-at-height **did not fall under a dedicated professional body**. In most cases, information regarding the field was **not explicitly mentioned**, and where it was mentioned, it was under the **umbrella of other bodies** in the **fields of building, safety, or scaffolding**. (The research report shows the work-at-height-related bodies and designations found)

Concluding comments



Concluding thoughts

The current research sought to understand the systems of, and challenges linked to, the professional designations of SAQA-recognised professional bodies – in particular, designation naming practices, the extent to which designation titles overlapped with OFO job titles, or the titles of qualifications registered on the NQF, the use of inappropriate terms, numbers of designations, and international links.

The research started by extracting the designation data from the NQF MIS. It went on to triangulate the information found, and deepen the understandings gained, by analysing the professional body websites. Information was coded and analysed. Patterns were sought for statutory and non-statutory professional bodies, and overall, as appropriate. There was no sample selection: all SAQA-recognised professional bodies in the NQF MIS at the time of the research were included.

Rich patterns were found in all the aspects investigated, including the foci in the original brief, as well as the **additional aspects that impacted on these foci, namely, the designation criteria, the hierarchy amongst the designations per body, progression pathways between the designations per body, and the designation systems of bodies.** The trends found provide clear pointers for the development of SAQA policy, criteria, and guidelines for professional designations in the NQF context.

Recommendations



Recommendation 1

(Simplifying designation titles)

Designation titles consist of various terms, including combinations of prefixes, descriptors, and suffixes. For user-friendliness, and while maintaining the integrity of professional body systems of designations, overly complex naming should be avoided. **One prefix and one suffix should ideally be used, with the descriptor** in a designation title. If a professional body wants to use more than one prefix and/or one suffix, a case should need to be presented to SAQA for consideration and approval.

Recommendation 2 (Avoiding confusing terms)

It is recommended that **SAQA stops the use of the following terms, and/or defines when they may be used**, and that:

- 2.1. Use of the term '**Chartered**' in a body and/or designation title be permitted only when the work of the body is closely linked to, and based on, a Charter (legal document).
- 2.2 Use of the term '**Graduate**' in a body and/or designation title be disallowed because it causes confusion around the qualification status of a learner/ worker/ candidate.
- 2.3. Use of the term '**Accredited**' in a body and/or designation title be disallowed because it causes confusion around quality assurance status in the South African NQF context.
- 2.4. Use of **acronyms** within body and/or designation titles be disallowed because they cause confusion.
- 2.5. To avoid confusion, **designation titles must differ from qualification, job titles** – although designation titles can *relate/ be similar to* qualification and job titles.

Recommendation 3 (Clarifying designation systems)

In **support of learning and work pathways** in the NQF context, it is recommended that professional bodies must, on their websites:

3.1. **List their designations and the criteria** clearly and fully for each of their designations (including the qualifications and work experience needed, and RPL possibilities).

3.2. **Illustrate and describe the progression pathways** clearly and fully, to and from each designation (and to and from each membership category as well?).

3.3. **Provide clear diagrams that illustrate their designation systems**, including showing, clearly, (a) each designation title and pathway, (b) the hierarchies between different designations, (c) where each designation fits in the designation system, (d) how the designation can be accessed, and (e) all the progression possibilities. Designation systems may include one or more distinct pathways.

Recommendation 4

(Minimising numbers of designations)

Learning-and-work pathways/ professional development are easier to access, and advance, when there are **smaller numbers of designations located clearly within the hierarchies and pathways of a designation system**. It is recommended that the numbers of designations within a professional body be minimised by, for example, having the designation **'Practitioner'** (with several specialisations if needed) and **'Specialist'** (with several specialisations if needed), and so on, rather than high numbers of separate designations. Designation systems may include one or more distinct pathways.

Recommendation 5

(Ensuring complete information – professional bodies)

Professional body and designation information across the professional body website and the NQF MIS must be complete, clear, consistent, and current.

5.1. As part the recognition processes, **professional bodies must provide to SAQA complete, clear, consistent, and current information for:** (a) designation titles, (b) designation criteria, (c) designation numbers, (d) designation hierarchies, (e) pathways to and from designations, (f) designation systems, and (g) explanatory diagrams of their designation systems. This information includes hierarchy and progression:

- within ‘single streams’ of designations,
- within and across ‘parallel streams’ of designations per body, and
- for ‘parallel streams’ of designations when there are associations/ boards/ chambers/ other entities under a single professional body.

5.2. Professional bodies **must inform SAQA of any changes** to their website information within a timeframe agreed by SAQA.

5.3. After effecting the changes on the professional body website, the body must **provide the information** to SAQA so that SAQA can update the NQF MIS, within a timeframe agreed by SAQA.

5.4. Based on this research **each professional body could conduct a self-evaluation** to assess the completeness, clarity, consistency, and currency of its designation information. Following this evaluation, each body could effect the changes required, and submit the updated information to SAQA within agreed timeframes.

Recommendation 6 (Ensuring complete information – SAQA)

SAQA needs to ensure that professional body and designation information is complete, clear, consistent, and current across the professional body website and the NQF MIS.

