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The Development of Level Descriptors for the NQF

Discussion document for public comment

This document was approved for release as a discussion document for public comment at the SAQA meeting held on 11 October 2000.

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The closing date for comments is 5 January 2001.

Submissions should be titled:

The Development of Level Descriptors for the NQF

Preface

This report is a synthesis of information gathered from a variety of sources on level descriptors with the view to gaining a better understanding of the general phenomenon of levels within a credits-based qualifications framework. The ultimate goal is to develop level descriptors that will be, historically and contextually, suitable for a South African National Qualifications Framework while at the same time taking into consideration international trends. Of significance will be the definition, general nature and purpose of levels, and the positioning of qualifications on the framework.

Developing level descriptors for South Africa raises concern about the international comparability of our qualifications: the question being; if the level descriptors are context-specific will these qualifications be of international standards? By taking into consideration international trends and initiatives taken by other countries in developing level descriptors SAQA hopes to develop a system of level descriptors that will not only be able to withstand intellectual scrutiny both nationally and intemationally, but also facilitate the international comparability of standards and qualifications.

The report attempts to highlight those areas, which need to be considered in the development of level descriptors. The report does not set out to provide specific answers to particular issues raised, but to raise awareness that many of the issues identified are recognized and have been dealt with to varying degrees in our own and other countries. The primary purpose of the report is to facilitate an understanding of issues surrounding level descriptors with the view to making informed decisions in developing level descriptors suitable for our own context.

It has been suggested that level descriptors "ensure consistency in assigning a standard or qualification to an NQF level" thereby providing "criteria for each level so that various

forms of learning can be made equivalent in terms of complexity" (Angelis 2000: 17). The above characterization of level descriptors shows that there is interdependence between level descriptors and a qualifications structure. The development of a qualifications structure and level descriptors is inextricably intertwined hence there are two possible ways to approach the issue of developing a complete qualifications system. One can start with level descriptors and then peg qualifications on the framework, or one can peg qualifications and then develop level descriptors. Either way, the process involves an iterative interaction between the two.

Considering the fact that there are a number of contestations with regard to the qualifications structure, it was necessary to focus on the qualifications structure before developing level descriptors. In terms of the methodology used, SAQA therefore chose-to peg qualifications before developing level descriptors. Since a qualifications structure charts progression in terms of an increase in level of learning demand, it was suggested that level descriptors should be developed on the basis of a well-defined qualifications structure. The intention behind this iterative approach is that, as the process of developing the NQF progresses, qualifications may be pegged differently and the level descriptors may be refined or re-defined.

SAQA presents the present report as a follow up to the proposed qualifications structure as illustrated in Annexure A. The present report is a proposal of level descriptors that describe knowledge attributes in the various NQF levels. The proposed level descriptors define increasing levels of complexity in terms of knowledge, skills and learner autonomy. The proposed level descriptors also show progression within and across the three NQF bands.

Finally, the report does not pretend in the least to be conclusive, definitive or exhaustive. The report highlights the fact that level descriptors are not prescriptive statements about knowledge attributes. Instead, these should be viewed as providing guidelines to all relevant stakeholders regarding the expected knowledge attributes at specific levels on the framework. Since the implementation of the NQF is a developmental process, the development of a qualifications structure and level descriptors is a starting point. Issues related to the qualifications structure and level descriptors that may still need further debate are the role of credits and credit value in a credits-based system and what rules of combination must be used in order to create coherence and consistency within the framework.

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The Development of Level descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework

Report

1. Credits-Based Qualifications Framework

It is important to understand the meaning of credit, the award of credit points and level in the context of a credits-based qualifications framework. The United Kingdom HEQC identifies three approaches to determining credit. Firstly, credit can be impositional in that it imposes credits on an existing structure. This type of credit is referred to as an impositional credit. Secondly, a compositional credit composes credits from notional hours of student learning, This type of credit is defined in terms of notional hours of learning. Thirdly, there is a competence-based credit that is awarded for the successful demonstration of a competence (Cooke & Naidoo 2000:38). This competence may be in academic learning or recognized learning in the context of everyday life and work as well as vocational and professional-related occupations.

In the South African context, the current discussions around the issue of credits are limited to the notion of compositional credit, i.e. the notion of credit used is based on notional hours of learning rather than on competence. Winter (1993) highlights inherent problems with the use of notional learning time as a means of calculating educational learning time. One of the limitations that is pertinent to the South African context is that this notion of time-based credit is not in line with an outcomes based system (cf. Robertson 1994a). A competency based-credit does not compromise the outcomes based system and research has shown that "awarding credit for competence also subsumes credit for notional time but places emphasis on the competence and not on "time served (even notional time)" (Cooke & Naidoo 2000:38).

Some of the critics of the South African NQF claim that the framework is too focused on notional time and thereby undermines the fundamental principles of OBE. Such criticism is based on the mistaken assumption that the NQF is a one-dimensional framework emphasizing the time factor at the expense of competence. What needs to be taken into consideration is that the NQF is not simply a credit-based framework. The NQF is a credit and level based framework which means that the framework not only regulates the award of credits for learning but also defines the levels at which programme elements will be taught and assessed thus influencing progression. Specifically y, the NQF is a ***multi-dimensional framework*** consisting of (1) the quantitative dimension in terms of the amount/volume of notional time, (2) value of learning vis-à-vis the

purpose of the qualification as a whole and lastly, (3) competence. As a multi-dimensional framework, all three of these concepts contribute to the architecture of the NQF.

1.1 The NQF, Level and Credits.

In the South African context, credit is defined in terms of two parameters, i.e. the amount (or volume) of learning expressed in numerical points and the position of that learning relative to its level. Credit for assessed learning is therefore expressed in terms of notional time. Notional time refers to the average time required by the average learner to achieve specified outcomes.

The level at which any credit is awarded is different from the amount/volume of notional time. It has been suggested that the principle in credits-based qualification frameworks is that "neither length of time of study nor.. credit points are indicators of level" (QAAHE, 1997). The resumption is that the number of credit points or the length of time (including notional time) of study does not reflect "complexity of learning demand".

