International Standard Classification of Education

# ISCED 2011

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## UNESCO

The constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was adopted by 20 countries at the London Conference in November 1945 and entered into effect on 4 November 1946. The Organization currently has 195 Member States and 8 Associate Members.

The main objective of UNESCO is to contribute to peace and security in the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture and communication in order to foster universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and the human rights and fundamental freedoms that are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.

To fulfil its mandate, UNESCO performs five principal functions: 1) prospective studies on education, science, culture and communication for tomorrow's world; 2) the advancement, transfer and sharing of knowledge through research, training and teaching activities; 3) standard-setting actions for the preparation and adoption of internal instruments and statutory recommendations; 4) expertise through technical co-operation to Member States for their development policies and projects; and 5) the exchange of specialized information.

UNESCO is headquartered in Paris, France.

## UNESCO Institute for Statistics

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the statistical office of UNESCO and is the UN depository for global statistics in the fields of education, science and technology, culture and communication.

The UIS was established in 1999. It was created to improve UNESCO's statistical programme and to develop and deliver the timely, accurate and policy-relevant statistics needed in today's increasingly complex and rapidly changing social, political and economic environments.

The UIS is based in Montreal, Canada.

# FOREWORD

As national education systems vary in terms of structure and curricular content, it can be difficult to benchmark performance across countries over time or monitor progress towards national and international goals. In order to understand and properly interpret the inputs, processes and outcomes of education systems from a global perspective, it is vital to ensure that data are comparable. This can be done by applying the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the standard framework used to categorise and report cross-nationally comparable education statistics.

The ISCED 2011 classification was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 36th session in November 2011. Initially developed by UNESCO in the 1970s, and first revised in 1997, the ISCED classification serves as an instrument to compile and present education statistics both nationally and internationally. The framework is occasionally updated in order to better capture new developments in education systems worldwide.

ISCED 2011 includes improved definitions for types of education and clarifies their application to ISCED. Categories have been added to the classification of levels in recognition of the expansion of early childhood education and restructuring of tertiary education. New features also include:

    i) the introduction of educational qualifications as a related statistical unit alongside the education programme;

    ii) three-digit coding schemes for the levels of education programmes and educational attainment;

    iii) a section on ISCED governance; and

    iv) an expanded glossary.

These improvements were introduced by a global technical advisory panel, comprising international experts on education and statistics including relevant international organizations and partners, such as Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The extensive review process included a series of regional expert meetings and a formal global consultation coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in which all UNESCO Member States were invited to take part.

The UIS and UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat (UOE) data collection programmes will be adjusted according to these new standards. Member States will apply ISCED 2011 in the reporting of their education statistics starting in 2014.

ISCED 2011 will contribute to the production of even more reliable and comparable international statistics on education, reflecting the ongoing evolution of education systems worldwide.

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## SECTION 1  WHAT IS ISCED?

1.  The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) belongs to the United Nations International Family of Economic and Social Classifications, which are applied in statistics worldwide with the purpose of assembling, compiling and analysing cross-nationally comparable data. ISCED is the reference classification for organizing education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields. ISCED is a product of international agreement and adopted formally by the General Conference of UNESCO Member States.

2.  ISCED is designed to serve as a framework to classify educational activities as defined in programmes and the resulting qualifications into internationally agreed categories. The basic concepts and definitions of ISCED are therefore intended to be internationally valid and comprehensive of the full range of education systems.

3.  ISCED classifies education programmes by their content using two main cross-classification variables: levels of education *(see Section 9)* and fields of education *(see Annex IV)*. ISCED 2011 presents a revision of the ISCED 1997 levels of education classification. It also introduces a related classification of educational attainment levels based on recognised educational qualifications.

4.  Information compiled according to ISCED can be used for assembling statistics on many different aspects of education of interest to policymakers and other users of international education statistics. These aspects include enrolment and attendance, human or financial resources invested in education, and the educational attainment of the population.

5.  The application of ISCED facilitates the transformation of detailed national education statistics on participants, providers and sponsors of education, compiled on the basis of national concepts and definitions, into aggregate categories that can be compared and interpreted internationally.

6.  Data collections of education statistics assembled according to ISCED can be based on different data sources such as administrative registers, individual and household surveys, and macro-economic aggregated statistics. Guidance on the implementation of ISCED 2011 in statistical sources will be included in an operational manual and other training materials *(see Section 8)*.

7.  ISCED 2011 rests on three components: i) internationally agreed concepts and definitions; ii) the classification systems; and iii) ISCED mappings of education programmes and related qualifications in countries worldwide.

8.  ISCED mappings are an essential tool for organizing information on national education systems, their programmes and related qualifications in order to ensure the comparability of ISCED-level information and to support their interpretation for international statistical purposes.

9.  ISCED mappings ensure a transparent process of coding national education programmes and related qualifications into comparable categories for use in international statistics by linking the classification criteria to the properties of the education programmes and their related qualifications.

# SECTION 2 **UNIT OF CLASSIFICATION**

10. The basic units of classification in ISCED are the national (and sub-national) education programme and the related recognised educational qualification.

11. In ISCED, an education programme is defined as a coherent set or sequence of educational activities or communication designed and organized to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Objectives encompass improving knowledge, skills and competencies within any personal, civic, social and/or employment-related context. Learning objectives are typically linked to the purpose of preparing for more advanced studies and/or for an occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades but may be related to personal development or leisure. A common characteristic of an education programme is that, upon fulfilment of learning objectives or educational tasks, successful completion is certified.

The key concepts in the above formulation are to be understood as follows:

12. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: deliberate activities involving some form of communication intended to bring about learning.

13. COMMUNICATION: a relationship between two or more persons or an inanimate medium and persons, involving the transfer of information (messages, ideas, knowledge, strategies, etc.). Communication may be verbal or non-verbal, direct/face-to-face or indirect/remote, and may involve a wide variety of channels and media.

14. LEARNING: individual acquisition or modification of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies or behaviours through experience, practice, study or instruction.

15. ORGANIZED: planned in a pattern or sequence with explicit or implicit aims. It involves a providing agency (person(s) or body) that facilitates a learning environment, and a method of instruction through which communication is organized. Instruction typically involves a teacher or trainer who is engaged in communicating and guiding knowledge and skills with a view to bringing about learning. The medium of instruction can also be indirect, e.g. through radio, television, computer software, film, recordings, Internet or other communication technologies.

16. SUSTAINED: the learning experience has the elements of duration and continuity.

17. An education programme can, in a national context, be strictly defined and regulated. The ISCED definition of an education programme caters to multiple possibilities available in different countries with the purpose of reaching comparability at the international level.

18. Within an education programme, educational activities may also be grouped into sub-components variously described in national contexts as 'courses', 'modules', 'units' and/or 'subjects'. In ISCED, a 'course' is equivalent in meaning to a 'module', 'unit' and/or 'subject'. An education programme may have major components not normally characterised as courses – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects, and preparation of dissertations.

19. The classification of education programmes determines the reporting of statistics on education systems, e.g. enrolment, entrants, teachers and other human and financial resources. Statistics on an education programme can provide information on the links between inputs (entrants into the system), the process (participation) and the output (the qualification).

20. Within the context of ISCED, an educational qualification is the official confirmation, usually in the form of a document certifying the successful completion of an education programme or a stage of a programme. Qualifications can be obtained through: i) successful completion of a full education programme; ii) successful completion of a stage of an education programme (intermediate qualifications); or iii) validation of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, independent of participation in an education programme. Successful completion of a programme is normally granted when a student has achieved specified learning objectives. Individual credits awarded for successful completion of individual courses (e.g. modules or subjects) are not considered as qualifications within ISCED. In such cases, a sufficient number of credits or subjects equivalent in duration and/or covering the curriculum of a full programme would represent a qualification.

21. ISCED 2011 considers the recognised qualifications corresponding to an education programme as a related unit of the classification. In ISCED, the term 'qualification' is synonymous with 'credential'. Other terms such as 'certificate', 'degree' or 'diploma' are types of qualification and are treated as being synonymous with each other within ISCED. The classification of qualifications officially recognised by the relevant national education authorities is the basis for statistics on educational attainment.

22. In ISCED, education programmes are classified first and qualifications are subsequently classified. The ISCED mapping is the tool to show the links between education programmes and qualifications. Normally one education programme leads to one qualification. However, in some cases several programmes can lead to the same qualification, and one programme can lead to a number of different qualifications.

23. The recognition of (prior) learning through non-formal education or informal learning has become more common in many countries over the last decade. ISCED 2011 specifically allows for the classification of qualifications obtained through the demonstrated acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies comparable to successful completion of a formal education programme and acknowledged through a formal qualification.

24. ISCED 2011 is not designed to directly assess the competencies of individuals because there is no direct relationship between education programmes or qualifications and actual educational achievement. The education programmes that an individual has participated in or has successfully completed are, at best, only an approximation of the skills, knowledge and competencies mastered at the time of completion.

25. National and regional qualification frameworks can be useful tools for distinguishing knowledge, skills and competencies related to programmes and qualifications. Such frameworks exist in many countries to describe competencies and skill levels for the population in the sense of educational achievement. It is recommended that countries make the links transparent between ISCED and their national or regional qualification framework where one exists.

# SECTION 3 PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS, SEQUENTIAL PROGRAMMES AND MODULAR PROGRAMMES

26. When classifying national education programmes by ISCED levels, transition points between national programmes and exit points into the labour market may not always coincide with transition points between ISCED levels. Three such cases can be identified: i) programmes that span two or more ISCED levels; ii) two or more sequential programmes that together constitute one ISCED level; and iii) programmes which are provided in modules or courses without clearly defined sequencing.

27. A national education programme with a duration exceeding the criteria provided for an ISCED level *(see Paragraphs 70 and 71)* is considered as spanning more than one level. It is therefore necessary to identify the transition point (or points) from one ISCED level to the next within the course of the programme according to the criteria. For example, when a national primary education programme lasts for eight years or longer, the final grades are to be classified as ISCED level 2 (e.g. the first six grades as ISCED level 1 and the last two grades as ISCED level 2).

