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**GOVERNMENT NOTICE**

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**SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

No. 203

3 March 2006

**SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA)**

The South African Qualifications Authority hereby publishes for public comment the following Draft Level Descriptors for the proposed 10 – Level National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These Level Descriptors are for Levels 5 to 10 and represent a substantial reworking of the draft previously published on 21 October 2005.

The Draft Level Descriptors can be accessed via the SAQA web-site at [www.saga.org.za](http://www.saga.org.za). Copies may also be obtained from the Directorate of Standards Setting and Development at the SAQA offices, Hatfield Forum West, 1067 Arcadia Street, Hatfield, Pretoria.

Comment on the Draft Level Descriptors should reach SAQA at the address ***below and no later than 30 March 2006***. All correspondence should be marked **Draft Level Descriptors** and addressed to

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**S BHIKHA**  
**DIRECTOR: STANDARDS SETTING AND DEVELOPMENT**

## REFINED LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR A 10 - LEVEL NQF

### 1. Definitions

In these level descriptors any word or expression to which a meaning has been assigned in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995) shall have such meaning and, unless the context indicates otherwise –

“applied competence” means the ability to put into practice in the relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification;

“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;

“level descriptor” means that statement describing achievement at a particular level of the NQF:

“NQF” means the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as already in the Act.

### 2. Level Descriptors

- Level descriptors describe an increasing complexity in learning outcome (including skills and personal development), and that progression is a key principle underlying the framework.
- Level descriptors are cumulative, and assume learning achieved at previous levels in the framework.
- Level descriptors are not learning outcomes or assessment criteria. They provide a broad frame from which the specific and contextualized outcome and assessment criteria for a particular programme can be derived.
- Level descriptors are descriptive, and not prescriptive statements, i.e. the competencies listed at a particular level in the framework broadly describe the learning achieved at that level, but an individual learning programme may not necessarily meet each and every criterion listed.
- Level descriptors embrace learning in a wide variety of contexts (vocational, occupational, academic and professional) and environments (classroom, laboratory, field, clinic, community etc.)

- Level descriptors do not describe years of study

### **3. Reading the Level Descriptors**

The philosophical underpinning of the NQF is applied competence, in line with the outcomes-based theoretical framework adopted in the South African context. Applied competence has three constituent elements: foundational; practical; and reflexive competences. Foundational competence embraces the intellectual / academic skills of knowledge together with analysis, synthesis and evaluation (information processing and problem solving). Practical competence includes the concept of operational context and reflexive competence incorporates learner autonomy.

These refined generic descriptors differ from previous versions of level descriptors, in that, the distinction between 'applied competence' and autonomy of learning', has been collapsed to avoid duplication between the latter and the application of knowledge.

Another development has been the incorporation of the first five Critical Cross-field Outcomes (CCOs) as developed for the context of the South African NQF into the refined descriptors. It is expected that the CCOs be contextualized and demonstrated in the qualification outcomes developed from these generic descriptors.

### **4. Descriptor categories**

The generic competencies described for Levels 5 to 10 are encapsulated in the following ten categories:

- Scope of knowledge
- Knowledge literacy
- Method and procedure
- Problem solving
- Ethics and professional practice
- Accessing, processing and managing information
- Producing and communicating information
- Context and systems
- Management of learning
- Accountability

NQF Level	Level Descriptors
<b>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</b>	
5	<p>Scope of knowledge :</p> <p>knowledge of the main areas of one or more fields<sup>1</sup>, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice.</p> <p>Knowledge literacy:</p> <p>an awareness of how knowledge (or a knowledge system) develops and evolves within the area of study or operation.</p> <p>Method and Procedure:</p> <p>an ability to select and apply standard methods, procedures, and/or techniques within the field, discipline or practice, and to plan and manage an implementation process within a supported environment.</p> <p>Problem solving:</p> <p>an ability to identify, evaluate<sup>2</sup> and solve defined, routine and new problems within a familiar context, and to apply solutions based on relevant evidence and procedures and/or other forms of explanation appropriate to the field, discipline or practice.</p> <p>Ethics and professional practice<sup>3</sup>:</p> <p>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.</p>

<sup>1</sup> A field of knowledge, by definition, must always be larger than the specific content of the programme.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the ability to recognize when the problem falls outside of the individual's scope of competence and who to refer it to.

<sup>3</sup> This category refers to the capacity to act in accordance with accepted professional ethical standards. This does not preclude appropriate consideration being given towards other worldviews or viewpoints.

