

## Postgraduate Level Descriptors and Principles

This document is designed to help academic staff who are developing a new paper at Level 8 or Level 9 on the [New Zealand Qualifications Framework](#) (NZQF). Level 7 is the end-point of a Bachelor's degree and is included for comparison. You will find some general guidance on how to think through the process of ensuring your new paper sits at the appropriate level. It also supplies language to help you understand what makes each level distinctive and to inform the whole development process. Seeing each level side by side should help you to work out how to match your paper to the required level.

It is customary to code Level 8 papers at the 400-level and Level 9 papers at the 500-level (the Division of Health Sciences also uses codes at the 700- and 800-level). However, it is possible for a 500-level paper to sit at Level 8. You might have a suite of papers all coded at the 500-level even though one or more of them is at Level 8. It is essential that those Level 8 papers, even if coded at the 500-level, are genuinely at Level 8 in the way they are constructed. Student learning should be sequential and progressive. That is, students should not be required to make the jump straight from Level 7 to Level 9. There must be some element of progression – at least one paper at Level 8 – to assist them with that transition. This is particularly relevant to taught Master's degrees.

It is also customary to think of Level 8 as Honours level and Level 9 as Master's level but this distinction has become blurred with the introduction of taught Master's and with a change that the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) made in 2018. The issue is that Honours degrees in other jurisdictions are difficult to distinguish from Bachelor's degrees. So CUAP required all Honours research papers to be re-levelled at Level 9 in order to demonstrate the more demanding nature of New Zealand's Honours qualifications. Apart from the research paper component, all taught papers at Honours level should be at Level 8.

This is how you might think through the levelling of your new paper...

### **Knowledge, Skills and Application:**

As you begin to develop a new paper, it is important to ensure that it is pitched at the correct level. This means paying attention to the level of learning required of the students and the knowledge, skills and application that they will be able to demonstrate once they have passed the paper.

The following tables provide language that will help you to understand what your paper should be achieving at Levels 7, 8 and 9. The first set of wording in each of the three categories derives from the NZQF (partly amended by CUAP for the adoption of universities). The second set of wording is drawn from comparable qualification frameworks. It will further illustrate, clarify and expand on the NZQF language to give you a richer understanding of what is expected.

Please do not copy-and-paste any of the statements in the tables. Instead, you should construct learning outcomes that might borrow key words from these statements but are specifically tailored to your particular paper. These statements are intended as guideposts towards your own outcomes that will be pitched correctly for each level.



## LEVEL 7: NZQF wording

Knowledge:	Skills:	Application:
Specialised technical or theoretical knowledge with depth in one or more fields of work or study.	Analyse, generate solutions to unfamiliar and sometimes complex problems; select, adapt and apply a range of processes relevant to the field of work or study.	Advanced generic skills and/or specialist knowledge and skills in a professional context or field of study.

### To put that in other words, Level 7 study will involve:

<p>Knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles;</p> <p>Demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education;</p> <p>Practical, conceptual or technological knowledge and understanding of a subject or field of work; and/or</p> <p>Broad and coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.</p>	<p>Application of knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;</p> <p>Well-developed cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse and evaluate information to complete a range of activities</li> <li>• analyse, generate and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems</li> <li>• transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others; and/or</li> </ul> <p>The ability to use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline/sector.</p>	<p>The ability to determine, refine, adapt and use appropriate methods and advanced cognitive and practical skills to address problems that have limited definition and involve many interacting factors; and/or</p> <p>The ability to apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well-developed judgement and responsibility.</p>
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LEVEL 8 NZQF wording		
Knowledge:	Skills:	Application:
Advanced technical and/or theoretical knowledge in a discipline or practice, involving a critical understanding of the underpinning key principles.	Analyse, generate solutions to complex and sometimes unpredictable problems; evaluate and apply a range of processes relevant to the field of work or study.	Developing identification with a profession and/or discipline through application of advanced generic skills and/or specialist knowledge and skills; some responsibility for integrity of profession or discipline.