28. To classify a programme spanning more than one ISCED level, existing transition points within the programme, such as stages or intermediate qualifications, should be used to assign the relevant grades of the programme to corresponding ISCED levels. If no such transition point exists, the typical cumulative duration of the ISCED level *(see Paragraph 71)* provides guidance on how to identify the boundaries between ISCED levels. See Section 9 for more details on ISCED levels.

29. Programmes spanning more than one ISCED level typically do not provide a qualification at the end of the lower ISCED level. In these cases, other criteria may be used to define level completion, for example having fully attended the final grade classified at the lower ISCED level or having access to the grades classified at the higher ISCED level.

30. There are special considerations for reporting on programmes that span across ISCED levels. Enrolment numbers are to be reported by ISCED level, typically using statistics by grade or year to make the distinction. Financial and human resources may also need to be estimated by level (or groups of levels, e.g. tertiary education). When reporting new entrants to or graduates of an ISCED level, all levels that the programme spans are considered separately.

31. In order to comply with the duration criteria for ISCED levels *(see Paragraphs 70 and 71)*, it may be necessary to classify two or more sequential programmes at the same ISCED level if their combined duration meets the minimum duration criteria but their individual durations do not. In such cases, the progression from the first to the second or subsequent programme in the education system is not reflected when reporting data on graduates from the given ISCED level, but any recognised intermediate qualifications can be reported in sub-categories: i) 'partial level completion' at ISCED levels 2 and 3; or ii) 'no level completion' at other ISCED levels *(see Paragraph 60)*. Such a situation may occur if in an education system a sequence of four rather than two or three programmes forms ISCED levels 1 to 3.

32. Two or more sequential programmes constituting one ISCED level require special consideration in reporting. Enrolment should be combined for all programmes in the level. Data on entrants consider only those entering the first programme in the ISCED level, while data on graduates consider only those completing the final programme in the sequence within the level. For

educational attainment, only recognised successful completion of the final programme in the sequence counts as level completion. Recognized successful completion of earlier programmes within the ISCED level is reported in sub-categories 'partial level completion' or 'no level completion' *(see Paragraph 60)*.

33. Modular programmes allow students to compose the content of their education in a flexible way by combining different courses or modules. A combination of modules is considered as an education programme if it meets the ISCED definition for an education programme *(see Paragraph 11)*.

34. All participants in modules that constitute an education programme are counted as enrolled in the programme, even if they only follow some of the modules, which on their own may be shorter than the typical duration of the given ISCED level. A modular programme is considered as successfully completed when the required number and kinds of modules for the education programme have been successfully completed.

# SECTION 4 **SCOPE OF EDUCATION IN ISCED**

35.  ISCED 2011 covers formal and non-formal education programmes offered at any stage of a person's life. Qualifications which are recognised by the relevant national education authorities, however they are obtained (e.g. by successful completion of a formal education programme or via a non-formal education programme or informal learning activity), are used for the purpose of measuring educational attainment. ISCED does not cover programmes of informal, incidental or random learning, nor qualifications which are not recognised. Formal and non-formal education cover a variety of education programmes that are designed within a national context, such as initial education, regular education, second chance programmes, literacy programmes, adult education, continuing education, open and distance education, apprenticeships, technical or vocational education, training, or special needs education.

36.  **Formal education** is education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private bodies, and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by the relevant national education or equivalent authorities, e.g. any other institution in cooperation with the national or sub-national education authorities. Formal education consists mostly of initial education *(see Paragraph 37)*. Vocational education, special needs education and some parts of adult education are often recognised as being part of the formal education system. Qualifications from formal education are by definition recognised and, therefore, are within the scope of ISCED. Institutionalised education occurs when an organization provides structured educational arrangements, such as student-teacher relationships and/or interactions, that are specially designed for education and learning.

37.  Formal education typically takes place in educational institutions that are designed to provide full-time education for students in a system designed as a continuous educational pathway. This is referred to as initial education, defined as the formal education of individuals before their first entrance to the labour market, i.e. when they will normally be in full-time education.

38.  Formal education also includes education for all age groups with programme content and qualifications that are equivalent to those of initial education. Programmes that take place partly in the workplace may also be considered formal education if they lead to a qualification that is recognised by national education authorities (or equivalent). These programmes are often provided in cooperation between educational institutions and employers (e.g. apprenticeships).

39.  Like formal education (but unlike informal, incidental or random learning), **non-formal education** is education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided in order to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity; and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Nevertheless, formal, recognised qualifications may be obtained through exclusive participation in specific non-formal education programmes; this often happens when the non-formal programme completes the competencies obtained in another context.

40. Depending on the national context, non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. It can include training in a workplace to improve or adapt existing qualifications and skills, training for unemployed or inactive persons, as well as alternative educational pathways to formal education and training in some cases. It can also include learning activities pursued for self-development and, thus, is not necessarily job-related.

41. The successful completion of a non-formal education programme and/or a non-formal educational qualification does not normally give access to a higher level of education, unless it is appropriately validated in the formal education system and recognised by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities (or equivalent).

42. In ISCED 2011, there is a clear distinction between formal and non-formal education for statistical purposes. ISCED 2011 recommends using the criteria of equivalency of content and/or resulting qualifications for the classification of non-formal education programmes. More information on the classification of non-formal education programmes is provided in Annex V. Currently, international data collection exercises on education (mappings, surveys, censuses, etc.) are mainly focused on formal education.

43. **Informal learning** does not fall within the scope of ISCED for measuring participation in education, although recognised qualifications obtained through informal learning are considered when determining educational attainment levels. Informal learning is defined as forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate, but are not institutionalised. It is consequently less organized and less structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis. Like formal and non-formal education, informal learning can be distinguished from incidental or random learning.

44. ISCED also excludes **incidental** or **random learning**, i.e. various forms of learning that are not organized or that involve communication not designed to bring about learning. Incidental or random learning may occur as a by-product of day-to-day activities, events or communication that are not designed as deliberate educational or learning activities. Examples may include learning that takes place during the course of a meeting, whilst listening to a radio programme, or watching a television broadcast that is not designed as an education programme.

# SECTION 5 **CROSS-CLASSIFICATION VARIABLES**

45.  The main cross-classification variables of ISCED are levels and fields of education *(see Annex V for fields of education)*. Within ISCED levels, programmes and qualifications are further classified by complementary dimensions. These include:

- the programme orientation;

- completion of the ISCED level;

- access to higher ISCED levels; and

- position in the national degree and qualification structure.

Not all complementary dimensions apply to all levels. In addition, ISCED level 0 is further subdivided according to the type of programme and age group targeted. The categories and sub-categories provided by these complementary dimensions allow more detailed collecting and reporting of cross-nationally comparable data.

46.  Other descriptive characteristics and attributes of programmes and qualifications beyond those described in ISCED may include: the education provider, the educational setting or location, the institutional context, the mode of education provision, the type of participant or the mode of participation. Although not specifically included in ISCED as complementary dimensions, these characteristics serve an important function in distinguishing the nature of the programmes in many countries and defining the scope of data collections.

## Levels

47.  The notion of 'levels' of education is represented by an ordered set, grouping education programmes in relation to gradations of learning experiences, as well as the knowledge, skills and competencies which each programme is designed to impart. The ISCED level reflects the degree of complexity and specialisation of the content of an education programme, from foundational to complex.

48.  Levels of education are therefore a construct based on the assumption that education programmes can be grouped into an ordered series of categories. These categories represent broad steps of educational progression in terms of the complexity of educational content. The more advanced the programme, the higher the level of education.

49.  Classifying education programmes into a progression of levels aims to reflect the full range of educational pathways available in education systems. Most education systems provide several possible pathways from ISCED level 0/1 to 8 *(see **Figure 2** in Annex I)*. Individuals can arrange their educational pathways in many ways, as education systems provide multiple branching paths, alternative programme sequences and second chance provisions. However, individuals rarely pass through all possible levels.

50.  The classification of education programmes by level aims to reflect their content. However, curricula are too diverse, multifaceted and complex to directly assess and compare the content of programmes across education systems in a consistent way. Due to the absence of direct measures to classify educational content, ISCED employs proxy criteria that help to classify

a given education programme to the appropriate ISCED level. The proxy criteria are at times specific for each ISCED level and are explained in the respective sections. The general criteria for duration and cumulative duration per level are summarised at the end of this section.

51.  These proxy criteria are comprised of main and subsidiary criteria. Main criteria indicate necessary characteristics of education programmes at the respective ISCED level. Subsidiary criteria indicate characteristics shared by many – but not all – education programmes at the ISCED level *(see Section 9)*.

52.  The primary criterion for classifying a programme is the complexity and specialisation of its educational content and how the content is reflected in the proxy criteria. The institutional context should not be used as a substitute for educational content as a classification criterion. For example, ISCED 4 programmes may take place in institutions that typically provide ISCED 5 or 6 programmes.

## Orientation

53.  The orientation of a programme is distinguished at ISCED levels 2 to 5, with the possibility of use at ISCED levels 6 to 8. There are two categories of orientation: general and vocational education. At tertiary education levels, the terms 'academic' and 'professional' will be used in place of general and vocational respectively. ISCED 2011 does not yet define academic and professional more precisely for higher ISCED levels, but opens up the possibility of distinguishing academic and professional orientations in the future based, for example, on fields of education. At ISCED level 5, the definitions of general and vocational education will be used until definitions of academic and professional have been developed.

54.  **Vocational** education is defined as education programmes that are designed for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies specific to a particular occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades. Such programmes may have work-based components (e.g. apprenticeships, dual-system education programmes). Successful completion of such programmes leads to labour market-relevant, vocational qualifications acknowledged as occupationally-oriented by the relevant national authorities and/or the labour market.