However, credits within levels do reflect complexity of learning demand. Put differently, if credit is viewed in terms of learning outcomes, then a two-year qualification should be pitched at a lower level than a three-year qualification. By assumption, the amount/volume of notional time taken to complete a three-year qualification is more than the notional time required for a two- year qualification. Specifically, the notion of time in an outcomes based framework incorporates the concepts of "level of difficulty and the value of the learning experience to the qualification as a whole" (The NQF & Curriculum Development: 24).

1.2 Credit Value

Mothata et al. (2000:38) define credit value as "the value assigned to standards in order to facilitate comparison between them as well as rules of combination". The need for rules of combination arises from the observation that the ultimate value of a credit may not be informative as some learning programmed may have more options while others may not. For example, it has been suggested that a first degree in the Health (i.e. nursing) Sciences maybe 620 credits while in the Arts subjects a first degree would not have the same number of credits (Transformation debates]. What needs to be taken into consideration is the composition of credits in terms of the fundamental, core and elective *vis-à-vis* the whole qualification, As a result, credit-value may not be a particularly helpful element in distinguishing between two different qualification types pitched at the same level.

1.3 Credits Within NQF Levels

In terms of the NQF, credit level refers to the credits within the level at which the credit is assessed and awarded (cf. QAAHE, 1997). Level refers to levels of learning where level is understood as defining "successive broad bands of learning expectation" (QAAHE 1997). The notion of progression is therefore closely related to the concept of credit level. In other words, credits within NQF-defined levels are a way of describing progression in terms of learning expectations. Credits within levels indicate relative intellectual demand and complexity of learning and learner autonomy.

2. Significance of Level Descriptors

The meaning and significance of the notion of levels of learning is reflected in the manner in which levels are described. Descriptors of levels are statements about intellectual demand, complexity of learning and learner autonomy (QAAHE, NICATS) at each level at which the credit is awarded. Level descriptors enable standards writers to contextualise the meaning of level and to apply it properly (QAAHE, 1997), Level descriptors are only useful in the context in which they are written. Consideration of context includes examining the purpose and use of level descriptors. Level descriptors can be developed from different standpoints each requiring its own degree of detail or generality. ***The degree of detail and generality required in level descriptors depends on their purpose and use.***

3. Types of Level Descriptors

There are three types of level descriptors. ***Generic level descriptors describe knowledge attributes that cut across disciplines and contexts. They lay down the expectations of progressive learning development in terms of general intellectual demand*** Generic level descriptors relate directly to the framework and function as guidelines to express the broad expectations associated with the awards at different levels in a credits-based system. In contrast, practitioner groups within particular disciplines and professional fields can also develop discipline/professional descriptors. For discipline/module/professional descriptors, a large degree of detail and specificity is required. This level of specificity is not required in the development of generic level descriptors. Similarly, institutions or individual educators within institutions can develop programme/module descriptors whose level of detail will also differ from generic level descriptors. Thus, different types of level descriptors indicate varying degrees of generality or specificity depending on the context in which they are used (QAAHE,1997).

In view of the above, SAQA needs ***to concentrate on the development of generic level descriptors because these relate directly to the framework as they cut across all disciplines and contexts.*** Such generic level descriptors can serve as guidelines to standards writers who may want to develop discipline/professional descriptors. The advantage of developing generic level descriptors is that by virtue of being generic, they relate to the qualifications structure.

4. The process of developing level descriptors

The process of developing level descriptors is not theoretically based (Winter 1993, Moon 1996, Wilson 1993, Robertson 1994a, b). Level descriptors are developed on the basis of a pragmatic approach that takes into consideration the context in which the level descriptors are to be used. Focusing on their purpose and use is one way of making use of context. Consideration of purpose and use of level descriptors includes establishing who will be using them and what they will be used for.

A philosophy that underpins education and training is rapid change (Smit & Breebaart 1998, Lemmer 1998), i.e. education and training is dynamic. One of the advantages of using a pragmatic approach in developing level descriptors is that it allows for changes to be effected as and when the need arises, Similarly, in the development of the NQF an iterative approach has been taken in the development of a qualifications structure and the proposed level descriptors. In particular, after wide consultation, the qualifications structure that has been adopted (see Annexure A) has maintained the 8 levels of the NQF, and level 8 is open-ended accommodating sub-levels if necessary. Similarly, level 1 is open-ended accommodating ABET levels 1-3. Thus, as new qualifications are developed and comparisons with existing qualifications take place, the current qualifications structure including level descriptors may be re-evaluated in order to take into consideration contextual changes.

4.1 Determining Descriptor Categories

While there is a general acceptance that there is no underpinning theoretical framework for developing level descriptors, Robertson (1994b) suggests that descriptor categories can be determined on the basis of theoretical models of learning development that are consonant with the particular framework. For example, the writing of level descriptors for standards and qualifications whose basis is the OBE framework must use OBE as an underlying theoretical framework for its descriptor categories. This suggests that in the South African context, the most

appropriate category would be applied competence (ETDP Project). Applied competence consists of foundational, practical and reflexive competence and these three can be used as descriptor categories. The advantage of using these three categories would be that the descriptor categories are kept minimal. Over-detailed descriptor categories often lead to multiple interpretations (NICATS).

4,2 Content of descriptors

The content of level descriptors (i.e. information to be captured by descriptor categories) needs to be brief and overlaps must be avoided. International comparators indicate three areas that are central to the content of levels descriptors. Intellectual/academic skills, operational contexts and learner autonomy are integral in the content of level descriptors (NICATS, NZQA). In the South African context these integral aspects are encapsulated in the three types of competencies identified above as constituent parts of applied competence. For example, foundational competence embraces intellectual/academic skills of knowledge and includes analysis, synthesis and evaluation (cf. Mothata et.al. 2000). In other words, fundamental competence includes not just knowledge, but also information processing and problem solving skills. On the other hand, practical competence includes the notion of operational context, i.e. the application of knowledge-specific context while reflexive competence encapsulates the broad concept of learner autonomy.

4.3 Language of Level descriptors

Level descriptors act as a guide to standards writers for pegging qualifications on the framework. The language used should be that of ***attributes or qualities.*** The language used must consist of simple, clear, explicit descriptions of the quality of learning. More importantly, the language used should be ***unambiguous*** and simple to use. This is to enable curriculum specialists to translate them into their own subject areas.

