

Technical Assistance for India-EU Skills Development project
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INTERPRETING NSQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

A Briefing for NSDA Consultants

This paper analyses the NSQF level descriptors domain by domain and offers comments on why they are difficult to understand and apply in the context of a comprehensive framework. It offers level by level interpretations of the wordings which could be used by NSDA consultants and could be the basis for a later revision of the descriptors. It does not address the significant issue of international comparability, particularly at the upper levels, where the top level of the NSQF (which will be the level of doctorates) appears to be lower than the comparable level in other national and regional frameworks – see separate briefing paper, *Comparing the NSQF to the EQF*.

Level	Statement	Comment	Interpretation / Possible revision
	PROCESS REQUIRED	Defined as “a general summary of the other four domains”, but isn’t really a summary.	NATURE OF WORK OR STUDY THAT CAN BE CARRIED OUT
		The form of words changes from level to level and references change from “process” to “a job” to “work”, etc At levels 1 and 2, it’s not clear what “prepares person”.	
1	Prepares person to/carry out process that are repetitive on regular basis require no previous practice.	What is the significance of the oblique? Presumably should be “...to carry out processes that are repetitive and require no previous practice, on a regular basis”	The individual can complete work or study which is repetitive, carried out on a regular basis, and involves very basic skills which can be learned immediately.
2	Prepares person to/carry out processes that are repetitive, on a regular basis, with little application	As for level 1. “with little application of understanding” is unclear.	The individual can complete work or study which is repetitive and is carried out on a regular basis, but requires some previous experience

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	of understanding, more of practice.		(ie practical knowledge) or practice (ie skills).
3	Person may carry out a job which may require limited range of activities routine and predictable.	Should be "... a limited range of routine and predictable activities"	The individual can complete work or study which is routine, predictable and limited in range. It also requires some knowledge and understanding of the requirements of particular tasks.
4	Work in familiar, predictable, routine, situation of clear choice.	Should be "routine situation". "of clear choice" is unclear.	The individual can complete work or study which is routine and predictable, but requires the individual to make some choices in carrying it out.
5	Job that requires well developed skill, with clear choice of procedures in familiar context.	Unnecessarily elliptical.	The individual can complete work or study which is carried out using standard practices in familiar contexts. However , he/she have the skills to be able to select procedures appropriate to the activity .
6	Demands a wide range of specialised technical skill, clarity of knowledge and practice in broad range of activity involving standard and non-standard practices.	What is the significance of "clarity of knowledge" at this level (or at all)?	The individual can complete work or study which involves a range of routine activities involving both standard and non-standard practices. It requires a wide range of specialised technical skill and clarity of understanding.
7	Requires a command of wide-ranging specialised theoretical and practical skills, involving variable routine and non-routine contexts.	Difficult to link this to level 6. What are "theoretical skills"?	The individual can complete work or study which involves a wide range of routine and non-routine activities. It requires a wide range of specialised cognitive and applied skills.

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	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	Should be sector-neutral – isn't	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING Nature and scope of the knowledge that can be deployed
1	Familiar with common trade terminology, instructional words, meanings and understanding.	Why "familiar with"? Familiarity is not a useful outcome. What is meant by "instructional words"?	The individual knows the basic terminology which is commonly used in a particular trade or subject of study. He/she understands the general importance of health and safety in carrying out the work/study.
2	Material, tools and applications in a limited context, understands context of work and quality.	This is the only level at which "understanding" is referred to in this domain. What is the significance - is there any? No reference to health and safety, which appears in "Professional Skill".	The individual knows the main materials, tools and applications used in a trade/subject. He/she understands the main requirements of health and safety in carrying out the work/study.
3	Basic facts, process and principle applied in trade of employment.	Presumably "principles"	The individual knows and works with the main facts, processes and principles which underpin a trade/subject.
4	Factual knowledge of field of knowledge or study.	What has happened to the "trade of employment"? Why "knowledge or study"?	The individual understands, employs and selects the materials, tools and applications required to work or study in a particular field.
5	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	"... in a field"?	The individual understands the principles, processes and general concepts which will affect his/her activities in a field of work or study.
6	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	"... within a field"? More detailed or specialised?	The individual knows and understands the main principles, processes and general concepts which govern a range of activities in a field of work or study.
7	Wide-ranging factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	As for level 6.	The individual understands a wide range of the practical and theoretical underpinnings of a field of work or study.