55.  **General** education is defined as education programmes that are designed to develop learners' general knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as literacy and numeracy skills, often to prepare participants for more advanced education programmes at the same or a higher ISCED level and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These programmes are typically school- or college-based. General education includes education programmes that are designed to prepare participants for entry into vocational education but do not prepare for employment in a particular occupation, trade or class of occupations or trades, nor lead directly to a labour market-relevant qualification.

## Completion and access to higher levels of education

56.  The requirements for successful completion of an education programme, i.e. achievement of its learning objectives, are normally stipulated in the programme specifications and usually include:

- attendance requirements (enrol and regularly attend through the final year of a programme); and/or

- demonstrated acquisition of expected knowledge, skills and competencies.

57. The acquisition of the knowledge, skills and competencies forming the learning objective of an education programme is normally validated by:

- passing (i.e. succeeding in) a final, curriculum-based examination or series of examinations;

- accumulating the specified number of study credits; or

- a successful formal assessment of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired.

In formal education, successful completion usually results in a qualification that is recognised by the relevant national education authorities.

58. Education programmes at ISCED levels 1 and 2 (and occasionally at ISCED levels 3 or 4) do not always conclude with a qualification. In these cases, other criteria in place of qualifications should be used to determine successful completion; for example, having attended the full final year of the programme or having access to a higher level of education.

59. Successful completion of programmes at ISCED levels 1 to 3 is always considered as level completion when the qualification obtained is designed to provide direct access to a higher ISCED level. In the case of ISCED level 3, 'higher ISCED level' is taken to mean ISCED level 5, 6 or 7. Qualifications are considered as giving access to a higher ISCED level even if this access is limited to only some of the programmes at the higher ISCED level. Successful completion of programmes classified at ISCED levels 4 to 8 is considered as level completion. However, for educational attainment, recognised qualifications obtained before completing the programme (e.g. from the successful completion of a stage of the programme resulting in a recognised intermediate qualification) are classified at a lower ISCED level. When a qualification obtained does not provide direct access to a higher ISCED level, successful completion of programmes may be considered as level completion (without access) or no level completion. At ISCED level 2 and 3 only, qualifications which do not give access to a higher ISCED level may be considered as level completion (without access), partial level completion or no level completion.

60. Education programmes and corresponding qualifications within ISCED levels 2 and 3 are distinguished by four sub-categories:

i) **no level completion** (and thus without direct access to a higher ISCED level – which in the case of ISCED 3 is to levels 5, 6 or 7);

ii) **partial level completion without direct access** to a higher ISCED level;

iii) **level completion without direct access** to a higher ISCED level; and

iv) **level completion with direct access** to a higher ISCED level (which in the case of ISCED 3 is to first tertiary programmes at levels 5, 6 or 7).

61. Successful completion of programmes at ISCED levels 2 or 3 which do not give access to programmes at a higher ISCED level (which in the case of ISCED level 3 is ISCED level 5, 6 or 7) is considered as level completion or partial level completion if the programme meets the following criteria: i) the programme has a duration of at least two years of study at the given ISCED level; and ii) the cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1 is at least 8 years for ISCED level 2 programmes and at least 11 years for ISCED level 3 programmes. Successful completion of shorter programmes at either ISCED level is regarded as the successful completion of the programme only. For educational attainment purposes, any recognised qualifications

obtained from the successful completion of short programmes are classified at a lower ISCED level than the programme itself.

62. Programmes which:

    a) do not meet the content, minimum duration and/or cumulative duration criteria are classified as category 1 (no level completion).

    b) meet the content, minimum duration and cumulative duration criteria, are part of a sequence of programmes within the same ISCED level (but are not the last programme in the sequence), and therefore do not give direct access to a higher ISCED level are classified as category 2 (partial level completion).

    c) meet the content, minimum duration and cumulative duration criteria and are terminal programmes are classified as category 3 (level completion without direct access). Such programmes usually lead directly to labour market-relevant qualifications.

    d) are ISCED level 3 programmes giving access to ISCED level 4 programmes only are also classified as category 3 (level completion without direct access).

    e) give direct access to tertiary education at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7 are classified as category 4 (level completion with direct access).

63. A programme for a specific group of participants (adults or individuals with special needs) may have a shorter or longer duration than a similar programme in regular education at a given ISCED level. However, successful completion of a programme should only count as level completion if the qualification obtained indicates the acquisition of an equivalent level of knowledge, skills and competencies as in regular education programmes at the same level.

64. Participation in a programme without successful completion does not qualify for level completion or partial level completion, and – except at ISCED levels 0 and 1 – is not considered when determining educational attainment levels. Thus, the educational attainment level of individuals who do not successfully complete a given programme is the highest level achieved before entering the programme.

65. While the criteria for level completion apply to successful completion and are thus only directly applicable to individuals, education programmes as a whole are classified according to the highest possible qualification they are designed to prepare for, even if some participants will not obtain this qualification.

## Position in the national degree and qualification structure

66. Programmes at ISCED levels 6 and 7 are distinguished by their position in the national degree and qualification structure. Considering the sequence of national programmes and qualifications is necessary in order to correctly count first-time entrants to and graduates of tertiary education (or its constituent levels). The position of a programme is assigned based on the sequence of degrees and qualifications within national tertiary education systems.

67. ISCED level 6 programmes that do not require prior completion of another level 6 programme for entry are classified as first degree programmes. All other ISCED level 6 programmes are classified as second or further degree programmes.

68.  ISCED level 7 programmes that do not require prior completion of a level 6 programme for entry are classified as first degree programmes. Other level 7 programmes may require either prior completion of a level 6 programme or another level 7 programme. These programmes are classified separately in ISCED in order to better identify first-time entrants to and graduates of ISCED level 7.

## Duration and cumulative duration criteria

69.  Because of their importance for the classification of programmes to levels and identification of level completion, the duration criteria are described in detail here. The remaining criteria are described in Section 9.

70.  The following ranges of duration of ISCED levels are used as criteria for classifying formal education programmes:

- ISCED 0: no duration criteria, however a programme should account for at least the equivalent of 2 hours per day and 100 days a year of educational activities in order to be included;

- ISCED 1: duration typically varies from 4 to 7 years. The most common duration is 6 years;

- ISCED 2: duration typically varies from 2 to 5 years. The most common duration is 3 years;

- ISCED 3: duration typically varies from 2 to 5 years. The most common duration is 3 years;

- ISCED 4: duration typically varies from 6 months to 2 or 3 years;

- ISCED 5: duration typically varies from 2 to 3 years; and

- ISCED 8: duration is a minimum of 3 years.

The typical duration of ISCED levels 6 and 7 is more easily described by reference to the durations of programmes at the respective levels as the duration of the ISCED level depends on the sequence of programmes offered at these levels in different countries.

- ISCED 6: the duration of Bachelor's or equivalent level programmes typically varies from 3 to 4 or more years when directly following ISCED level 3, or 1 to 2 years when following another ISCED level 6 programme;

- ISCED 7: the duration of Master's or equivalent level programmes typically varies from 1 to 4 years when following ISCED level 6, or from 5 to 7 years when directly following ISCED level 3.

71.  ISCED uses the following ranges of cumulative duration as criteria for classifying formal education programmes by level:

- ISCED 1+2: the typical cumulative duration is 9 years, but may range from 8 to 11 years; and

- ISCED 1+2+3: the typical cumulative duration is 12 years, but may range from 11 to 13 years. Entrance to tertiary education usually requires a minimum of 11 years of education at ISCED levels 1 to 3.

72.  When applying the criteria of duration to part-time or modular programmes, the theoretical programme duration should be measured in full-time equivalents.

73.   While the main aim of ISCED is to promote the collection and use of comparable education data, it is recognised that nationally-distinct conditions may exist that require flexibility in the definition of duration by level. Therefore, a range of years of duration are provided in Paragraphs 70 and 71. Ideally, the most common or typical duration is used when classifying programmes.

74.   The duration by level and cumulative duration as given in Paragraphs 70 and 71 serve as a guide. However, institutional transition points may be used as criteria for assigning a programme to an ISCED level. The choice of national transition points for matching the international categories is primarily determined by the content of the education programmes, not (cumulative) duration.

# SECTION 6  **TYPES OF DATA**

75.  ISCED is mostly applied to statistics on participants, entrants, graduates and educational attainment. ISCED is not a guide for data collection and does not define in detail the coverage of data collections or how to make statistical units operational. However, the following principles are considered in the implementation of ISCED for different types of statistics.

## Enrolment, attendance and entrants

76.  In order to accurately measure enrolment, attendance and entrants, students must be assigned to an ISCED level, category and sub-category. The institutional context should not be used as a basis for assembling statistics. Students within the same institution in different ISCED levels and categories need to be reported separately, if necessary by making estimates. Students in education programmes which span ISCED levels should be reported using statistics by grade or stage.

77.  Students are assigned to ISCED levels and categories according to the characteristics of the programme and not the characteristics of individual students. For example, the category 'pre-primary education' targets children aged 3 and over, but children under that age who are enrolled in such programmes should also be reported in this category. Similarly, statistics using categories on access to a higher level should be based on the programme design and not on an individual student's pathway.

78.  New entrants to an ISCED level must be distinguished from entrants to an education programme who are not entering a new level (i.e. those who have entered the same ISCED level before). Entrants to an education programme that is preceded by a programme at the same level are excluded when reporting entrants to a level. For programmes which span two ISCED levels, participants entering the first grade of the higher ISCED level need to be considered as entrants to an ISCED level, even though from a national point of view they are continuing their education within the same programme.

## Graduates

79.  Graduates from an ISCED level include those who entered and successfully completed an education programme which is classified as 'level completion'. In principle, only those students who successfully complete the full level or a set of levels in which they enrolled (for instance first graduation in tertiary education) should be counted in order to maintain the link between entrants, enrolment and graduates. Students who receive the same or equivalent qualification by successfully completing only a stage of an ISCED level should not be counted as graduates.