Depending on the purpose and use of level descriptors, the language used must encapsulate concepts developed for different purposes such as academic, vocational, occupational and professional learning. In other words, the language used must not reflect any form of bias. For example, one of the criticisms leveled against the NZQA model is that although the model claims to integrate vocational, academic and professional aspects of learning, the language used in the descriptors reflects a vocational bias. This bias creates problems for the HE sector (CHET, 1998).

Levels reflect progression in terms of complexity of learning. The language in which descriptor are expressed must capture this progression in that it must display "progressive learning in a continuum" (NICATS). In other words, the language used must show the qualitative differences in terms of learning demands between levels.

5. Coverage

Questions have been raised regarding the extent of coverage, i.e. whether or not a qualification has to meet all the elements of level descriptors (Cosser 2000). The extent of coverage cannot be determined during the developmental stages because of the possibility of periodic reviews depending on whether or not further modifications are required. Robertson (1994b) argues that level descriptors are "arbitrary conventions" and trying to determine the extent of coverage would be tantamount to searching "for the ultimate precision" which might "cause the entire edifice of qualifications and progression to unravel in a fruitless search for the impossible". International comparators also show that a qualification does not need to include all elements of level descriptors. The assumption is that level ***descriptors are not prescriptive statements*** and therefore, the extent of coverage will be determined within specific subject areas (cf. QAAHE, 1997).

6. **NQF Bands**

The NQF is made up of 8 qualification levels that are accommodated within three bands. It has also been emphasized that progression is one of the principles underpinning the NQF. The question is: if levels describe progression, what is the purpose of having the 3 NQF bands? Can progression be captured in terms of bands? Specifically, can descriptors also reflect progression from one band to the next in much the same way as they show progression between levels? In other words, does each of the bands display distinct characteristics in terms of foundational, practical and reflexive competence?

The three NQF bands capture progression and this progression can be manifested through level descriptors. As a result, one would expect the GET band to reflect low-level intellectual/academic skills, a very narrow range of operational contexts and no responsibility towards the learning of others. In this regard, the FET will be a watershed band with intermediate intellectual/academic skills, a limited extension of operational contexts and responsibility towards the learners' own output and that of others. Similarly, the HET will be an all-embracing band with high-level information processing and problem solving skills leading to an exploration of knowledge

boundaries As such, one would expect that at the HET band the operational contexts will be complex and highly unpredictable while, in terms of learner autonomy, there is complete accountability towards one's own work and the work of others,

7. **Proposals and Recommendations for South African level descriptors.**

Based on the SAQA methodology, the qualifications structure shown in table 1 has been proposed. In the proposed qualifications structure (see Annexure A), levels 1 and 8 are open-ended and both accommodate sub-levels.

Table 1: Proposed SA Qualifications Structure

Name of Qualification	***Proposed NQF***
All doctorates Masters degrees (coursework/research)	8+ 8
Honours degrees, the B Tech degree, some professional, postgraduate and work-based qualifications	7
First national degrees, some professional, postgraduate and work-based qualifications.	6
Undergraduate diplomas/certificates, work-based qualifications	5
National Certificates	4
National Certificates	3
National Certificates	2
National Certificates ABET levels 1-3/4	1

7.1 Language **Used for level descriptors**

The language of level descriptors can be used to capture the following: (1) distinction between two levels, (2) distinction between different types of degrees (e.g. a professional and an academic degree) pitched at the same level and (3) progression within the framework in terms of bands.

. Recommendation 1

The language used in the proposed South African model must capture the three areas identified above.

7.2 Proposed Type of level descriptors

It has already been stated that generic level descriptors describe knowledge attributes that cut across disciplines and contexts. It has also been stated that generic level descriptors relate directly to the qualifications structure.

o Recommendation 2.

Generic level descriptors must be **used for the proposed model of South African level** descriptors.

7.3 Proposed Descriptor Categories

The South African model uses applied competence and the notion of applied competence embraces generic competence (SAUVCA). The concept of applied competence can be used in determining the categories for the level descriptors.

. Recommendation 3

The constituent parts of applied competence must be used as descriptor categories **for the South African model. The three categories suggested for the SA model are foundational, practical and reflexive competence.**

The advantage in using these as descriptor categories is that the three types of competence encapsulate the three integral parts of the content of level descriptors, i.e. intellectual/academic skills, operational context and learner autonomy.

7.4 Proposed Content for **Level Descriptors**

In terms of content, it is proposed that the content of level descriptors should include intellectual/academic skills, operational contexts and learner autonomy that have been identified as integral to the content of level descriptors (NICATS).

• Recommendation 4

It is recommended that since the descriptor category foundational competence encapsulates intellectual/academic skills, it should reflect depth **of knowledge and skills including level of understanding, application, analysis, synthesis/creativity and evaluation. It should also cover psychomotor skills, self-appraisal/reflection on**

practice, planning, management of learning, problem solving, communication and presentation of information, interactive and group skills.

. Recommendation 5

Since practical competence encapsulates the notion of operational context, it is recommended that operational contexts should include the contexts, tasks and procedures required for the application of the intellectual/academic skills identified for that particular level.

. Recommendation 6

Reflexive competence embraces the broad concept of learner autonomy; it is recommended that learner autonomy should include responsibility and **issues pertaining to ethics and general professional code of conduct.**

7,5 The Proposed Model of South African Level Descriptors

Based on the qualifications structure shown in table 1 and the recommendations outlined above, the level descriptors (summarised in table 2 below) were developed. A number of sources were used in the development of the proposed South African level descriptors. The proposed SA level descriptors draw from the NICATs document, the Australian model, NZQA and the document from SAQA'S standards setting structures, including the NSBs.

The proposed model is an attempt at developing level descriptors from the GET to the HET band. The assumption is that developing level descriptors for one band will not create a continuous hierarchy of levels that describe achievement and progression in the proposed qualifications structure (cf. NICATS). The intention in developing level descriptors from the GET to the HET band (i.e. levels 1 to 8) is to create coherence between the three bands.

Table 2; Proposed Model of SA Level Descriptors.

Level	**Foundational Competence**	**Practical Competence**	**Reflexive Competence**
GET BAND			
1	**Demonstrate use of** recall and elementary comprehension skills in	**Operate in closely** defined contexts under clo e supervision.	Perform directed activity.