6.1. As part of the professional body recognition processes, SAQA submission requirements need to include complete, clear, consistent, current information on: (a) designation titles, (b) designation criteria, (c) designation numbers, (d) designation hierarchies, (e) pathways to and from designations, (f) designation systems, and (g) diagrams of designation systems. This information needs to include hierarchy and progression:

- within ‘single streams’ of designations,
- within and across ‘parallel streams’ of designations under a single professional body, and
- within ‘streams’ of designations when there are several associations/ boards/ chambers/ other entities under a single professional body.

6.2. SAQA needs to assess and update the NQF MIS information on: (a) designation titles, (b) designation criteria, (c) designation numbers, (d) designation hierarchies, (e) pathways to and from designations, and (f) designation systems and diagrams, on a periodic basis to be determined by SAQA.

6.3. SAQA needs to communicate with professional bodies when it plans to assess their information in the NQF MIS and on the professional body websites.

Recommendation 7 (Currency of information)

Regarding the **currency of information**:

7.1. Professional bodies need to ensure that the terminology on their websites is up to date in the context of the NQF Act, for example, reference needs to be made to:

- NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008), that superseded SAQA Act (No. 58 of 1995),
- NQF Sub-Frameworks and NQF Levels (not NQF Bands),
- current qualification/ part-qualification titles with their SAQA identity numbers (if reference is made to deregistered/ legacy qualifications/ part-qualifications, the status of these items needs to be made clear), and
- current designation titles (if reference is made to deregistered designations, the status of these designations must be made clear).

7.2. Professional bodies need to ensure that their contact details are up to date on their websites.

7.3. SAQA needs to ensure that the NQF MIS contains updated website links for all professional bodies.

Recommendation 8 (Clarifying international links)

SAQA-recognised bodies with international links should make these links *explicit* as follows.

- 8.1. SAQA-recognised bodies must **make their regional and global links clear, on their websites.**
- 8.2. SAQA-recognised bodies that are the **local chapters of international counterparts** should:
 - **have a South African website** that describes the larger professional systems of which they are part,
 - add, on their websites, **hyperlinks** to the relevant international websites,
 - ensure that these **hyperlinks also feature in the NQF MIS**, and
 - ensure that the **local website is relevant and up to date for local members/ prospective members.**
- 8.3. Where SAQA-recognised bodies **accept/ require qualifications/** part-qualifications from systems outside South Africa, bodies need to describe:
 - the **positioning/ status of that qualification in its home country** system,
 - the **South African equivalent** of that qualification, where appropriate, and
 - the **access and progression criteria for all the qualifications** involved.
- 8.4. Where SAQA-recognised bodies **use terminology from systems outside** the South African system:
 - the terminology needs to be **explained**, and
 - the **related South African terminology** needs to be explained.

Recommendation 9

(Professional body names)

In the interests of clarity, SAQA should not permit the situation to arise where a professional body acronym is the same as that of another professional body or provider.

Recommendation 10

(Monitoring the situation of ‘several bodies in a field’)

In fields where there are several professional bodies – SAQA needs to note the current arrangements and ensure that the mandates of bodies to be recognised in the future do not overlap. SAQA may want to consider the international picture for any field but can lead instead of follow, good practice.

Recommendation 11

(On professional bodies ‘offering training’)

South African professional bodies are not permitted to offer training, but play quality assurance roles in collaboration with, and under formal agreements with, the three Quality Councils. SAQA-recognised bodies with links to international bodies that offer training, need make their relationships with these bodies clear on their local websites, as well as emphasising their location and role in the South African system for education, training, development, and work.

Recommendation 12

(Making website navigation easy)

The following are recommended.

12.1. SAQA-recognised professional bodies need to ensure that their websites:

- **Contain complete, clear, consistent, current information** on their designation titles, criteria, hierarchies, pathways, systems, system diagrams, and international links,
- **Have hyperlinks** to their information in the NQF MIS,
- **Have hyperlinks** to the websites of international bodies as appropriate, and
- **Explain all terminology used**, including NQF terms, special field-based terms, and the relevant terms of the international systems to which they are linked, *in relation* to the South African terms, and
- **Are easy to navigate.**

12.2. SAQA needs to assess and evaluate the professional body websites as part of the recognition process, and periodically thereafter at intervals that it decides.

Recommendation 13

(Addressing editorial aspects)

Having two primary sources of information – such as the **professional body websites** and the **NQF MIS** – necessarily leads to the possibility of editorial errors over time, and both should be checked periodically for clarity, completeness, consistency, and currency.

Recommendation 14

(Sharing good practice)

The research identified **examples of good practice** regarding making professional designation information complete and clear. These examples could be shared and **workshopped with all professional bodies**, for the learning of all.



**South African Qualifications Authority
Postnet Suite 248
Private Bag X06
WATERKLOOF
Pretoria
0145
South Africa**

**Tel: +27 12 431 5000
Helpdesk: +27 0860 111 673
Web: www.saq.org.za
Email: info@saqa.org.za**