80.  Graduates should only be counted once at any given ISCED level at the level of the highest programme successfully completed. This is especially relevant for upper secondary and tertiary education, where a sequence of programmes may follow each other within the same ISCED level. The accurate measurement of graduates would imply that the individual student could be followed throughout the level (or set of levels) from entrance to completion. This is often not possible in practice and the development of estimation methods to derive the number of graduates, for instance through a cohort follow-up survey based on a sample, will often be necessary.

## Educational attainment

81. The educational attainment of an individual is defined as the highest ISCED level completed by the individual. For operational purposes, educational attainment is usually measured with respect to the highest education programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.

82. An education programme is usually considered to be successfully completed when a student has attended and completed a formal education programme and is awarded a recognised qualification *(see also Paragraphs 56 to 58)*.

83. Relevant national education authorities may recognise qualifications obtained through non-formal education programmes or through the validation of skills gained by means of informal learning as equivalent to formal education qualifications. These qualifications are also considered within the concept of educational attainment as defined by ISCED. Qualifications from non-formal education or validation of skills that are not recognised as equivalent to formal qualifications are not within the scope of ISCED *(see Paragraph 35)*.

84. The ISCED definition of educational attainment should be distinguished from other concepts related to an individual's educational achievements. Individual achievements may include education levels attended but not successfully completed, or an individual's actual knowledge, skills and competencies (e.g. levels of literacy and numeracy) as determined through standardised testing or years of schooling.

85. Individuals who attend only part of an education programme or do not meet the completion requirements (e.g. fail the final examinations) do not qualify for successful completion of the programme. They should be classified according to the highest ISCED level successfully completed (i.e. before entering the programme that was not successfully completed).

86. For the classification of educational attainment, level 0 has a different meaning than for the classification of education programmes: it means not having successfully completed ISCED level 1. This includes individuals who have never attended an education programme, who have attended some early childhood education, or who have attended some primary education but have not successfully completed ISCED level 1. Several sub-categories are considered for this attainment level *(see Table 4)*.

87. Educational attainment can be classified according to completed (or partially completed) ISCED level, programme orientation and access to higher ISCED levels. If an individual has successfully completed the same ISCED level more than once (e.g. by taking two different programmes which are normally offered as parallel options), the characteristics of the most recent qualification obtained should be reported.

88. Statistics on educational attainment cover individuals of all age groups, some or many of whom may have completed education programmes or obtained qualifications which are different from those currently provided. In order to achieve comparability of indicators over time and across education cohorts, educational attainment should be classified on the basis of the characteristics of education programmes and recognised qualifications at the time of successful completion.

# SECTION 7  CODING SCHEMES

89.   The ISCED classification consists of parallel coding schemes for education programmes (ISCED-Programmes or ISCED-P) and levels of educational attainment (ISCED-Attainment or ISCED-A). Within both schemes, nine separate levels are identified. Within each level, complementary dimensions are used to identify further categories and sub-categories, if applicable. Three-digit coding systems are used to codify both education programmes and educational attainment.

## Table 1. ISCED coding of levels (first digit)

| ISCED-Programmes (ISCED-P) | | ISCED-Attainment (ISCED-A) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Early childhood education | 0 | Less than primary education |
| 1 | Primary education | 1 | Primary education |
| 2 | Lower secondary education | 2 | Lower secondary education |
| 3 | Upper secondary education | 3 | Upper secondary education |
| 4 | Post-secondary non-tertiary education | 4 | Post-secondary non-tertiary education |
| 5 | Short-cycle tertiary education | 5 | Short-cycle tertiary education |
| 6 | Bachelor's or equivalent level | 6 | Bachelor's or equivalent level |
| 7 | Master's or equivalent level | 7 | Master's or equivalent level |
| 8 | Doctoral or equivalent level | 8 | Doctoral or equivalent level |
| 9 | Not elsewhere classified | 9 | Not elsewhere classified |

## Table 2. ISCED coding of categories (second digit)[1]

| ISCED-Programmes (ISCED-P) | | ISCED-Attainment (ISCED-A) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Not further defined | 0 | Not further defined |
| 1 | Early childhood educational development | 1 | Never attended an education programme |
| 2 | Pre-primary education | 2 | Some early childhood education |
| 3 | Not used | 3 | Some primary education (without completion of ISCED level 1) |
| 4 | General / academic | 4 | General / academic |
| 5 | Vocational / professional | 5 | Vocational / professional |
| 6 | Orientation unspecified[2] | 6 | Orientation unspecified[3] |
| 7 | Not used | 7 | Not used |
| 8 | Not used | 8 | Not used |
| 9 | Not elsewhere classified | 9 | Not elsewhere classified |

1. Programmes: type of programme (ISCED-P level 0), orientation (ISCED-P levels 2-8), not further defined (ISCED-P level 1).
   Attainment: participation (ISCED-A level 0), orientation (ISCED-A levels 2-5), not further defined (ISCED-A levels 1 and 6-8).
2. Used at ISCED-P levels 6 to 8.
3. Used at ISCED-A levels 5 to 8.

## Table 3. ISCED coding of sub-categories (third digit)[1]

| ISCED-Programmes (ISCED-P) | | ISCED-Attainment (ISCED-A) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Not further defined | 0 | Not further defined[2] |
| 1 | Recognised successful completion of programme is insufficient for completion or partial completion of ISCED level (and thus without direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels) | 1 | Not used |
| 2 | Recognised successful completion of programme is sufficient for partial completion of ISCED level but without direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels | 2 | Partial level completion without direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels |
| 3 | Recognised successful completion of programme is sufficient for completion of ISCED level but without direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels[3] | 3 | Level completion without direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels[3] |
| 4 | Recognised successful completion of programme is sufficient for completion of ISCED level and with direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels[3,4] | 4 | Level completion with direct access to programmes at higher ISCED levels[3, 5] |
| 5 | First degree programme – Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 to 4 years) | 5 | Not used |
| 6 | Long first degree programme – Bachelor's or Master's, or equivalent level | 6 | Not used |
| 7 | Second or further degree programme, following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme | 7 | Not used |
| 8 | Second or further degree programme, following a Master's or equivalent programme | 8 | Not used |
| 9 | Not elsewhere classified | 9 | Not elsewhere classified |

1. Programmes: completion/access (ISCED-P levels 2 to 5 and 8), position in national degree/qualification structure (ISCED-P levels 6-7), not further defined (ISCED-P levels 0-1).
   Attainment: completion/access (ISCED-A levels 2-4), not further defined (ISCED-A levels 0-1 and 5-8).

2. At ISCED-A levels 1 and 5 to 7, including successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at a higher ISCED level insufficient for level or partial level completion.

3. In the case of ISCED level 3, higher ISCED levels refer to ISCED-P levels 5 to 7.

4. In the case of ISCED levels 5 and 8, all (full) programmes are classified as type 4 regardless of whether they give access to higher ISCED levels or not.

5. At ISCED-A levels 2 to 4, including successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at a higher ISCED level insufficient for level or partial level completion.

90. Not all combinations of categories and sub-categories exist or are widespread. The three-digit codes provided in this document are thus limited to the combinations in use. Full listings of these codes are given in Annexes II and III. If users of ISCED identify additional combinations of categories and sub-categories, the list of three-digit codes can be expanded using the existing codes reserved for additional dimensions.

# SECTION 8 **GOVERNANCE**

91. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the custodian of ISCED and is thus responsible for the development, maintenance, updating and revision of this reference classification. It also provides guidance on the effective and consistent use of ISCED for data collection and analysis. The UIS should aim to maintain links with custodians of other relevant classifications in order to ensure consistency across related standard frameworks.

92. Further responsibilities of the UIS include:

    • describing how the structure and details of the classification are used when producing and presenting statistics;

    • promoting the use of ISCED for cross-nationally comparable statistics;

    • providing guidance materials, training and technical support to countries to ensure the effective implementation and utilization of the classification throughout the world;

    • establishing monitoring mechanisms for proper feedback from ISCED users about problems in its use *(see Paragraph 96)*; and

    • forming an ISCED Committee with other data collection partners to review the classification and advise on its implementation *(see Paragraph 97)*.

93. The UIS plans to produce an operational manual to facilitate the classification and mapping of national education systems to ISCED (initially on formal education programmes and qualifications). The manual should provide guidelines and explanatory notes for the interpretation of ISCED (including some country examples). Additional guidance and training materials could be provided as necessary and as requested by users.

94. Training on implementation should be arranged through regional workshops, technical assistance and cooperation based on needs and existing capacities of countries. The UIS will also work closely with data collection partners on training materials and their content. Particular attention should be given to the transformation of mappings from ISCED 1997 to the ISCED 2011 version and to guidance on the classification of new or reformed programmes.

95. The UIS plans to maintain a database on its website of mappings of national education systems to ISCED (formal education programmes and qualifications). The mappings will be updated as appropriate to reflect changes over time in national education systems.

96. To ensure compliance with ISCED 2011, quality assurance mechanisms should be established for its implementation. The UIS plans to work closely with countries and partner data collection agencies (including Eurostat and OECD) to ensure that mappings are in accordance with the ISCED classification and updated as needed. A mechanism for the peer review of mappings of formal national education programmes and qualifications should be established, working with member states and other relevant agencies.

97. An ISCED Committee should be formed in order to advise UIS regarding the classification of national programmes and qualifications, to review the current version of ISCED and to identify potential areas for further development, although ISCED revisions are not expected to be within

its remit. The Committee should consist of UNESCO (as lead agency within the UN system of organizations), custodians of other related classifications as appropriate, and key education data collection partners, such as OECD and Eurostat, as permanent members. The composition of the Committee membership should aim to be balanced both technically and geographically, and therefore would include in addition a number of educational, statistical and classification experts with knowledge of ISCED and representing different regions of the world on a non-permanent basis as well as representatives from the research and user community.

## SECTION 9  ISCED LEVELS

98.  The following sub-sections define the nine ISCED levels. Each sub-section is structured as follows:

A.  *Principal characteristics* describe the objectives of programmes at different ISCED levels, the way in which instruction is organized (characteristics of the teaching-learning process and typical assessment methods, if applicable), as well as entry requirements. For some ISCED levels, common or well-known national names of programmes are indicated as possible examples of the correspondence between national education programmes and ISCED levels.

