

## Appendix 2: NICATS level descriptors

### Summary of the NICATS<sup>5</sup> level descriptors

The level descriptors should be seen as a developmental continuum in which preceding levels are necessarily subsumed within those which follow.

Learning accredited at this level will reflect the ability to:

- **Entry level** — employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas, exercise basic skills within highly structured contexts, and carry out directed activity under close supervision.
- **Level 1** — employ a narrow range of applied knowledge, skills and basic comprehension within a limited range of predictable and structured contexts, including working with others under direct supervision, but with a very limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible action.
- **Level 2** — apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas and employ a range of skills within a number of contexts, some of which may be non-routine; and undertake directed activities, with a degree of autonomy, within time constraints.
- **Level 3** — apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories; access and analyse information independently and make reasoned judgements, selecting from a considerable choice of procedures, in familiar and unfamiliar contexts; and direct own activities, with some responsibility for the output of others.
- **Level 4** — develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base; employ a range of specialised skills; evaluate information using it to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems; and operate in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.
- **Level 5** — generate ideas through the analysis of concepts at an abstract level, with a command of specialised skills and the formulation of responses to well defined and abstract problems; analyse and evaluate information; exercise significant judgement across a broad range of functions; and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.
- **Level 6** — critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilizing specialised skills across an area of study; critically evaluate new concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant judgement in a range of situations; and accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.
- **Level 7** — display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills, employing advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for related decision making including use of supervision.
- **Level 8** — make a significant and/original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry demonstrating a command of methodological issues and engaging in critical dialogue with peers; accepting full accountability for outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation Transfer System

## NICATS level descriptors

Level	Intellectual skills and attributes	Processes	Accountability
Entry	<p>Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others.</p> <p>Exercise basic skills.</p> <p>Receive and pass on information.</p>	<p>Operate mainly in closely defined and highly structured contexts.</p> <p>Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable.</p> <p>Undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks.</p> <p>Assume a limited range of roles.</p>	<p>Carry out directed activity under close supervision.</p> <p>Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality.</p>
1	<p>Employ a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension.</p> <p>Demonstrate a narrow range of skills.</p> <p>Apply known solutions to familiar problems.</p> <p>Present and record information from readily available sources.</p>	<p>Show basic competence in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts.</p> <p>Utilise a clear choice of routine responses.</p> <p>Co-operate with others.</p>	<p>Exercise a very limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible actions.</p> <p>Carry restricted responsibility for quantity and quality of output.</p> <p>Operate under direct supervision and quality control.</p>
2	<p>Apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas.</p> <p>Make comparisons.</p> <p>Interpret available information.</p> <p>Demonstrate a range of skills.</p>	<p>Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, some of which may be non-routine.</p> <p>Co-ordinate with others.</p>	<p>Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy.</p> <p>Achieve outcomes within time constraints.</p> <p>Accept increased responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking.</p>

**NICATS level descriptors** (*continued*)

<b>Level</b>	<b>Intellectual skills and attributes</b>	<b>Processes</b>	<b>Accountability</b>
3	<p>Apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories.</p> <p>Access and evaluate information independently.</p> <p>Analyse information and make reasoned judgements.</p> <p>Employ a range of responses to well defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems.</p>	<p>Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts using a range of technical or learning skills.</p> <p>Select from a considerable choice of procedures.</p> <p>Give presentations to an audience.</p>	<p>Engage in self directed activity with guidance/evaluation.</p> <p>Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output.</p> <p>Accept limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others.</p>
4	<p>Develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base.</p> <p>Employ a range of specialised skills.</p> <p>Determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems.</p> <p>Generate a range of responses, a limited number of which are innovative, to well defined but often unfamiliar problems.</p> <p>Evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies.</p>	<p>Operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non-routine activities.</p> <p>Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources.</p>	<p>Undertake self directed and a limited amount of directive activity.</p> <p>Operate within broad general guidelines or functions.</p> <p>Take responsibility for the nature and quantity of outputs.</p> <p>Meet specified quality standards.</p>

**NICATS level descriptors** (*continued*)

<b>Level</b>	<b>Intellectual skills and attributes</b>	<b>Processes</b>	<b>Accountability</b>
5	<p>Generate ideas through the analysis of information and concepts at an abstract level.</p> <p>Command wide ranging, specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills.</p> <p>Formulate appropriate responses to resolve well-defined and abstract problems.</p> <p>Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information.</p>	<p>Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions.</p> <p>Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes.</p>	<p>Accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.</p>
6	<p>Critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge.</p> <p>Utilise highly specialised technical or scholastic skills across an area of study.</p> <p>Utilise research skills.</p> <p>Critically evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources.</p>	<p>Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations.</p> <p>Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes including resourcing.</p>	<p>Accept.</p> <p>Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.</p> <p>Begin to lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups.</p>

**NICATS level descriptors** *(continued)*

Level	Intellectual skills and attributes	Processes	Accountability
7	<p>Display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Demonstrate expertise in highly specialised and advanced technical, professional and/or research skills.</p>	<p>Conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, using and modifying advanced skills and tools.</p> <p>Design and apply appropriate research methodologies.</p> <p>Communicate results of research to peers.</p> <p>Develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques.</p> <p>Act in a wide variety of unpredictable and advanced professional contexts.</p>	<p>Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision.</p> <p>Take significant responsibility for the work of other professional staff; lead and initiate activity.</p>
8	<p>Make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of enquiry.</p> <p>Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge.</p>	<p>Demonstrate command of methodological issues.</p> <p>Communicate results of research to peers and engage in critical dialogue.</p> <p>Develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials.</p>	<p>Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision.</p> <p>Lead and originate complex social processes.</p>