	A narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others. Possession of basic skills. Receive and pass on information.	Carry out repetitive and predictable procedures. Perform clearly defined tasks.	No responsibility for the learning of others.
FET BAND			
2	Demonstrate basic comprehension and employ a narrow range of skills. Apply known solutions to familiar problems. Basic processing of readily available information.	Show basic competence in a limited range of established and familiar contexts under general supervision and quality control. Follow established and familiar procedures. Co-operate with others.	Some limited/restricted responsibility for quantity and quality of one's own output. Possibility of responsibility for guiding others.
3	Possession of a well-developed range of skills. Apply relevant knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas. Demonstrate ability to make comparisons and interpret available information.	Operate in a number of contexts some of which may be non-routine. Make significant choice from a wide range of procedures. Co-ordinate with others.	Significant responsibility for quantity and quality of one's own output under general supervision and quality checking. Possibility of being responsible for the output of others.

4	Possession of wide-ranging scholastic or technical skills. Possession of a broad knowledge base incorporating some basic theoretical concepts. Demonstrate ability to access, analyse and evaluate information independently. Employ a range of responses to well-defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems.	Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts under broad guidance and evaluation. Select from a considerable choice of procedures. Give presentations to an audience.	Complete responsibility for quantity and quality of output. Possible responsibility for the quantity and quality of output of others.
HET BAND			
5	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic or technical skills. Possession of a broad knowledge base with substantial depth in other areas.	Operate in a variety of routine and non-routine contexts under general supervision. Select from a wide choice of procedures ranging from standard and non-standard. Plan, *select* **or** present information, methods or resources.	Full responsibility for the nature, quantity and quality of output. Possible responsibility for the achievement of group output.
6	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic, professional	Operate in highly variable scholarly, technical, professional	Complete accountability for determining and achieving personal

	or technical skills and basic (applied or theoretical) research across a major discipline. Ability to analyse, evaluate and reformat a wide range of information. Ability to formulate appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems, Generate ideas by analysing information and concepts at an abstract level.	contexts within broad parameters for well-defined activities. Select from a wide choice of procedures, standard and non-standard, and often in non-standard combinations in a major discipline. Diagnose problems and create appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems in a range of technical, professional or management functions.	and/or group output.
	Possession of highly specialised, scholastic, professional, technical and advanced research across a major discipline. Demonstrate ability to critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge. Demonstrate ability to analyse, transform and critically evaluate new information, abstract	Operate in complex, variable, highly specialised and unpredictable contexts within broad parameters and functions. Select from a full range of advanced procedures in a major discipline. Diagnose problems and create appropriate responses to resolve contextual and abstract problems.	Complete accountability for determining for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and/or group output.

	data and concepts including evidence from a range of sources. Ability to create appropriate responses to resolve abstract contextual problems,	Ability to transfer and apply diagnostic skills in a range of contexts.	
	Display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills. Ability to generate, evaluate and synthesize information and concepts at highly abstract levels. Demonstrate expertise in highly specialised and advanced technical, professional and/or research.	Operate in complex, advanced and highly specialised contexts. Select from complex and advanced procedures across a major discipline. Conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity. Design and apply research methods and communicate research to peers.	Complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and group output.
	Possession of expert, highly specialised and in-depth technical/professional or research skills, both across a major discipline and interdisciplinary. Ability to generate, evaluate and synthesize inform tion and	Operate in highly specialised and unpredictable contexts. Select from highly complex, advanced and highly specialised procedures across a major discipline and interdisciplinary.	Complete accountability for determining, achieving, evaluating and applying all personal and/or group output.

	concepts at highly abstract levels. Make a significant and original contribution in a specialised field and engage in critical dialogue. Ability to respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing knowledge.	Demonstrate command of methodological issues. Communicate results of research to peers and engage in critical dialogue.	

7.6 Differences **between levels**

Differences in terms of learning complexity between levels should be manifested in the three categories, i.e. foundational, practical and reflexive competence. Since level descriptors reflect progression in terms of learning demand, this progression must be captured in the three categories. As indicated, progression in the proposed qualifications structure is defined as "increase overtime in the conceptual, intellectual demands and degree of maturity of learners" (QAAHE, 1997). For example, progression in intellectual/academic skills can be shown by an introduction of a new problem solving ability that was not manifest at the previous level. Similarly, progression in operational contexts can be shown by the extension of contexts, procedures and tasks in which knowledge is applied. Progression in learner autonomy till therefore be reflected by a gradual increase in acceptance of responsibility for quantity and quality of output.

However, international comparators suggest that at much more advanced levels (e.g. (levels 7-8+), there may be very little difference, if any, in terms of operational contexts and learner autonomy (NZQA, 1996; NICATS). In these levels progression can only be in terms of intellectual/academic skills. At these levels it seems that the differentiation between levels can be achieved by an introduction of minimum credits. For example, the difference between qualifications at level 8 could be indicated by a difference in the minimum number of credits required for specific qualifications at that level.

In developing our level descriptors, an attempt was made at capturing differences in all the NQF levels including the more advanced levels. Although there may be no significant differences in knowledge attributes, operational contexts or learner autonomy in the more advanced levels, there are nuances of difference of these at more advanced levels and these are highlighted. The differences between the levels are highlighted in tables 1 to 9 below. The distinctive characteristics of each level are underlined for ease of exposition.

Level 1 and 2

Table 3: Differences between Level I and 2

Level	**Foundational Competence**	**Practical Competence**	Reflexive **Competence**
GET BAND			
	Demonstrate use of recall and elementary comprehension skills in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others. Possession of basic skills. Receive and pass on information.	Operate in closely defined contexts under close supervision. Carry out repetitive, routine and predictable procedures. Perform clearly defined tasks.	Perform directed activity. No responsibility for the learning of others.
FET BAND			
2	Demonstrate basic comprehension and employ a narrow range of skills. Apply known solutions to familiar problems. 'Basic processing of readily available	Show basic competence in a limited range of routine and familiar contexts under general supervision and quality control. Follow established and familiar procedures.	**Some** limited/restricted responsibility for quantity and quality of output" Possibility of responsibility for guiding others.

	information.	Co-operate with others.	

Foundational competence: Since level 1 is open-ended, progression is measured in terms of the actual starting point of each learner (cf. NICATS). The essential difference between level 1 and 2 is that while at level 1 there is heavy reliance on recall and learning through multiple repetition with no generation of new ideas, at level 2 there is limited generation of ideas from the information supplied.