B.  *Classification criteria* formally define how education programmes are classified at the respective ISCED level using main and subsidiary criteria. For more information on the general concept of a 'level' in ISCED, see Section 5.

C.  The section on *programmes spanning ISCED levels* provides further guidelines for the classification of education programmes that extend beyond one ISCED level. For more information on the underlying concept of education programmes spanning ISCED levels, see Section 3.

D.  *Complementary dimensions* define characteristics that distinguish different types of programmes within ISCED levels according to programme orientation, level completion and access to higher ISCED levels, programme duration, or position in the national degree/ qualification structure. For more general information on these complementary dimensions in ISCED, see Section 5.

E.  *Other programmes included in ISCED level* indicate less typical or non-formal education programmes (e.g. special needs, second chance or adult education) that may not fulfil all classification criteria (e.g. typical entry age) but which are equivalent to programmes already classified at this ISCED level in terms of complexity of content. These programmes are therefore also classified at the respective ISCED level.

F.  *Classification of education programmes* provides the detailed codes for ISCED-P levels, categories and sub-categories that are assigned to education programmes.

G.  *Classification of educational attainment* provides the detailed codes for ISCED-A levels, categories and sub-categories that are assigned to educational qualifications and similar measures of successful completion of education programmes. It also indicates in which cases an educational qualification needs to be classified at a different ISCED-A level than the ISCED-P level of the respective education programme through which the qualification is usually obtained.

99.  Following the description of the ISCED levels, Section 10 provides correspondence tables (*see Table 20 and Table 21)* linking ISCED 2011 to ISCED 1997.

## ISCED LEVEL 0  EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### A.    Principal characteristics

100.  Programmes at ISCED level 0, or early childhood education, are typically designed with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to organized instruction outside of the family context. ISCED level 0 refers to early childhood programmes that have an intentional education component. These programmes aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society. They also develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and prepare children for entry into primary education.

101.  At this level, programmes are not necessarily highly structured but are designed to provide an organized and purposeful set of learning activities in a safe physical environment. They allow children to learn through interaction with other children under the guidance of staff/educators, typically through creative and play-based activities.

102.  ISCED level 0 programmes target children below the age of entry into ISCED level 1. There are two categories of ISCED level 0 programmes: early childhood educational development and pre-primary education. The former has educational content designed for younger children (in the age range of 0 to 2 years), whilst the latter is designed for children from age 3 years to the start of primary education.

103.  Programmes classified at ISCED level 0 may be referred to in many ways, for example: early childhood education and development, play school, reception, pre-primary, pre-school, or *educación inicial*. For programmes provided in *crèches*, daycare centres, nurseries or *guarderías*, it is important to ensure that they meet the ISCED level 0 classification criteria specified below. For international comparability purposes, the term 'early childhood education' is used to label ISCED level 0.

### B.    Classification criteria

104.  For the definition of early childhood education, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a)  Educational properties of the programme *(see Paragraphs 105 and 106)*;

b)  Institutional context *(see Paragraph 107)*;

c)  Typical target age of children for whom the programme is designed *(see Paragraphs 102 and 108)*; and

d)  Programme intensity/duration *(see Paragraph 110)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a)  Staff qualifications *(see Paragraph 111)*;

b)  Existence of a regulatory framework *(see Paragraph 112)*; and

c)  Typically not part of compulsory education *(see Paragraph 113)*.

105. The educational properties of **early childhood educational development** are characterised by a learning environment that is visually stimulating and language- rich. These programmes foster self-expression, with an emphasis on language acquisition and the use of language for meaningful communication. There are opportunities for active play, so that children can exercise their coordination and motor skills under supervision and through interaction with staff. Programmes providing only childcare (supervision, nutrition and health) are not covered by ISCED.

106. The educational properties of **pre-primary education** are characterised by interaction with peers and educators, through which children improve their use of language and social skills, start to develop logical and reasoning skills, and talk through their thought processes. They are also introduced to alphabetical and mathematical concepts, and encouraged to explore their surrounding world and environment. Supervised gross motor activities (i.e. physical exercise through games and other activities) and play-based activities can be used as learning opportunities to promote social interactions with peers and to develop skills, autonomy and school readiness.

107. ISCED level 0 programmes are usually school-based or otherwise institutionalised for a group of children (e.g. centre-based, community-based, home-based). ISCED level 0 excludes purely family-based arrangements that may be purposeful but are not organized in a 'programme' (e.g. informal learning by children from their parents, other relatives or friends is not included under ISCED 0).

108. Within ISCED 0, early childhood educational development programmes are targeted at children aged 0 to 2 years; and pre-primary education programmes are targeted at children aged 3 years until the age to start ISCED 1. The upper age limit for the pre-primary education category depends in each case on the theoretical age of entry into ISCED level 1, i.e. primary education *(see Paragraph 117)*.

109. Integrated early childhood education programmes that span the two sub-categories of ISCED 0 (i.e. education programmes for children aged 0 to the start of ISCED 1) need special consideration for classification. For programmes divided into years, stages or cycles: those corresponding to the content criteria in Paragraph 105 should be classified as early childhood educational development, and those corresponding to the content criteria in Paragraph 106 should be classified as pre-primary education. Where no subdivision of the programme exists, classification into the two categories should be based on the ages of the participants.

110. ISCED recommends the following minimum intensity and duration to improve cross-national comparability: education programmes must account for at least the equivalent of 2 hours per day and 100 days a year of educational activities in order to be classified in ISCED.

111. Where appropriate, the requirement of pedagogical qualifications for educators is a good proxy criterion for an education programme in those education systems in which such a requirement exists. It serves to distinguish early childhood education from childcare for which no explicitly pedagogically-trained staff is required.

112. Where relevant, the existence of a reference or regulatory framework issued or recognised by relevant national authorities (e.g. a ministry of education, other relevant ministry or affiliated institution) is a good proxy criterion for an education programme. This would include guidelines, standards or instructions that describe the learning opportunities provided to young children.

113. In education systems that have compulsory schooling, non-compulsory education programmes which are designed to take place before the start of compulsory education and which fulfil the criteria above are classified as ISCED level 0. In addition, in some countries the first stage or cycle of compulsory education may also be classified at ISCED level 0 if it fulfils the criteria at this level. Thus, the beginning of compulsory education is not a sufficient criterion to distinguish ISCED level 0 programmes from ISCED level 1 programmes, even though this may be the case in some education systems.

## C.    Programmes spanning ISCED levels

114. Education programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 need special consideration for classification. In education systems where a part of early childhood education is included with primary education, only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 104 should be classified as ISCED level 0. Those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 124 should be classified as ISCED level 1.

115. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 0 and 1, it is recommended that:

   i)   for programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 that are organized in stages, the end of the stage closest to 6 years of age should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 0 and 1; and

   ii)  for programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 that are not divided into stages, grades targeting children under the age of 6 should be classified as ISCED level 0, while the remaining grades should be classified as ISCED level 1.

## D.    Complementary dimensions

116. One dimension differentiates education programmes at ISCED level 0:

   • Target age group *(see Paragraph 102)*.

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 0

117. ISCED level 0 includes programmes for children with special needs corresponding to the criteria described in Paragraph 104, irrespective of their ages.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 0

118. Education programmes at ISCED level 0 are coded 010 for early childhood educational development programmes and 020 for pre-primary education programmes *(see Paragraph 102)*. There are no sub-categories differentiated by the third digit.

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED levels 0 and 1

119. For classifying educational attainment, level 0 (less than primary education) is used for individuals who:

- never attended an education programme;

- attended some early childhood education (ISCED 0); or

- attended some primary education but have not successfully completed ISCED level 1 (with or without having attended ISCED 0).

Classification codes for educational attainment related to pre-primary and primary education are provided in **Table 4**.

## ISCED LEVEL 1  PRIMARY EDUCATION

### A.    Principal characteristics

120. Programmes at ISCED level 1, or primary education, are typically designed to provide students with fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy) and establish a solid foundation for learning and understanding core areas of knowledge, personal and social development, in preparation for lower secondary education. It focuses on learning at a basic level of complexity with little, if any, specialisation.

121. Educational activities at ISCED level 1 (particularly in the early grades) are often organized around units, projects or broad learning areas, often with an integrated approach rather than providing instruction in specific subjects. Typically, there is one main teacher responsible for a group of pupils who organizes the learning process, although a class may have more than one teacher, especially for certain subjects or units.

122. Age is typically the only entry requirement at this level. The customary or legal age of entry is usually not below 5 years old nor above 7 years old. This level typically lasts six years, although its duration can range between four and seven years. Primary education typically lasts until age 10 to 12 *(see Paragraphs 132 to 134)*. Upon completion of primary education programmes, children may continue their education at ISCED level 2 (lower secondary education).

123. Programmes classified at ISCED level 1 may be referred to in many ways, for example: primary education, elementary education or basic education (stage 1 or lower grades if an education system has one programme that spans ISCED levels 1 and 2). For international comparability purposes the term 'primary education' is used to label ISCED level 1.

### B.    Classification criteria

124. For the definition of primary education, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a)  Systematic instruction in fundamental knowledge, skills and competencies *(see Paragraph 125)*;

b)  Typical entrance age and duration *(see Paragraph 122)*; and

c)  Instruction organized typically by one main class teacher *(see Paragraph 126)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a)  Part of compulsory education *(see Paragraph 127)*.

125. The boundary between ISCED level 0 and level 1 coincides with the transition point in an education system where systematic teaching and learning in reading, writing and mathematics begins. Although some ISCED level 0 programmes may already provide some introduction in reading, writing and mathematics, these programmes do not yet give children sound basic skills in these areas, and thus do not sufficiently fulfil the criteria for classification as ISCED level 1. The transition from pre-primary to primary education is typically marked by entry into nationally designated primary, elementary or basic educational institutions or programmes.