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
	PROFESSIONAL SKILL	Should be sector-neutral, but isn't. The wording is not consistent from level to level.	SKILLS Nature and scope of the skills that can be deployed
1	Routine and repetitive, takes safety and security measures.	The formula used at levels 5-7 seems the best approach.	The individual can employ skills which are routine and used repetitively in a trade/subject. He/she can do this in a safe and secure manner.
2	Limited service skills used in limited context; select and apply tools; assist in professional works with no variables; differentiate good and bad quality.	Is "service skills" clear?	The individual can employ limited skills to assist fellow workers carrying out routine work and/or customers (eg by selecting and using basic tools). He/she can differentiate good and bad quality in his/her work.
3	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetitive in narrow range of application	What is the point of "recall"? A word like "apply" would be better. Presumably "skills"	The individual can employ the practical skills required to carry out a narrow range of routine and repetitive tasks .
4	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetitive in narrow range of application, using appropriate rule and tool, using quality concepts.	As for level 3. This is very condensed and forced together.	The individual can employ the practical skills required to select approaches and tools to carry out a narrow range of routine and repetitive tasks.
5	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.		The individual can employ a range of the cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, equipment, materials and information .
6	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	What are "specific" problems? Common problems? Simple problems?	The individual can employ the kind of cognitive and practical skills required to identify problems or issues which are likely to arise in the course of his/her work and to take steps to resolve them.
7	Wide range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work of study.	As for 7. Where is the progression?	The individual can employ a wide range of the cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to problems which can arise in a field of work of study.

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
	CORE SKILL	Why is “skill” singular? Very mixed set of skills.	CORE SKILLS Nature and scope of the core skills that can be deployed.
1	Reading and writing; addition, subtraction; personal financing; familiarity with social and religious diversity, hygiene and environment.	“Reading and writing” – but many people who are literally non-literate are employed at this level. “Familiarity” is not a useful outcome. Hygiene can be covered by health and safety in “Skills”.	The individual can read and write enough to carry out basic work or study. He/she can add and subtract to the extent required for basic work or study. He/she takes account of social, religious and environmental issues which affect his/her work or study.
2	Receive and transmit written and oral messages, basic arithmetic, personal financing, understanding of social, political, and religious diversity, hygiene and environment.	Why is “personal financing” here? Is it not covered by arithmetic? And what is the significance of the “understanding... etc...”?	The individual can use simple written and oral communications in carrying out work or study. He/she can carry out the arithmetical processes required for his/her work or study. He/she takes account of social, religious and environmental issues which can affect his/her in work or study.
3	Communication written and oral, with minimum required clarity, skill of basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, personal banking, basic understanding of social and natural environment.	If the minimum required clarity is mentioned for the first time at level 3, what kind of communication skills are required at levels 1 & 2?	The individual can use written and oral communication in carrying out work or study. He/she can carry out any arithmetical and algebraic processes required for his/her work or study. He/she takes account of social, religious and environmental issues in work or study.
4	Language to communicate written or oral, with required clarity, skill to basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, basic understanding of social political and natural environment.	Jumbled.	Uses a range of written and oral communications in carrying out work or study. Carries out a range of arithmetical and algebraic processes in work or study. Takes account of actual and potential social, religious and environmental issues in work or