Practical competence: The use of routine procedures at level 1 is replaced by a limited range of choice and the increase in the range and complexity of tasks. Progression at level 1 to level 2 is therefore marked by the introduction of a limited range of choice and the increase in the range and complexity of the tasks involved.

Reflexive: In level 1 there is total reliance on close supervision while at level 2 there is a limited degree of independence in familiar contexts. Progression is therefore shown by the introduction of limited independence in the quantity and quality of output.

Levels 2 and 3

Table 4: Differences between level 2 and 3

2	Demonstrate basic comprehension and employ a narrow range of skills. Apply known solutions to familiar problems. Basic processing of readily available information.	Show basic competence in a limited range of routine and familiar contexts under general supervision and quality control. Follow established and familiar procedures. Co-operate with others.	Some limited/restricted responsibility for quantity and quality of output. Possibility of responsibility for guiding others.
3	Possession of well-developed range of skills. Apply relevant	Operate in a number of contexts some of which may be non-routine. Make significant choice	Significant responsibility for quantity and quality of output under general supervision and quality

	knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas. Demonstrate ability to make comparisons and interpret available information.	from a wide range of procedures. Co-ordinate with others.	checking, Possibility of being responsible for the output of others.

Foundational competence: While in level 2 responses to familiar situations are generally routine, at level 3 there is thinking and interpretation involved. Progression is therefore shown by the introduction of comprehension and comparison, thinking, interpreting and responding appropriately.

Practical Competence: At level 2 knowledge acquired is used routinely and yet at level 3 it is transferred to cover a greater range of activities. Progression is therefore reflected in the transferability of knowledge and skills acquired.

Reflexive Competence: Increased levels of complexity in learner autonomy are shown by a significant change in terms of responsibility. At level 3 there is increased responsibility for outputs within a managed environment. Progression is therefore shown by the increase in the level of responsibility towards individual output and the need to interact with others.

Level 3 and 4

Table S: Differences between levels 3 and 4

	Possession of well-developed range of skills. Apply relevant knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a	Operate in a number of contexts some of which maybe non-routine. Make significant choice from a wide range of procedures.	Significant responsibility for quantity and quality of output under general supervision and quality checking. Possibility of being

	number of areas. Demonstrate ability to make comparison and interpret available information.	Co-ordinate with others.	responsible for the output of others.
4	Possession of wide-ranging scholastic/technical skills. Possession of a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts. Demonstrate ability to access, analyse and evaluate information independently. Employ a range of responses to well defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems.	Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts under broad guidance and evaluation. Select from a considerable choice of procedures. Give presentations to an audience.	Complete responsibility for quantity and quality of output. Possible responsibility for the quantity and quality of output of others.

Foundational Competence: Progression is manifested by the change from routine responses at level 3 to generation of responses at level 4.

Practical competence: There is evidence of progression in terms of the mnge of skills, choice of actions and the ability to present information to others.

Reflexive Competence: Progression is marked by a significant increase in responsibility for individual outputs and the need to interact with others. At level 4, the learner can assume leadership roles of a limited nature.

Levels 4 and 5

Table 6: Differences between levels 4 and 5

4	Possession of wide-ranging scholastic/technical skills. Possession of a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts. demonstrate ability to access, analyse and valuate information ndependently. Employ a range of responses to well-defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems.	Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts under broad guidance and support. Select from a considerable choice of procedures. Give presentations to an audience.	Complete responsibility for quantity and quality of output. possible responsibility for the quantity and quality of output of others.
HET BAND			
5	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic or technical skills. possession of a broad knowledge base with substantial depth in other areas.	Operate in a variety of routine and non-routine contexts under general supervision. Select from a wide choice of procedures ranging from standard and non-standard.	Full responsibility for the nature, quantity and quality of output. possible responsibility for the achievement of group output.

		Plan, select or present information, methods or resources.	

Foundational Competence: Progression is marked by a gradual shift from well defined (level 4) to abstract thought processes.

Practical competence: Progression is shown by a "shift towards either very varied methods and procedures or in those that are specialized and technical" (NZQA, 1996: 14). There is also planning involved.

Reflexive ***Competence:*** Changes in reflexive competence are shown by the introduction of full responsibility and self-direction for all output,

Levels 5 **and 6**

Table 7: Differences between levels 5 and 6

5	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic or technical skills. Possession of a broad knowledge base with substantial depth in other areas.	Operate in a variety of routine and non-routine contexts under general supervision. Select from a wide choice of procedures ranging from standard and non-standard. Plan, select or present information, methods or resources.	Full responsibility for the nature, quantity and quality of output. Possible responsibility for the achievement of group output.
6	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic, professional or technical skills and basic research across a	Operate in highly variable scholarly, technical, professional contexts within broad parameters for well-	Complete accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group output.

	najor discipline. Ability to analyse, evaluate and reformata wide range of Information. Ability to formulate appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems. Generate ideas by analysing information and concepts at an abstract level.	efined activities. Select from a wide choice of procedures. standard and non-standard, and often-in ton-standard combinations in a major discipline. Diagnose and create appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems in a range of technical, professional or management functions.	

Foundational competence: Level 6 reflects the introduction of analysis and abstraction. The manner in which data is handled at level 6 is different from level 5, i.e. at level 6 data is reformatted or transformed to a useable format. Progression from level 5 is therefore marked by an introduction of higher order problem solving and ps ychomotor skills.

Practical Competence.' This progression is also reflected in the use of creative skills in practical competence.

Reflexive competence: There is an introduction of an ability to negotiate outcomes under supervision and to take personal responsibility for planning and delivery.

Levels 6 and 7

Table 8: Differences between levels 6 and 7

6	Possession of wide-ranging, specialised scholastic, professional or technical skills and basic (applied or	Operate in highly variable scholarly, technical, professional contexts within broad parameters for well-	Complete accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group output.

	theoretical) research across a major discipline. Ability to analyse, evaluate and reformat a wide range of information. Ability to formulate appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems. Generate ideas by analysing information and concepts at an abstract level.	defined activities. Select from a wide choice of procedures standard and non-standard, and often in non-standard combinations in a major discipline. Diagnose and create appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems.	
7	Possession of highly specialised, scholastic, professional, technical and advanced research across a major discipline. Demonstrate ability to critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge independent y. Demonstrate ability to analyse, transform and critically evaluate new information, abstract data and concepts.	Operate in complex, variable and highly specialised contexts within broad parameters and functions. Select from a full range of advanced procedures in a major discipline. Diagnose problems and create appropriate responses to resolve contextual and abstract problems. Ability to transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range	Complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and/or group output.