126. Typically, one main teacher is responsible for a group of children and facilitates the learning process, often organized around units, projects or broad learning areas with an integrated approach (particularly in the early years of primary education). However, a class may have other teachers, especially for certain specialised subjects. Teachers at ISCED level 1 are typically trained in pedagogical approaches for core subjects. In contrast, in ISCED level 2 programmes there may be more than one teacher instructing different subject areas, often with more in-depth training in particular subjects.

127. The beginning of primary education often coincides with the beginning of compulsory education, except for education systems where some or all of pre-primary education is already compulsory. Therefore, where compulsory education is legislated, it starts with ISCED level 1 or before.

## C.    Programmes spanning ISCED levels

128. Education programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 or 1 and 2 need special consideration for classification. In education systems where primary education is part of an education programme of eight or more years, only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 124 should be classified as ISCED level 1. Any grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 104 should be classified as ISCED level 0, while others corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 143 should be classified as ISCED level 2.

129. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 0 and 1, additional criteria to determine the end of ISCED level 0 and the beginning of ISCED level 1 are provided in Paragraph 115.

130. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 1 and 2, the following is recommended:

    i)   for programmes spanning ISCED levels 1 and 2 that are organized in stages, the end of the stage closest to six years after the start of ISCED level 1 should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 1 and 2; and

    ii)  for programmes spanning ISCED levels 1 and 2 that are not divided into stages, only the first six years should be classified as ISCED level 1, while the remaining years are classified as ISCED level 2 *(see Paragraph 149)*.

## D.    Complementary dimensions

131. None.

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 1

132. ISCED level 1 includes programmes suited to individuals with special needs if the programme provides systematic teaching and learning in the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics, irrespective of the age of the participant.

133. This level also includes primary-level second chance or re-integration programmes. Such education programmes usually target individuals who:

    i)  left school before completing primary education, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete primary education; or

    ii)  completed primary education but wish to enter an education programme or occupation for which they are not yet qualified. Participants are typically older than the target age group for ISCED level 1 (but not necessarily adults).

134. Formal and non-formal literacy programmes that are similar in complexity of content to programmes already classified as primary education, aimed at adults and youth older than typical ISCED level 1 students, are also included at this level.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 1

135. All education programmes at ISCED level 1 are coded 100. There are no categories or sub-categories to be differentiated by the second or third digit.

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED levels 0 and 1

136. When coding educational attainment, special consideration is required for the classification of individuals who attended but did not complete primary education.

137. For educational attainment, recognised qualifications from ISCED level 2 programmes which are not considered sufficient completion or partial completion of ISCED level 2 are classified as ISCED level 1 (e.g. programmes with a duration of less than two years at ISCED level 2 or less than eight cumulative years since the start of ISCED level 1).

138. The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED levels 0 and 1 programmes and qualifications from lower secondary education programmes not sufficient for consideration as completion or partial completion of ISCED level 2 are shown in **Table 4**.

## Table 4. Classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED levels 0 to 1 (ISCED-A)

| ISCED-A level | | Category | | Sub-category | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Less than primary education | 01 | Never attended an education programme | 010 | Never attended an education programme |
| | | 02 | Some early childhood education | 020 | Some early childhood education |
| | | 03 | Some primary education (without level completion) | 030 | Some primary education (without level completion) |
| 1 | Primary education | 10 | Primary education | 100 | Including recognised successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial level completion |

## ISCED LEVEL 2  LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION

### A.    Principal characteristics

139. Programmes at ISCED level 2, or lower secondary education, are typically designed to build on the learning outcomes from ISCED level 1. Usually, the aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development upon which education systems may then expand further educational opportunities. Some education systems may already offer vocational education programmes at ISCED level 2 to provide individuals with skills relevant to employment.

140. Programmes at this level are usually organized around a more subject-oriented curriculum, introducing theoretical concepts across a broad range of subjects. Teachers typically have pedagogical training in specific subjects and, more often than at ISCED level 1, a class of students may have several teachers with specialised knowledge of the subjects they teach.

141. ISCED level 2 begins after four to seven years of ISCED level 1 education, with six years of ISCED level 1 being the most common duration. Students enter ISCED level 2 typically between ages 10 and 13 (age 12 being the most common).

142. Programmes classified at ISCED level 2 may be referred to in many ways, for example: secondary school (stage one/lower grades if there is one programme that spans ISCED levels 2 and 3), junior secondary school, middle school, or junior high school. If a programme spans ISCED levels 1 and 2, the terms elementary education or basic school (stage two/upper grades) are often used. For international comparability purposes, the term 'lower secondary education' is used to label ISCED level 2.

### B.    Classification criteria

143. For the definition of lower secondary education, the following criteria are relevant:

   **Main criteria**

   a) Transition to more subject-oriented instruction *(see Paragraph 144)*;

   b) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 145)*; and

   c) Cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1 *(see Paragraph 146)*.

   **Subsidiary criteria**

   a) Typical entry age *(see Paragraph 141)*;

   b) Instruction by subject teachers and qualifications of teachers *(see Paragraph 147)*; and

   c) Relationship with compulsory education *(see Paragraph 148)*.

144. The boundary between ISCED level 1 and ISCED level 2 coincides with the transition point in the education system at which subject-oriented instruction is emphasised.

145. This level requires completion of ISCED level 1 or the ability to study ISCED level 2 content through a combination of prior education as well as life and work experiences. The successful completion of ISCED level 1 or a specific level of achievement may be required for entering some or all ISCED level 2 programmes in a specific country.

146. ISCED level 2 ends after 8 to 11 years of education from the start of ISCED level 1, with 9 years being the most widespread cumulative duration. At the end of ISCED level 2, pupils are typically aged 14 to 16 years (most often 15 years old).

147. The required teacher qualifications may be different at ISCED level 2 compared to ISCED level 1. Teachers at ISCED level 2 are often qualified in one or more specific subjects, as well as in pedagogy. In addition, the organization of instruction can differ from ISCED level 1 as there are more often several teachers for one class, who teach in their respective field or fields of specialisation.

148. In many education systems with compulsory education legislation, the end of lower secondary education coincides with the end of compulsory (general) education.

## C.     Programmes spanning ISCED levels

149. Education programmes spanning ISCED levels 1 and 2 or levels 2 and 3 need special consideration for classification. Only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 143 should be classified as ISCED level 2. Those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 124 should be classified as ISCED level 1, while others corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 166 should be classified as ISCED level 3.

150. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 1 and 2, it is recommended to use the criteria provided in Paragraph 130 to determine the end of ISCED level 1 and the beginning of ISCED level 2.

151. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 2 and 3, the following is recommended:

   i)  for programmes spanning ISCED levels 2 and 3 that are organized in stages, the end of the stage closest to nine years after the start of ISCED level 1 should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 2 and 3; or

   ii) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 2 and 3 that are not divided into stages, only the grades between the end of ISCED level 1 until the end of nine years of schooling after the start of ISCED level 1 should be classified as ISCED level 2. The remaining years are classified as ISCED level 3 *(see Paragraph 171)*.

## D.     Complementary dimensions

152. Two dimensions differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 2:

   • Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 153)*;

   • Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels *(see Paragraph 154)*.

   **Programme orientation**

153. The following two orientation categories are defined in Paragraphs 55 and 54:

   • General; and

   • Vocational.

**Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels**

154. The following four level completion and access sub-categories are defined for ISCED level 2:

    i) *No completion of ISCED level 2 (and thus without direct access to higher ISCED levels)*: short, terminal programmes (or sequence of programmes) with a duration of less than two years at ISCED level 2 or that end after less than eight years of cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1 These do not give access to ISCED level 3. Successful completion of such programmes does not count as completion of ISCED level 2.

    ii) *Partial completion of ISCED level 2 without direct access to higher ISCED levels*: programmes representing at least two years at ISCED level 2 and a cumulative duration of at least eight years since the beginning of ISCED level 1, and which are part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 2 but are not the last programme in the sequence at this level. These programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 3. Successful completion of such programmes is considered as partial completion of the level only (as only the final programme in the sequence is likely to give access to ISCED level 3).

    iii) *Completion of ISCED level 2 without direct access to higher ISCED levels*: programmes with a duration of at least two years at ISCED level 2 and that end after at least eight years of cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1 but which do not give access to ISCED level 3. Although these programmes are considered terminal, their successful completion qualifies for completion of ISCED level 2.

    iv) *Completion of ISCED level 2 with direct access to higher ISCED levels*: any programmes that give direct access to ISCED level 3 regardless of their duration at the level or their cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1.

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 2

155. ISCED level 2 includes programmes suited to individuals with special needs that are designed to build on the fundamental teaching and learning processes that begin at ISCED level 1 and/or to provide skills relevant to employment.

156. This level also includes lower secondary-level second chance or re-integration programmes. Such education programmes usually target individuals who:

    i) left education after completing primary education but before completing lower secondary education, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete a lower secondary education programme; or

    ii) who completed lower secondary education but wish to enter an education programme or occupation for which they are not yet qualified.

Participants are typically older than the target age group for ISCED level 2.

157. This level also includes adult education programmes equivalent in complexity of content to the education given in programmes already classified at this level.

## F. Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 2

158. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for level completion and access to higher ISCED levels. The codes for lower secondary education programmes are shown in **Table 5**.

### Table 5. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 2 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Lower secondary general education | 241 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 242 | Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 243 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 244 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education |
| 25 | Lower secondary vocational education | 251 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 252 | Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 253 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 254 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education |

## G. Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 2

159. For educational attainment, recognised qualifications from ISCED level 2 programmes which are not considered sufficient for completion or partial completion of ISCED level 2 are classified as ISCED level 1 *(see Table 4)*.

160. Similarly, recognised qualifications from ISCED level 3 programmes which are insufficient for consideration as completion or partial completion of ISCED level 3 are classified as ISCED level 2.

161. The classification codes for educational attainment related to lower secondary education and for qualifications from upper secondary programmes insufficient for level or partial level completion are shown in **Table 6**.