To put that in other words, Level 8 study will involve:		
<p>Advanced theoretical and technical knowledge in one or more disciplines or areas of practice;</p> <p>Knowledge that covers and integrates most of the principal areas, features, boundaries, terminology and conventions of a subject/discipline/sector; and/or</p> <p>Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, some of which is informed by, or at the forefront of, a subject/discipline/sector.</p>	<p>Advanced cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse critically, evaluate and transform information to complete a range of activities</li> <li>• analyse, generate and transmit solutions to complex problems</li> <li>• transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others; and/or</li> </ul> <p>Apply knowledge, skills and understanding in executing a defined project of research, development or investigation and in identifying and implementing relevant outcomes.</p>	<p>Demonstrating expert, specialised cognitive and technical skills in a body of knowledge or practice to independently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse critically, reflect on and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts and theories</li> <li>• research and apply established theories to a body of knowledge or practice</li> <li>• interpret and transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</li> </ul> <p>Applying knowledge, skills and understanding in planning and executing a significant project of research, investigation or development; and/or</p> <p>Demonstrating specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.</p>

## LEVEL 9 NZQF wording

Knowledge:	Skills:	Application:
Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge, and a critical awareness of issues in a field of study or practice.	Display skills in research and/or advanced scholarship by developing and applying new skills, techniques, and knowledge to existing or emerging problems; mastery of the field of study or practice to an advanced level.	Independent application and/or development of highly specialised knowledge and skills in research and/or advanced scholarship within a discipline or professional practice; some responsibility for leadership within the profession or discipline.

### To put that in other words, Level 9 study will involve:

<p>Advanced and integrated understanding of a complex body of knowledge in one or more disciplines or areas of practice;</p> <p>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research;</p> <p>A critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles;</p> <p>Extensive, detailed and critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at, or informed by, developments at the forefront; and/or</p> <p>A critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline/sector and one or more specialisms.</p>	<p>Expert, specialised cognitive and technical skills in a body of knowledge or practice to independently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse critically, reflect on and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts and theories</li> <li>• research and apply established theories to a body of knowledge or practice</li> <li>• interpret and transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</li> </ul> <p>Apply knowledge, skills and understanding in planning and executing a significant project of research, investigation or development; and/or</p> <p>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.</p>	<p>The ability to apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, expert judgement, adaptability and responsibility as a practitioner or learner;</p> <p>The ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;</p> <p>The ability to communicate conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; and/or</p> <p>The learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.</p>
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## The Graduate Profile:

Your new paper will be part of a qualification that has a [graduate profile](#). Taken together, all the papers in that qualification should develop the whole of that profile. Think about how your paper will make a contribution. Your paper is not likely to contribute to all the graduate attributes. Be clear about which ones you have in mind and then begin to think about how the elements that comprise your paper will work towards that end.

## Making it Work:

The knowledge, skills and application you are aiming for, along with the relevant graduate attributes, will be reflected in the various elements that comprise the paper. This means paying attention to four things in particular.

**1. Prerequisites:** Have you ensured that the students coming into your paper have the required prior learning to achieve the level of learning intended and have the required admission criteria and prerequisites? Think through the issue of progression to make sure that students are engaged in sequential learning, both in level and in content. Consider how your paper will fit in with other papers in your qualification and in feeder qualifications.

**2. Learning Outcomes:** Do the learning outcomes accurately reflect the level of learning required? One way of ensuring this is to borrow from the language given in the above tables. Weave that language into the learning outcomes for your paper. It is desirable to include learning outcomes that reach across knowledge, skills, and application.

**3. Learning Activities / Workload Expectations:** Are your learning activities and workload expectations appropriate to the level at which students are learning? Ideally, your department or programme will have a set of expectations for each level according to the particular requirements of your discipline. Make sure that these are neither too demanding nor not demanding enough.

**4. Assessment Procedures:** Is the level of knowledge, skills and application you are seeking to develop in your students matched by appropriate assessment procedures? Here again, make sure these place the appropriate level of demand on each student for the level of the paper. Consider not just the amount of assessment but its nature and timing. The University's [Guidelines of the Assessment of Student Performance](#) will be helpful and relevant.

Putting together an effective paper takes considerable thought and effort. This document should give you an orientation in how to pitch your new paper at the appropriate level. Your Division will have more detailed guidance on the process of creating a new paper. HEDC and your Associate Deans (Academic and Postgraduate) are available to offer further help if required. Do take advantage of the expertise on offer.