	Ability to diagnose and create appropriate responses to resolve abstract contextual problems.	of contexts.	

Foundational Competence: The introduction of synthesis at level 7 marks progression. At level 7 the creation of ideas and solutions through analysis and transformation indicate a high level of abstraction.

Practical Competence: In terms of operational contexts, level 6 learners operate in variable contexts and their procedures are selected from "a wide range" of choices whereas at level 7 the contexts are "complex" and the procedures are selected from a "full range" of choice. Progression is marked by an introduction of complexity and exercise of significant judgement in a full range of complex and variable contexts.

Reflexive Competence: While there are no major differences between level 6 and 7 in terms of reflexive competence, there are nuisances of difference between the two levels. Although there is complete accountability for the quality and quantity of output at both levels, an evaluative dimension is introduced at level 7. Thus, the introduction of evaluation of one's own output and that of others marks progression.

Levels 7 and 8/8+

Table 9: Differences between levels 7 and 8

7	Possession of highly specialised, scholastic, professional, technical and advanced research across a major discipline Demonstrate ability to critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent	Operate in a complex, variable and highly specialised contexts within broad parameters and functions. Select from a full range of advanced procedures in a major discipline.	Complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and/or group output

	body of knowledge. demonstrate ability to nalyse, transform and valuate abstract data nd concepts. Ability to create appropriate responses to esolve abstract - ontextual problems.	Diagnose problems and create appropriate responses to resolve contextual and abstract problems. Ability to transfer and ply diagnostic and eative skills in a range 'contexts.	
	Display a mastery of complex skills in a specialised area of knowledge. Demonstrate expertise in a highly specialised, rofessional and dvanced technical nd/or research across a najor discipline. Ability to generate, valuate and synthesize nformation and oncepts at highly abstract levels.	perate in complex. dvanced and highly ecialised contexts. elect from complex nd advanced rocedures across a ajor discipline. Conduct research, or dvanced technical or rofessional activity. Design and apply appropriate research methods and communicate research results to peers.	Complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and roup oUtpUt.
8	possession of expert, highly specialised and in-depth technical/professional research skills, both across a major discipline and interdisciplinary.	Operate in highly specialised and unpredictable contexts. Select from highly complex, advanced and highly specialised	Complete accountability for determining, achieving, evaluating and applying all personal and/or group output.

	Make a significant and original contribution in a specialised field and engage in critical dialogue. Ability to respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing knowledge.	procedures across a major discipline and nterdisciplinary. Demonstrate command of methodological issues. Communicate results of research to peers and engage in critical dialogue.	

Foundational Competence: While all the previous levels focused on knowledge and skills within, progression at level 8 is reflected by the fact that at this level there is an exploration of the boundaries of knowledge and skills (NICATS, Cosser 2000). At level 8, the level of engagement with concepts indicates a high level of expertise that is not evident at level 7. Progression is evidenced by shift from specialised to "expert" and "in-depth" knowledge.

Practical Competence: Although there is emphasis on complexity of tasks and procedures at both levels there are nuances of difference in the nature of the contexts. For instance, whale at level 7 the contexts are "variable", at level 8 the contexts are "highly advanced" and the procedures are complex. However, there are fundamental differences between level 7 and 8/8+ in terms of the nature of the tasks performed. At level 8/8+, the ability to design, apply research methods, conduct research marks progression.

Reflexive Competence: Progression is reflected in that while at level 7 accountability is limited to [determining, achieving and evaluating personal and/or group output, at level 8/8+ there is application of one's output including group output.

Summary: As shown in the above tables, differences between levels can be captured by means of level descriptors. However, these differences become blurred or less evident at more advanced levels. At these levels it is still possible, however, to capture nuances of difference by means of the language used in developing level descriptors. These nuances of differences can also be

discerned in those levels where there are sublevels. For example, at level 8 while at sub-level 8 knowledge boundaries are merely explored, at level 8^{+} learners make an original and significant contribution, suggesting that there is a subtle difference in the sub-levels and this difference lies in the nature of the contribution.

7.7 Differences between Bands

As already stated, differences between bands can also be captured by means of level descriptors. The differences between the bands are summarised in table 10 below. Table 10 not only captures progression from one band to the next but also shows the cohesion, in terms of increase in learning demand 'created from the GET to the HET band. One could summarize the developmental thread that runs through from the GET to the HET as consisting of the ***foundation*** (GET band), the introduction of ***analysis (the*** FET band) and the introduction of ***synthesis*** wherein high order psychomotor skills are optimally utilized (the HET band).

Table 10: *Summary of Differences* ***between Bands***

BAND	Foundational :ompetence	Practical Competence	Reflexive Competence
GET	**Knowledge**: *Narrow ranging* **[formation Processing**: *Recall* **problem Solving:** *Known olutions to familiar roblems*	**Contexts: Closely** *defined* **Procedures:** *Repetitive*	*Directed Close supervision Not responsible for own learning or [earning Of others*
'ET	**Knowledge:** *Broad nowledge base with some heoretical concepts nformation Processing* **nformation Processing:** *as ic, analytical, nterpretive* **problem Solving:** *Innovative responses*	**Contexts:** *Variety, familiar & unfamiliar* **Procedures:** *Significant choice*	*Self directed. Broad guidance. Complete responsibility for ownand work of others*
HET	**Knowledge** *expert & highly specialised* **[formation Processing:** *Generation, evaluation & synthesis of information & highly abstract concepts* **Problem Solving:** *a range of concrete problem with some theoretical elements to redefining existing knowledge.*	**Contexts:** *unpredictable, highly specialised* **procedures:** *complex, highly advanced*	*Optimizing* all *aspects of process. Complete accountability for personal & group output.*

GET to FET

Foundational Competence: In table 2 above the differences between the bands are shown in the three-descriptor categories. In fact, progression is evident in intellectual academic skills including information processing and problem solving abilities from the GET to the FET. In terms of knowledge, progression is from a knowledge base that is wide ranging to one that is broad based and with a limited degree of analytic it y. There is

also progression in terms of skills in that while in the GET band the skills are limited at the FET these have become "broad".