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
			study.
5	Desired mathematical skill; understanding of social, political; and some skill of collecting and organising information, communication.	“Desired” by whom? Would this not vary from sector to sector or even job to job? This needs to reflect back to the expectations of work or study set in Process/Nature of work or study”.	The individual can collect, organise and communicate the information required to carry out work or study. He/she can use a number of mathematical skills. He/she acts in accordance with his/her understanding of social and political issues which directly affect his/her field of work or study.
6	Reasonable good in mathematical calculation, understanding of social, political and reasonably good in data collecting organising information, and logical communication.	Same with “reasonable”.	The individual can use good communication skills to organise and present the information required to carry out work or study. He/she can use mathematical skills to collect data and make calculations in a field of work or study. He/she acts in accordance with his/her understanding of social, political and environmental issues which are associated with a field of work or study.
7	Good logical and mathematical skill understanding of social political and natural environment and organising information, communication and presentation skill.	And “good”.	The individual can use good communication skills and different communication methods to organise and presenting information. He/she can use logical and mathematical skills to take forward work or study. He/she acts on his/her understanding of a range of social political and natural environment issues affecting a field of work or study.

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
	RESPONSIBILITY		RESPONSIBILITY
		Exclusively vocational	
1	No responsibility; always works under continuous instruction and close supervision.	Not true – all employees have some responsibility – eg for health and safety (in PROFESSIONAL SKILLS it says “takes safety and security measures”. “Continuous instruction” is a strange phrase.	The individual is only competent to work/study under instruction and close supervision.
2	No responsibility; works under instruction and close supervision.	“No responsibility” isn’t helpful – and where is the progression.	The individual normally works/studies under instruction and close supervision.
3	Under close supervision. Some responsibility for own work within defined limit.	“Works under ...”	The individual works/studies under instruction and close supervision, but also has some responsibility for own work/studies within limits which are clearly stated/identified.
4	Responsibility for own work and learning.		The individual will be fully responsible for his/her own work/studies and personal development.
5	Responsibility for own work and learning and some responsibility for others’ works and learning.		The individual will be fully responsible for own work/studies and development and also has some responsibility for others’ work and their development related to work or study.
6	Responsibility for own work and learning and full responsibility for other’s works and learning.		The individual will be fully responsible for own work/studies and development and is also fully responsible for others’ work and their development related to work or study.
7	Full responsibility for output of group and development.		The individual will be able to take full responsibility for the activities and outputs of a group or team and for the development of that group or team in relation to work or study.

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
	UNNAMED DOMAIN 1 (Combined Process, knowledge and skills)	Doesn't cover Process. Does include communication. Spread this over the first 4 columns	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
8	Comprehensive, cognitive, theoretical knowledge and practical skills to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. Undertakes self-study; demonstrates intellectual independence, analytical rigour and good communication.	There seems to be a big step from level 7 to level 8.	Uses comprehensive, cognitive, theoretical knowledge and practical skills to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. Undertakes self-study. Demonstrates intellectual independence and analytical rigour.
9	Advanced knowledge and skill. Critical understanding of the subject, demonstrating mastery and innovation, completion of substantial research and dissertation.		Uses advanced knowledge and skills to complete and report on substantial research activities. Demonstrates critical understanding of the subject, mastery of related skills and the ability to innovate.
10	Highly specialised knowledge and problem solving skill to provide original contribution to knowledge through research and scholarship.		Uses highly specialised knowledge, problem-solving skills and research or scholarship to make original contributions to knowledge in a field of work or study.

Level	Statement	Comment	Possible revision
	UNNAMED DOMAIN 2 (Core skills and Responsibility)	Doesn't cover core skills. Bring under the final column.	RESPONSIBILITY
	Exercise management and supervision in the context of work/study having unpredictable changes; responsible for the work of others.		Always works/studies under instruction and close supervision.
	Responsible for decision making in complex technical activities involving unpredictable work/study situations.		Works/studies under instruction and close supervision.
	Responsible for strategic decisions in unpredictable complex situations of work/study.		Has some responsibility for own work/studies within defined limit.

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