



Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework

November 2010

Purpose of level descriptors

1. The purpose of level descriptors for Levels One to Ten of the NQF shall be to ensure coherence across learning in the allocation of qualifications and part qualifications to particular levels, and to facilitate the assessment of the international comparability of qualifications and part qualifications.

Definitions and context

2. In these level descriptors any word or expression to which a meaning has been assigned in the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act 67 of 2008) shall have such meaning and, unless the context indicates otherwise.
 - a. “applied competence” means the ability to put into practice in the relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification
 - b. “autonomy of learning” means the capacity of a learner for lifelong learning and includes the extent to which a learner can undertake action for learning independently, the extent to which a learner takes responsibility for his or her own learning and the extent to which a learner is self-reflexive about and can evaluate the quality of his or her learning and eventually that of others
 - c. “field” means a particular area of learning used as an organising mechanism for the NQF
 - d. “level” means one of the series of levels of learning achievement arranged in ascending order from one to ten according to which the NQF is organised
 - e. “level descriptor” means that statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the NQF that provides a broad indication of learning achievements or outcomes that are appropriate to a qualification at that level

- f. “National Qualifications Framework ” is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications
 - g. “operational literacy” means an ability to use basic procedures and operations to complete complex tasks
 - h. “sub-framework” means one of three coordinated qualifications sub-frameworks which make up the NQF as a single integrated system: The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, the General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework and the Occupational Qualifications Framework
3. Each level of the NQF is described by a statement of learning achievement, known as a level descriptor.
 4. There is one set of level descriptors for the NQF.
 5. The nomenclature for qualifications is dealt with in the sub-frameworks of the NQF.
 6. Contextual interpretation of the level descriptors within each of the three sub-frameworks is encouraged.
 7. In order to advance the objectives of the NQF, the South African Qualifications Authority is responsible for the development of the content of the level descriptors for each level of the NQF in consultation with the three Quality Councils: The Council on Higher Education, Umalusi and the Council for Trades and Occupations

Level descriptors

8. A qualification or part qualification registered at a specific level of the NQF shall comply with the following categories of level descriptors.
9. NQF Level One
 - Applied competence*
 - a. a general knowledge of one or more areas or fields of study, in addition to the fundamental areas of study
 - b. an understanding of the context within which the learner operates
 - c. an ability to use key common tools and instruments
 - d. sound listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
 - e. basic numeracy skills including an understanding of the symbolic systems
 - f. an ability to recognise and solve problems within a familiar, well-defined context
 - g. an ability to recall, collect and organise given information clearly and accurately
 - h. an ability to report information clearly and accurately in spoken and written form

Autonomy of learning

- i. a capacity to apply themselves to a well-defined task under direct supervision
- j. an ability to sequence and schedule learning tasks
- k. an ability to access and use a range of learning resources
- l. an ability to work as part of a group

10. NQF Level Two

Applied competence

- a. a basic operational knowledge of one or more areas or fields of study, in addition to the fundamental areas of study
- b. an understanding of the environment within which the learner operates in a wider context
- c. an ability to use a variety of common tools and instruments
- d. the ability to apply literacy and numeracy skills to a range of different but familiar contexts
- e. an ability to use their knowledge to select and apply known solutions to well-defined routine problems
- f. a basic ability to collect, organise and report information clearly and accurately
- g. an ability to express an opinion on given information clearly in spoken and written form

Autonomy of learning

- h. a capacity to work and learn in a disciplined manner in a well-structured and supervised environment
- i. an ability to manage their time effectively
- j. an ability to develop sound working relationships and an ability to work effectively as part of a group

11. NQF Level Three

Applied competence

- a. a basic understanding of one or more fields' or disciplines' key concepts and knowledge, in addition to the fundamental areas of study
- b. an understanding of the organisation or operating environment as a system
- c. application of skills in measuring the environment using key instruments and equipment
- d. operational literacy
- e. an ability to use their knowledge to select appropriate procedures to solve problems within given parameters
- f. a basic ability to summarise and interpret information relevant to the context from a range of sources
- g. an ability to take a position on available information, discuss the issues and reach a resolution

- h. produce a coherent presentation and report, providing explanations for positions taken

Autonomy of learning

- i. a capacity to operate within clearly defined contexts
- j. an ability to work and learn within a managed environment
- k. capacity to actively contribute to team effectiveness

12. NQF Level Four

Applied competence

- a. a fundamental knowledge base of the most important areas of one or more fields or disciplines, in addition to the fundamental areas of study
- b. an informed understanding of the key terms, rules, concepts, established principles and theories in one or more fields or disciplines
- c. an understanding of the organisation or operating environment as a system within a wider context
- d. an ability to apply essential methods, procedures and techniques of the field or discipline
- e. an ability to apply and carry out actions by interpreting information from text and operational symbols or representations
- f. an ability to use their knowledge to solve common problems within a familiar context
- g. an ability to adjust an application of a common solution within relevant parameters to meet the needs of small changes in the problem or operating context
- h. an ability to motivate the change using relevant evidence
- i. a basic ability in gathering relevant information, analysis and evaluation skills
- j. an ability to communicate and present information reliably and accurately in writing and verbally