Practical Competence: In terms of operational contexts, there is progression Ii-em the **closely defined** contexts to a variety of contexts including those familiar and unfamiliar to the learner evident at the FET band.

Reflexive Competence: There is also progression in terms of learner autonomy. At the GET band, learners are directed and operate under very close supervision and cannot be responsible for the learning of others, at the FET level, there is self-directed learning under broad guidance and the learner can be responsible for the output of other learners.

FET to HET

Foundational Competence: The FET band is characterised by a knowledge base that is broad and has a limited degree of analytical ability whereas the HET band is characterised by in-depth knowledge in complex and specialised areas including a high level of abstraction. At the FET band,. the methods and procedures are merely determined **whereas at the** HET band a range of concrete problems are solved and theoretical concepts are **used** for the redefinition of existing knowledge.

Practical Competence: Progression in terms of operational contexts is marked by the introduction of specialisation and the unpredictability of the contexts under which the learner can operate in. There is also progression in terms of the procedures used. At the FET band, there is a significant or "considerable" choice of contexts whereas at the HET band the contexts have become unpredictable and highly specialised. Similarly, there is progression in terms of the tasks performed. At the FET band, the tasks performed are "wide-ranging" whereas at the HET band these are expert and highly specialised. Put differently, progression from the FET to the HET band is manifested by a change from analysis to high-level synthesis.

Reflexive Competence: In terms of learner autonomy, the FET band is characterised by self-direction and broad guidance with a degree of being directive and yet at the HET band, there is independence and the optimal use of all aspects of the learning process, Progression is, therefore, marked by the shift from mere responsibility for individual and group output to complete accountability at the HET band.

Summary: Progression between the bands can also be captured by means of level descriptors. One could describe the progression from the GET as a development from the foundation at the GET band, to the watershed phase at the FET and the exploration of boundaries in the HET band.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, although the proposed level descriptors can be used in the interim, these can be changed as new qualifications are developed. Research has shown that the development of level descriptors must be an on-going activity, which is informed by experience hence there is never a point at which one could claim to have a stable system of level descriptors. What seems to be necessary, however, is that educationists working in the FET and HET band engage more in the debate towards developing a continuum of achievement for purposes of coherence between the different bands.

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Annexure A.

(This proposal was approved by the Authority in its meeting on 16 August 2000).

The Development of Level Descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework: A proposal to take the matter forward

1. The role of SAQA in the development of level descriptors

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is bound by the SAQA Act to develop level descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework. Clause (2) of Regulation No. 4 of the NSB Regulations states that:

> *"The Authority shall prescribe level descriptors in consultation with the National Standards Bodies in order to ensure coherence across fields and to facilitate the assessment of the international comparability of standards and qualifications."*

SAQA is bound by this clause to develop level descriptors through its standards setting structures. For purposes of international comparability, the development of these level descriptors must take into consideration international trends by examining initiatives in other systems and qualifications authorities. While it is incontestable that the SAQA system is an open system that allows flexibility for different stakeholders to make an input towards the development and implementation of the NQF, SAQA has the legal responsibility as per the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 to make a decision on the most appropriate model for South African level descriptors.

2. Defining Level Descriptors in a South African Context

The notion of 'level' is used extensively in the education and training sector especially in the standards setting structures. Since 'level' is a fundamental characteristic of a standard or qualification, it is necessary that standards setting bodies work towards a common understanding of the meaning of level. Generic level descriptors qualitatively describe knowledge that cuts across all qualifications irrespective of the context where learning takes place. It is the generic nature of such descriptor that allows for the ***comparability of qualifications attained in different learning contexts thus enabling learners to transfer credits from one learning context to another.*** To this **extent, *level descriptors facilitate the development of different but comparable qualifications and standards.***

The link between the level descriptor and the qualifications associated with the level concerned, is very strong. In fact, it is impossible to talk about the one without making a direct association with the other. Hence it could be argued that the establishment of level descriptors is dependent on reaching agreement on the relationship between the levels at which different qualifications are pegged. Alternatively it could be argued that the pegging of qualifications to different levels is dependent on the level description of the different levels. It would seem that both approaches have support.

3. The number of levels

The decision on the number of levels has been taken in the South African context Section 3 (a) and (b) of the NSB regulations state as follows:

(a) The National Qualifications Framework shall consist of eight levels, which shall be entitled Levels 1 to 8, and each level shall be described by a unique level descriptor.

(b) Level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework shall be open-ended and shall accommodate three sub-levels for Adult Basic Education and Training and for which certificates of achievement may be awarded, and level 8 shall be open-ended.

In section 3 (c) of the NSB Regulations it is stated that levels 5 to 8 constitute the Higher Education and Training Band i.e. 4 levels.

There seems to be a wide international acceptance for 4 levels in higher education. For instance, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales all allocate 4 levels of their qualifications structure for higher education.

The South African decision that level 8 should be open-ended was motivated by the realisation that the NQF in South Africa is a social construction and hence is developmental in its establishment. The open-endedness of level 8 is designed to accommodate the possibility that there may need to be room for expansion within the HET Band, as debates unfold.

4. Determining the level of a qualification

The following table indicates the level at which certain HET qualifications have been pegged.

***Table** 1: A comparison of the pegging of qualifications in the HET Band*

	SAUVCA	CTP	NIF	SCOTCAT	NZQA
PhDs/DTech/All senior Degrees	8b	8	8	I-18	8
Masters Degrees (Coursework/research)	8a	7	7	H7	8
Postgraduate Diplomas/Hons Degrees	7	?	7	H6	7
Bachelors Degrees/Btech	6	6	6	H5	6
Undergraduate Diplomas/CertificatedFoundation Courses	5	5	5	H5	5

Clearly the final allocation of qualifications to a level will be determined by the relationship between the qualification and its demands and the level descriptors that are

finally loped. However, in a sense, the level descriptors themselves are shaped by the perceptions surrounding differences between the demands of the different qualifications themselves.

5.The process of writing level descriptors

The process of writing level descriptors is not an exact science. There are disagreements with regard to the extent to which level descriptors have a theoretical underpinning (Winter 1993, Moon 1996, Wilson 1993, Robertson 1994a, b). General theories of learning development indicate difficulties in arriving at meaningful qualitative measures of learning. A pragmatic approach seems to be taking into consideration the context in which the level descriptors are to be used.