	<p>Accessing, processing and managing information<sup>4</sup>:</p> <p>an ability to gather information from a range of sources, including oral, written and/or symbolic texts<sup>5</sup>, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply basic processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on that information.</p> <p>Producing and communicating information:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Context and systems<sup>6</sup>:</p> <p>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 how actions in one area impact on other areas within the same system.</p> <p>Management of learning:</p> <p>an ability to assess own and others' performance and to take appropriate action where necessary;</p> <p>an ability to take responsibility for own learning within a structured learning process and to promote the learning of others.</p> <p>Accountability:</p> <p>an ability to answer for own 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.</p>
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<sup>4</sup> Accessing and processing information is inextricably linked with the use of information and communication technology (ICT), tools and processes. The descriptors in this category assume that ICT skills appropriate to each level are embedded in the overall competence.

<sup>5</sup> 'Text' is meant in the broadest sense.

<sup>6</sup> Systems refer to knowledge systems, economic, environmental and social systems. An understanding of the inter-relatedness of systems and of how actions in one area impact on others is not repeated in the level descriptors but is expected to be displayed at all levels of operation.

<b>NQF Level</b>	<b>Level Descriptors</b>
	<p><b>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</b></p>
6	<p>Scope of knowledge :</p> <p>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;</p> <p>knowledge of an area or areas of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to other fields, disciplines or practices.</p> <p>Knowledge literacy:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Method and Procedure:</p> <p>an ability to evaluate, select and apply appropriate methods, procedures and/or techniques in processes of investigation or application within a defined context.</p> <p>Problem solving:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Ethics and professional practice:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Accessing, processing and managing information:</p> <p>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.</p>



	<p><b>Producing and communicating information:</b></p> <p>an ability to present and communicate complex information reliably and coherently using appropriate academic/professional/occupational conventions, formats and technologies for a given context.</p> <p><b>Context and systems:</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Management of learning:</b></p> <p>an ability to evaluate performance against given criteria, and accurately identify and address own task-specific learning needs in a given context, and to support the learning needs of others.</p> <p><b>Accountability:</b></p> <p>an ability to work effectively in a team or group, and to take responsibility for own decisions and actions and those of others within well-defined contexts, including the responsibility for the use of resources where appropriate.</p>
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NQF Level	Level Descriptors
<p><b>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</b></p>	
7	<p>Scope of knowledge :</p> <p>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;</p> <p>detailed knowledge of an area or areas of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to other fields, disciplines or practices.</p> <p>Knowledge literacy:</p> <p>an understanding of knowledge as contested and an ability to evaluate types of knowledge and explanations typical within the area of study or practice.</p> <p>Method and Procedure:</p> <p>an understanding of a range of methods of enquiry in a field, discipline or practice, and their suitability to specific investigations;</p> <p>an ability to apply a range of methods to resolve problems or introduce change within a practice.</p> <p>Problem solving:</p> <p>an ability to identify, analyse, critically reflect on and address complex problems, applying evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments.</p> <p>Ethics and professional practice:</p> <p>an ability to take decisions and act ethically and professionally, and the ability to justify these decisions and actions drawing on appropriate ethical values and approaches, within a supported environment.</p>

	<p>Accessing, processing and managing information:</p> <p>an ability to develop appropriate processes of information gathering for a given context or use;</p> <p>an ability to independently validate the sources of information, and evaluate and manage the information.</p> <p>Producing and communicating information:</p> <p>an ability to develop and communicate one's own ideas and opinions in well-formed arguments, using appropriate academic, professional, or occupational discourse.</p> <p>Context and systems:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Management of learning:</p> <p>an ability to accurately identify, evaluate and address own learning needs in a self-directed manner, and facilitate collaborative learning processes.</p> <p>Accountability:</p> <p>an ability to take full responsibility for own work, decision making and use of resources and limited accountability for the decisions and actions of others in varied or ill-defined contexts.</p>
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NQF Level	Level Descriptors
<p><b>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</b></p>	
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>Scope of knowledge:</b></p> <p>knowledge of and engagement in an area at the forefront of a field, discipline or practice;</p> <p>an understanding of the theories, research methodologies, methods and techniques relevant to the field, discipline or practice; and an understanding of how to apply this knowledge in a particular context.</p> <p><b>Knowledge literacy:</b></p> <p>an ability to interrogate multiple sources of knowledge in an area of specialisation, and to evaluate knowledge and processes of knowledge production.</p> <p><b>Method and Procedure:</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Problem solving:</b></p> <p>an ability to use a range of specialised skills to identify, analyse and address complex and/or abstract problems drawing systematically on the body of knowledge and methods appropriate to a field, discipline or practice.</p> <p><b>Ethics and professional practice:</b></p> <p>an ability to identify and address ethical issues based on critical reflection on the suitability of different ethical value systems to specific contexts.</p> <p><b>Accessing, processing and managing information:</b></p> <p>an ability to critically review information gathering, evaluation and management processes in specialised contexts in order to develop creative responses to problems and issues.</p>