Autonomy of learning

- k. a capacity to take responsibility for their own learning within a supervised environment
- l. a capacity to take decisions about and responsibility for actions
- m. a capacity to evaluate their own performance against given criteria
- n. a capacity to take the initiative to address any shortcomings they find

13. NQF Level Five

- a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate knowledge of the main areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice
- b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an awareness of how knowledge or a knowledge system develops and evolves within the area of study or operation

- c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to select and apply standard methods, procedures or techniques within the field, discipline or practice, and to plan and manage an implementation process within a supported environment
- d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify, evaluate and solve defined, routine and new problems within a familiar context, and to apply solutions based on relevant evidence and procedures or other forms of explanation appropriate to the field, discipline or practice
- e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to take account of, and act in accordance with prescribed organisational and professional ethical codes of conduct, values and practices and to seek guidance on ethical and professional issues where necessary
- f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to gather information from a range of sources, including oral, written or symbolic texts, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply basic processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on that information
- g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to communicate information reliably, accurately and coherently, using conventions appropriate to the context, either in writing, verbally or in practical demonstration, including an understanding of and respect for conventions around intellectual property, copyright and plagiarism
- h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to operate in a range of familiar and new contexts, demonstrating an understanding of different kinds of systems, their constituent parts and the relationships between these parts, and to understand how actions in one area impact on other areas within the same system
- i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to: assess his or her performance or the performance of others and to take appropriate action where necessary; and take responsibility for his or her learning within a structured learning process and to promote the learning of others
- j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to account for his or her actions, to work effectively with and respect others, and, in a defined context, to take supervisory responsibility for others and for the responsible use of resources where appropriate

14. NQF Level Six

- a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: detailed knowledge of the main areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of and an ability to apply the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice; and knowledge of an area or areas of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to

other fields, disciplines or practices

b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of different forms of knowledge, schools of thought and forms of explanation typical within the area of study or operation, and an awareness of knowledge production processes

c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to evaluate, select and apply appropriate methods, procedures or techniques in processes of investigation or application within a defined context

d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify, evaluate and solve problems in unfamiliar contexts, gathering evidence and applying solutions based on evidence and procedures appropriate to the field, discipline or practice

e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions, within an organisational or professional context, based on an awareness of the complexity of ethical dilemmas

f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to evaluate different sources of information, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply well-developed processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on that information

g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to present and communicate complex information reliably and coherently using appropriate academic and professional or occupational conventions, formats and technologies for a given context

h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to make decisions and act appropriately in familiar and new contexts, demonstrating an understanding of the relationships between systems, and of how actions, ideas or developments in one system impact on other systems

i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to evaluate performance against given criteria, and accurately identify and address his or her task-specific learning needs in a given context, and to support the learning needs of others

j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team or group, and to take responsibility for his or her decisions and actions and the decisions and actions of others within well-defined contexts, including the responsibility for the use of resources where appropriate

15. NQF Level Seven

a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: integrated knowledge of the main areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of and an ability to apply and evaluate the key terms, concepts, facts, principles,

- rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice; and detailed knowledge of an area or areas of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to other fields, disciplines or practices
- b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of knowledge as contested and an ability to evaluate types of knowledge and explanations typical within the area of study or practice
 - c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an understanding of a range of methods of enquiry in a field, discipline or practice, and their suitability to specific investigations; and an ability to apply a range of methods to resolve problems or introduce change within a practice
 - d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify, analyse, critically reflect on and address complex problems, applying evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments
 - e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to take decisions and act ethically and professionally, and the ability to justify those decisions and actions drawing on appropriate ethical values and approaches, within a supported environment
 - f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an ability to develop appropriate processes of information gathering for a given context or use; and an ability to independently validate the sources of information, and evaluate and manage the information
 - g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to develop and communicate his or her ideas and opinions in well-formed arguments, using appropriate academic, professional, or occupational discourse
 - h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to manage processes in unfamiliar and variable contexts, recognising that problem solving is context- and system-bound, and does not occur in isolation
 - i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify, evaluate and address accurately his or her learning needs in a self-directed manner, and to facilitate collaborative learning processes
 - j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to take full responsibility for his or her work, decision-making and use of resources, and limited accountability for the decisions and actions of others in varied or ill-defined contexts

