

NQF LEVELS, NOTIONAL HOURS AND CREDITS: THE DEFINITIONS

NQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Level descriptors, as the nomenclature suggests, provide a description of each of the ten levels on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The purpose of such description is to assist a writer of standards or qualifications in designing a qualification by allocating a level to a unit standard or a qualification, and to formulate outcomes and criteria for assessment that could clearly indicate the level of knowledge of a learner required to successfully achieve the unit standard or qualification.

NQF LEVEL	BAND	QUALIFICATION TYPE
10	HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-doctoral research degrees • Doctorates
9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters degrees
8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional 4-year Bachelor's degrees • Bachelor Honours degrees
7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's degrees • Advanced diplomas • (3rd year level)
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomas • Advanced Certificates • (1st and 2nd year level)
5	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher certificates • Foundation modules
1-4	GENERAL EDUCATION & TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National certificates

In line with the level descriptors, qualifications and unit standards are registered at the specified level of the NQF with a number of credits allocated to it. This means that a learner could accumulate credits for successful completed unit standards towards a qualification making learning more flexible to meet learner needs.

If additional information is required about the new NQF levels, please visit [Level descriptors \(July 2004\)](#) included in the official documentation on the following website:

http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Administrative_Divisions/INB/Tuisblad/HEQF%20Belyning

NOTIONAL LEARNING HOURS

'Notional learning hours' are the **estimated** learning time taken by the '**average**' student to achieve the specified learning outcomes of the course-unit or programme. They are therefore not a precise measure but provide students with an indication of the amount of study and degree of commitment expected. Notional learning time includes teaching contact time (lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratory practicals, workshops, fieldwork etc.), time spent on preparing and carrying out formative and summative assessments (written coursework, oral presentations, exams etc.) and time spent on private study, whether in term-time or the vacations.

Notional Learning Time

The number of hours, which it is expected a learner (at a particular level) will spend, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level. It includes all learning relevant to achievement of the learning outcomes e.g. directed study, essential practical work, project work, private study and assessment.

Credit

Credit provides a means of quantifying learning outcomes achievable in notional learning hours at a given level.

- One credit is awarded for 10 notional hours of successful learning activity.
- Notwithstanding the link between credit and notional learning time, the emphasis of assessment should be upon learning achieved and not time served.
- Credit is awarded for the achievement of specified learning outcomes. No additional credit can be awarded for achievement above the threshold level (although such achievement can be recognised through the award of marks or grades).

Notional learning time

Taught or contact time will vary according to the mode of delivery, but notional learning time will not. All learning relevant to the learning outcomes should be considered when notional learning time is being estimated. Consideration should also be given to the level at which the learning is being offered.

Notional learning time is not equivalent to the actual time that any particular learner needs to spend in order to achieve the learning outcomes. The real time will vary according to the individual's capability, degree of prior experiential or other learning and the mode of learning, for example, in the case of work based learning the actual time spent in the workplace may greatly exceed the notional time required to achieve the specified learning outcomes. Any prior skill or knowledge required of the learner should not be included in an estimate of notional learning time.

Higher Education uses the **10-hour credit** which means that each credit awarded equates with 10 notional hours of successful learning. The notional learning time encompasses **all time** (formal classes, self-study, reading, searching the internet for information, writing assignments) spent by the learner in pursuit of achieving the designated learning outcomes. The emphasis is on the term 'notional' because it is well known that the actual time which learners need to achieve designated learning outcomes varies considerably. It is based on how long it would take an average full-time student entering a university and studying that subject, at that level, for the first time would take to gain the knowledge, skills and understanding to achieve the learning outcomes. So it is presumed that an 'average' student will take 200 hours to successfully achieve a 20 credit module.