## Table 6. Classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 2 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Primary education | 100 | Recognised successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial level completion |
| 24 | Lower secondary general education | 242 | Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 243 | Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 244 | Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education[1] |
| 25 | Lower secondary vocational education | 252 | Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 253 | Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 254 | Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education[1] |
| 1. Including recognised successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme in upper secondary education insufficient for level or partial level completion. | | | |

## ISCED LEVEL 3  UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

### A.  Principal characteristics

162. Programmes at ISCED level 3, or upper secondary education, are typically designed to complete secondary education in preparation for tertiary education or provide skills relevant to employment, or both.

163. Programmes at this level offer students more varied, specialised and in-depth instruction than programmes at ISCED level 2. They are more differentiated, with an increased range of options and streams available. Teachers are often highly qualified in the subjects or fields of specialisation they teach, particularly in the higher grades.

164. ISCED level 3 begins after 8 to 11 years of education since the beginning of ISCED level 1. Pupils enter this level typically between ages 14 and 16. ISCED level 3 programmes usually end 12 or 13 years after the beginning of ISCED level 1 (or around age 17 or 18), with 12 years being the most widespread cumulative duration. However, exit from upper secondary education may range across education systems from usually 11 to 13 years of education since the beginning of ISCED level 1.

165. Programmes classified at ISCED level 3 may be referred to in many ways, for example: secondary school (stage two/upper grades), senior secondary school, or (senior) high school. For international comparability purposes the term 'upper secondary education' is used to label ISCED level 3.

### B.  Classification criteria

166. For the definition of upper secondary education, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Second/final stage of general and vocational secondary education *(see Paragraph 167)*;

b) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 168)*; and

c) Cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1 *(see Paragraph 164)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a) More differentiated programmes, with an increased range of options and streams *(see Paragraph 169)*; and

b) Teacher qualifications *(see Paragraph 170)*.

167. Programmes which form the second/final stage of secondary education may be either general or vocational ISCED level 3 programmes. Some of these programmes allow direct access to ISCED level 4, and/or level 5, 6 or 7. When identifying transition points between ISCED levels, correspondence between general and vocational pathways should be ensured.

168. ISCED level 3 requires the completion of lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) or the ability to handle ISCED level 3 content through a combination of prior education as well as life and work experiences. A specific ISCED level 2 qualification or a specific level of achievement may be required for entering some or all ISCED level 3 programmes.

169. The transition from ISCED level 2 to ISCED level 3 coincides with the transition point in an education system at which programmes offer students more varied, specialised and in-depth instruction in specific subjects or fields. Typically, programmes are more differentiated, and an increased range of options and streams are available.

170. Standards for teacher qualifications may be different at ISCED level 3 compared to ISCED level 2. In addition to pedagogical training, teachers may be more qualified with respect to the subject matter they teach.

## C. Programmes spanning ISCED levels

171. Education programmes spanning ISCED levels 2 and 3 or levels 3 and 5 need special consideration for classification. Only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 166 should be classified as ISCED level 3. Those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 143 should be classified as ISCED level 2, while others corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 211 should be classified as ISCED level 5.

172. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 2 and 3, criteria to determine the end of ISCED level 2 and the beginning of ISCED level 3 are provided in Paragraph 151.

173. If the theoretical duration of a vocational ISCED level 3 programme is two or more years longer than the theoretical duration of a general ISCED level 3 programme in the same education system, the programme should be regarded as spanning upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4) or short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED level 5). The grades, stages or cycles which extend beyond the general ISCED level 3 programme should be classified as ISCED level 4 or 5 depending on the complexity of their content.

## D. Complementary dimensions

174. Two dimensions differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 3:

• Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 175)*; and

• Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels *(see Paragraph 176)*.

**Programme orientation**

175. The following two orientation categories are defined in Paragraphs 55 and 54:

• General; and

• Vocational.

**Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels**

176. The following four level completion and access sub-categories are defined for ISCED level 3:

i) *No completion of ISCED level 3 (and thus without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7)*: short, terminal programmes (or sequence of programmes) with a duration of less than two years at ISCED level 3 or that end after less than 11 years of cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. These programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 5, 6 or 7. Successful completion of such programmes does not count as completion of ISCED level 3. Note also that these programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 4 either.

ii) *Partial completion of ISCED level 3 without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7*: programmes representing at least 2 years at ISCED level 3 and a cumulative duration of at least 11 years since the beginning of ISCED level 1, and which are part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 3 but are not the last programme in the sequence at this level. These programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 5, 6 or 7. Successful completion of such programmes is considered as partial completion of the level only (as only the final programme in the sequence is likely to give access to tertiary education at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7). Note also that these programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 4 either.

iii) *Completion of ISCED level 3 without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7*: programmes with a duration of at least two years at ISCED level 3 and that end after at least 11 years of cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. These programmes may be terminal or give direct access to ISCED level 4. Successful completion of such programmes qualifies for completion of ISCED level 3.

iv) *Completion of ISCED level 3 with direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7*: any programmes that give direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7 regardless of their duration at level 3 or their cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1. These programmes may also give direct access to ISCED level 4.

## E. Other programmes included in ISCED level 3

177. ISCED level 3 includes programmes suited to individuals with special needs that are equivalent in complexity of content to programmes already classified at ISCED level 3.

178. This level can include some second-cycle vocational programmes in cases where the transition points at the end of the second cycle correspond to transition points between levels in other, mainly general, pathways offered in the system.

179. This level also includes upper secondary-level second chance or re-integration programmes. Such education programmes usually target individuals who:

i) left school before completing upper secondary education, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete upper secondary education; or

ii) completed upper secondary education but wish to enter a programme or occupation for which they are not yet qualified.

Participants are typically older than the target age group for ISCED level 3.

180. This level also includes adult education programmes equivalent in complexity of content to the education given in programmes already classified at this level.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 3

181. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for level completion and access to higher ISCED levels. Not all combinations of orientation and completion and access exist or are widespread across education systems. The codes for upper secondary education programmes are shown in **Table 7**.

### Table 7. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 3 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 34 | Upper secondary general education | 341 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 342 | Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 343 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| | | 344 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| 35 | Upper secondary vocational education | 351 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 352 | Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 353 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| | | 354 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 3

182. For educational attainment, recognised qualifications from ISCED level 3 programmes which are not considered as sufficient for ISCED level 3 completion are classified at ISCED level 2.

183. Similarly, recognised qualifications from ISCED level 4 programmes which are insufficient for consideration as ISCED level 4 completion are classified as ISCED level 3.

184. The classification codes for educational attainment related to upper secondary education programmes and qualifications are shown in **Table 8**.

## Table 8. Classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 3 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Lower secondary general education | 244 | Recognised successful completion of an upper secondary general education programme insufficient for level or partial level completion |
| 25 | Lower secondary vocational education | 254 | Recognised successful completion of an upper secondary vocational education programme insufficient for level or partial level completion |
| 34 | Upper secondary general education | 342 | Partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 343 | Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| | | 344 | Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1] (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| 35 | Upper secondary vocational education | 352 | Partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education or tertiary education |
| | | 353 | Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| | | 354 | Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1] (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education) |
| 1. Including recognised successful completion of a stage of a programme in post-secondary non-tertiary education insufficient for level completion. | | | |

## ISCED LEVEL 4  POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

### A.    Principal characteristics

185. Post-secondary non-tertiary education provides learning experiences building on secondary education, preparing for labour market entry as well as tertiary education. It aims at the individual acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies lower than the level of complexity characteristic of tertiary education. Programmes at ISCED level 4, or post-secondary non-tertiary education, are typically designed to provide individuals who completed ISCED level 3 with non-tertiary qualifications required for progression to tertiary education or for employment when their ISCED level 3 qualification does not grant such access. For example, graduates from general ISCED level 3 programmes may choose to complete a non-tertiary vocational qualification; or graduates from vocational ISCED level 3 programmes may choose to increase their level of qualifications or specialise further. The content of ISCED level 4 programmes is not sufficiently complex to be regarded as tertiary education, although it is clearly post-secondary.

186. The completion of an ISCED level 3 programme is required to enter ISCED level 4 programmes. However, these entry requirements may be lower than for tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7.

187. Usually, programmes at this level are designed for direct labour market entry. In some education systems, there are general programmes at this level. Such programmes typically target students who have completed ISCED level 3 but who want to increase their opportunities to enter tertiary education.

188. Programmes classified at ISCED level 4 may be referred to in many ways, for example: technician diploma, primary professional education, or *préparation aux carrières administratives*. For international comparability purposes the term 'post-secondary non-tertiary education' is used to label ISCED level 4.

### B.    Classification criteria

189. For the definition of post-secondary non-tertiary education, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Orientation *(see Paragraph 190)*;

b) Complexity of content higher than ISCED level 3 and below the level of tertiary education *(see Paragraph 191)*; and

c) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 186)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

None.

190. ISCED level 4 programmes are not considered to be tertiary education and are typically vocational and terminal programmes that prepare for the labour market. General programmes at this level can exist in some education systems. Programmes designed to review the content of ISCED level 3 programmes – for example, with the aim of preparing students for tertiary education entrance examinations – should be included in ISCED level 3.

191. ISCED level 4 programmes often serve to broaden – rather than deepen – the knowledge, skills and competencies of participants who have completed a programme at ISCED level 3. Programmes are often not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED level 3, but the content is typically more specialised or detailed than at the upper secondary level of education. Programmes are clearly less advanced than at the tertiary level and can be provided in a variety of institutional settings, not only those considered as post-secondary non-tertiary institutions.

## C.    Programmes spanning ISCED levels

192. Not applicable.

## D.    Complementary dimensions

193. Two dimensions differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 4:

• Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 194)*; and

• Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels *(see Paragraph 195)*.

**Programme orientation**

194. The following two orientation categories are defined in Paragraphs 55 and 54:

• General; and

• Vocational.