6. Uses of level descriptors.

Level descriptors act as a guide to standards writers for pegging qualifications on the framework. Generally, levels and their descriptors enable standards writers to position their qualifications on the framework by taking into consideration the complexity of learning involved in each qualification rather than purely a consideration of the "time-served" factor.

7. **Current practice in pegging qualifications on the NQF**

There is general consensus on the open-endedness **of level 8. There is also consensus regarding the pegging of first degrees at level 6.**

7.1 **Pegging of Masters Degrees**

The pegging of research Masters degrees at the same level with course work Masters is a moot point in academic circles. The question asked is why these two degrees should be pegged at the same level when there are differences in terms of "level of intellectual demand" between research and course work Masters degrees. A comparison with international trends shows that Masters degrees whether by course work or research are pegged at the same level. The basis for this is that, broadly, the level of "scholarly activity" is comparable between research and coursework.

There is an anomaly with regard to the pegging of Masters degrees. Some standards setting bodies have pegged Masters degrees at level 8 while others have pegged them at level 7. *A number of* ***international comparators indicate that Masters degrees and doctorates are not pegged at the same level on the framework Doctorates are pegged at a higher level than Masters degrees.*** However, even international comparators show differences in the pegging of Masters degrees. For example, in the New Zealand model Masters degrees (coursework/research) are pegged at the same level while in the United Kingdom frameworks (i.e. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) doctorates are pegged at a higher level than Masters degrees irrespective of the type of Masters degree, i.e. irrespective of whether these are by research or by coursework.

7.2 **Pegging of professional degrees**

Differences in complexity between professional and formative degrees lead to problems of positioning these qualifications on the NQF. On the understanding that qualifications

are pegged at specific levels according to their level of complexity, certain professional degrees can be pegged at level 7 and some at level 6. For example, a professional first degree like the MBchB might be pegged at level 7 while the B Tech could be allocated to Level 6 (CTP submission).

The pegging of professional or vocational qualifications raises questions about the feasibility of a single qualifications structure especially in higher education. The problems encountered in the pegging of professional degrees suggest that higher education might be divisible into two sub-parts consisting of professional, vocationally-oriented degrees and formative academically oriented degrees and that these two sub-parts should be kept separate. In other words, a single qualifications structure tries to collapse these two sub-parts into one hence the problem of pegging professional degrees. The emphasis seems to be that vocationally oriented degrees may not be easily amenable to the system of levelling of qualifications required in a credits-based framework or the NQF in particular (cf. Cosser 1998). As a result, academic and professional qualifications should be separated on the framework.

However, the integration imperative of the NQF requires that education and vocational training should not be separated and as such formative and professional degrees can be pegged at the same level. What needs to be the focus is *the comparability of skills and knowledge in a generic sense.* Furthermore, international comparator (e.g. New Zealand, SCOTCAT and Northern Ireland) indicate that professional degrees can be accommodated within a single qualifications structure. Thus formative and professional degrees are pegged at the same level if the degree of complexity of the learning of programmed offered for these qualifications is comparable. The assumption here is that in a credits-based system the notion of level encapsulates "the idea of comparative equivalence" with the proviso that "possession of a degree signifies certain qualities of mind and possession of particular skills" (QAAAHE, 1997) in the sense that "all graduates can demonstrate certain general skills" irrespective of the discipline or type of degree. The emphasis is that vocational or professional qualifications can be pegged at the same level because a credits-based system not only focuses on what is learned but also on the attributes and qualities of the learner (QAAAHE, 1997).

7.3 **The South African reality**

The South African reality is that *there are* a number of postgraduate diplomas, honours degrees and certain professional degrees which in practice, have been viewed as fitting between a first national degree and a Masters programme of study. If the approach to the building of the NQF is developmental, then this layer of qualifications must be taken into consideration.

There are a number of standards setting initiatives that are currently grappling with the allocation of qualifications to specific levels. There is a need to provide some clarity to enable these people to continue with their work. Currently they are hampered because the level descriptor debate is as yet unresolved.

8. The flexibility afforded by the open-endedness of level 8

By having level 8 open-ended, South Africa is able to accommodate the possibility of starting off debates by allowing the possibility for accommodating a qualifications structure which has a greater number of levels than the 4 that is generally accepted.

Differences between different qualifications pegged at the same level can be addressed through a number of mechanisms. One possibility is the proposal made by the CTP of tying levels to the minimum number of credits. By extending that concept, one could link different qualifications pegged at the same level to a minimum number of credits. For example, if *a* Masters degree were pegged at the same level as a doctorate, the distinction between the two qualifications could be based on the credit value of each degree, as well as the minimum number of credits allocated at the specific level. Another possibility for distinguishing between the qualifications is to propose level descriptor for the different qualifications in an effort to accommodate the different perceptions. In this way differences of opinion could be accommodated as the debates unfold.

9. Proposal

It is proposed that the following qualifications structure be adopted in order to facilitate the development of level descriptors which are associated with the reality of the current qualifications system in South Africa.

The qualifications structure proposed is as follows:

Name of Qualification	**Possible NQF Level**
All doctorates	8 +
Masters degrees (coursework/research)	8
Hens Degree, B Tech, some professional, post graduate and work-based qualifications.	7
First National degree, some professional, post graduate and work-based qualifications.	6
Undergraduate Diplomas/Certificates, work-based qualifications	5

The development of generic descriptors would then lead to the development of a single qualifications framework against which this proposal can be re-evaluated. If necessary, adjustments could be made on the basis of debate, interaction and in depth consideration of the qualifications themselves.

This approach would also provide standards setters who are currently pegging qualifications at specific levels with much-needed clarity in their deliberations.

The NSB regulations have identified the following credit values for certain qualifications:

- A National Certificate has 120 or more credits, with 72 credits at or above the level at which the certificate is registered
- A National Diploma has a minimum of 240 credits of which at least 72 credits shall be at level 5 or above
- A National First Degree has a minimum of 360 credits of which at least 72 credits shall be at level 6 or above

Points of discussion that would need to be addressed would include:

- The number of credits (credit value) of the different qualifications pegged at the same level;
- The spread of credits of a qualification across different levels of the framework;
- Rules of combination.

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