16. NQF Level Eight

- a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: knowledge of and engagement in an area at the forefront of a field, discipline or practice; an understanding of the theories, research methodologies, methods and techniques relevant to the field, discipline or practice; and an understanding of how to apply

such knowledge in a particular context

b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to interrogate multiple sources of knowledge in an area of specialisation and to evaluate knowledge and processes of knowledge production

c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of the complexities and uncertainties of selecting, applying or transferring appropriate standard procedures, processes or techniques to unfamiliar problems in a specialised field, discipline or practice

d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to use a range of specialised skills to identify, analyse and address complex or abstract problems drawing systematically on the body of knowledge and methods appropriate to a field, discipline or practice

e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify and address ethical issues based on critical reflection on the suitability of different ethical value systems to specific contexts;

f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to critically review information gathering, evaluation and management processes in specialised contexts in order to develop creative responses to problems and issues

g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to present and communicate academic, professional or occupational ideas and texts effectively to a range of audiences, offering creative insights, rigorous interpretations and solutions to problems and issues appropriate to the context

h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to operate effectively within a system, or manage a system based on an understanding of the roles and relationships between elements within the system

i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to apply, in a self-critical manner, learning strategies which effectively address his or her professional and ongoing learning needs and the professional and ongoing learning needs of others

j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to take full responsibility for his or her work, decision-making and use of resources, and full accountability for the decisions and actions of others where appropriate

17. NQF Level Nine

a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: specialist knowledge to enable engagement with and critique of current research or practices; and an advanced scholarship or research in a particular field, discipline or practice

b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to evaluate current processes of knowledge

production and to choose an appropriate process of enquiry for the area of study or practice

c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate a command of and ability to design, select and apply appropriate and creative methods, techniques, processes or technologies to complex practical and theoretical problems

d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an ability to use a wide range of specialised skills in identifying, conceptualising, designing and implementing methods of enquiry to address complex and challenging problems within a field, discipline or practice; and an understanding of the consequences of any solutions or insights generated within a specialised context

e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to make autonomous ethical decisions which affect knowledge production, or complex organisational or professional issues, an ability to critically contribute to the development of ethical standards in a specific context

f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to design and implement a strategy for the processing and management of information, in order to conduct a comprehensive review of leading and current research in an area of specialisation to produce significant insights

g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an ability to use the resources of academic and professional or occupational discourses to communicate and defend substantial ideas that are the products of research or development in an area of specialisation; and a range of advanced and specialised skills and discourses appropriate to a field, discipline or practice, to communicate to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge or expertise

h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to make interventions at an appropriate level within a system, based on an understanding of hierarchical relations within the system, and the ability to address the intended and unintended consequences of interventions

i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to develop his or her own learning strategies which sustain independent learning and academic or professional development, and can interact effectively within the learning or professional group as a means of enhancing learning

j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to operate independently and take full responsibility for his or her own work, and, where appropriate, to account for leading and initiating processes and implementing systems, ensuring good resource management and governance practices

18. NQF Level Ten

a. *Scope of knowledge*, in respect of which a learner is able to

demonstrate: expertise and critical knowledge in an area at the forefront of the field, discipline or practice; and the ability to conceptualise new research initiatives, and create new knowledge or practice

b. *Knowledge literacy*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to contribute to scholarly debates around theories of knowledge and processes of knowledge production in an area of study or practice

c. *Method and procedure*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to develop new methods, techniques, processes, systems or technologies in original, creative and innovative ways appropriate to specialised and complex contexts

d. *Problem solving*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to apply specialist knowledge and theory in critically reflexive, creative and novel ways to address complex practical and theoretical problems

e. *Ethics and professional practice*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to identify, address and manage emerging ethical issues, and to advance processes of ethical decision-making, including monitoring and evaluation of the consequences of these decisions where appropriate

f. *Accessing, processing and managing information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to make independent judgements about managing incomplete or inconsistent information or data in an iterative process of analysis and synthesis, for the development of significant original insights into new complex and abstract ideas, information or issues

g. *Producing and communicating information*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an ability to produce substantial, independent, in-depth and publishable work which meets international standards, is considered to be new or innovative by peers, and makes a significant contribution to the discipline, field, or practice; and an ability to develop a communication strategy to disseminate and defend research, strategic and policy initiatives and their implementation to specialist and non-specialist audiences using the full resources of an academic and professional or occupational discourse

h. *Context and systems*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: an understanding of theoretical underpinnings in the management of complex systems to achieve systemic change; and an ability to independently design, sustain and manage change within a system or systems

i. *Management of learning*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to demonstrate intellectual independence, research leadership and management of research and research development in a discipline, field or practice

j. *Accountability*, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an ability to operate independently and take full responsibility for his or her work, and where appropriate to lead, oversee and be held ultimately accountable for the overall governance of processes and systems.

Short title

19. This document must be referred to as the Level Descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework.

End of document