**Level completion and access to higher ISCED levels**

195. The following three level completion and access sub-categories are defined for ISCED level 4:

• *No completion of ISCED level 4*: modules or stages of programmes which are too short for level completion. These do not give access to first tertiary education programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7. Successful completion of such modules or stages does not count as completion of ISCED level 4.

• *Completion of ISCED level 4 without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7*: programmes designed primarily for direct labour market entry.

• *Completion of ISCED level 4 with direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7*: programmes designed primarily to expand access to tertiary education.

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 4

196. This level includes adult education programmes similar in complexity of content to the education given in programmes already classified at this level.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 4

197. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for completion and access. Not all combinations of categories and sub-categories exist or are widespread across education systems. The classification for post-secondary non-tertiary education is shown in **Table 9**.

## Table 9. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 4 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 44 | Post-secondary non-tertiary general education | 441 | Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 443 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 444 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education |
| 45 | Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education | 451 | Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 453 | Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 454 | Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education |

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 4

198.   For educational attainment, recognised intermediate qualifications from successful completion of a stage of an ISCED level 5 programme which are not considered as sufficient for completion of ISCED level 5 are classified at ISCED level 4.

199.   The classification codes for educational attainment related to post-secondary non-tertiary education qualifications are shown in **Table 10**.

## Table 10. Classification codes for educational attainment at ISCED level 4 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 34 | Upper secondary general education | 344 | Recognised successful completion of a stage of a post-secondary non-tertiary general programme insufficient for level completion |
| 35 | Upper secondary vocational education | 354 | Recognised successful completion of a stage of a post-secondary non-tertiary vocational programme insufficient for level completion |
| 44 | Post-secondary non-tertiary general education | 443 | Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 444 | Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1] |
| 45 | Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education | 453 | Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | 454 | Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1] |

1. Including recognised successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme in short-cycle tertiary education insufficient for level completion.
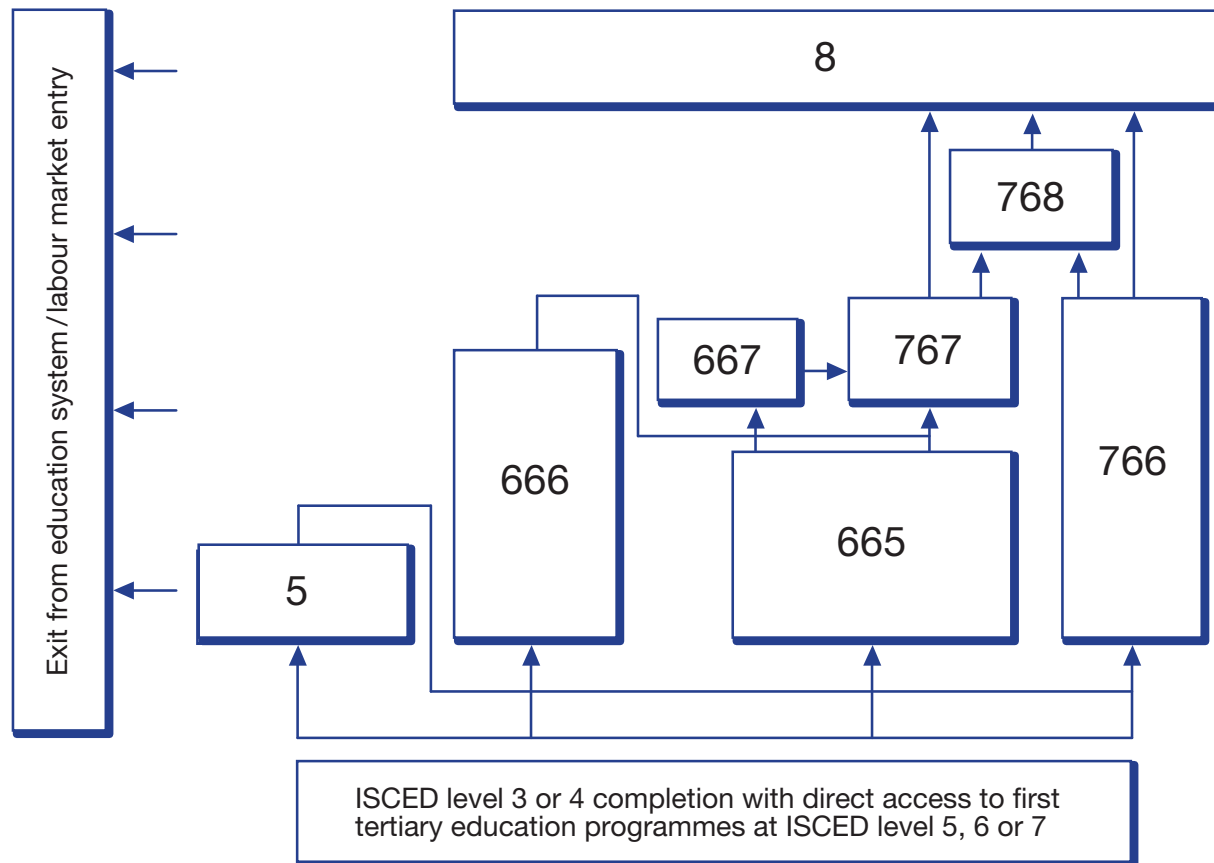
## TERTIARY EDUCATION

200. Tertiary education builds on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialised fields of education. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialisation. Tertiary education includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education. It comprises ISCED levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are labelled as short-cycle tertiary education, Bachelor's or equivalent level, Master's or equivalent level, and doctoral or equivalent level, respectively. The content of programmes at the tertiary level is more complex and advanced than in lower ISCED levels.

201. First programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7 require the successful completion of ISCED level 3 programmes that give direct access to first tertiary education programmes. Access may also be possible from ISCED level 4. In addition to qualification requirements, entry into education programmes at these levels may depend on subject choice and/or grades achieved at ISCED level 3 or 4. Further, it may be necessary to take and succeed in entrance examinations.

202. In tertiary education, an education programme is always classified at the same level as the level of the qualification awarded on its successful completion (unless a programme is partly classified as ISCED level 3, see Paragraph 173). Therefore, in contrast to ISCED levels 0, 1, 2 and 3, the concept of programmes spanning ISCED levels is not applicable for the tertiary levels.

203. There is usually a clear hierarchy between qualifications granted by tertiary education programmes. However, unlike programmes at ISCED levels 1, 2, 3 and 4, national programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 and 7 can exist in parallel rather than as one ISCED level building sequentially on another. Completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme may provide access to a range of first tertiary education programmes at ISCED level 5, 6 or 7, depending on the availability in a specific education system and/or on additional entry requirements which may be specified. These include:

    • short-cycle tertiary education programmes at ISCED level 5 (at least two years);

    • Bachelor's or equivalent first degree programmes at ISCED level 6 (three to four years);

    • Bachelor's or equivalent long first degree programmes at ISCED level 6 (more than four years); or

    • Master's or equivalent long first degree programmes at ISCED level 7 (at least five years).

204. The transition between programmes at the tertiary level is not always clearly distinguished and it may be possible to combine programmes and transfer credits from one programme to another. In certain cases, credits received from previously completed education programmes may also be counted towards the completion of a programme at a higher ISCED level. For example, having obtained credits in an ISCED level 5 programme can reduce the number of credits or study duration required to complete a level 6 programme. In some systems, individuals may transfer to an education programme at ISCED level 6 after completion of an ISCED level 5 programme, which may reduce the time required for an individual to complete an ISCED level 6 programme. Others may directly enter ISCED level 6 or 7 from ISCED level 3. In many education systems, most students must first complete ISCED level 6 before gaining entry into ISCED level 7.

205. The successful completion of ISCED level 7 is usually required for entry into ISCED level 8.

206. **Figure 1** illustrates the categories of tertiary education programmes and the pathways between them.

**Figure 1. Tertiary education pathways in ISCED**

## ISCED LEVEL 5  SHORT-CYCLE TERTIARY EDUCATION

### A.    Principal characteristics

207.  Programmes at ISCED level 5, or short-cycle tertiary education, are often designed to provide participants with professional knowledge, skills and competencies. Typically, they are practically-based, occupationally-specific and prepare students to enter the labour market. However, these programmes may also provide a pathway to other tertiary education programmes. Academic tertiary education programmes below the level of a Bachelor's programme or equivalent are also classified as ISCED level 5.

208.  Entry into ISCED level 5 programmes requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3 or 4 with access to tertiary education. Programmes at ISCED level 5 have more complex content than programmes at ISCED levels 3 and 4, but they are shorter and usually less theoretically-oriented than ISCED level 6 programmes.

209.  Although ISCED level 5 programmes are usually designed to prepare for employment, they may give credit for transfer into ISCED level 6 or 7 programmes. Upon completion of these ISCED level 5 programmes, individuals may in some education systems continue their education at ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) or long first degree ISCED level 7 programmes (Master's or equivalent level).

210.  Programmes classified at ISCED level 5 may be referred to in many ways, for example: (higher) technical education, community college education, technician or advanced/higher vocational training, associate degree, or *bac*+2. For international comparability purposes the term 'short-cycle tertiary education' is used to label ISCED level 5.

### B.    Classification criteria

211.  For the definition of short-cycle tertiary education, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Content of short-cycle tertiary education programmes *(see Paragraph 212)*;

b) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 208)*; and

c) Minimum duration of level *(see Paragraph 213)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a) Institutional transition point *(see Paragraph 214)*; and

b) Typical duration of level *(see Paragraph 213)*.

212.  ISCED level 5 captures the lowest level of tertiary education. The content of programmes at this level is more complex than in secondary (ISCED level 3) or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4), but less than in ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) programmes.

213.  ISCED level 5 has a minimum duration of two years and is typically but not always shorter than three years. For education systems with modular programmes where qualifications are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required.

214. The transition point from non-tertiary to tertiary educational institutions can help to identify the boundary between upper secondary education (ISCED level 3), post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4) and tertiary education. ISCED level 5 programmes are often provided by different educational institutions than ISCED level 6, 7 and 8 programmes.

## C.    Programmes spanning ISCED levels

215. Education programmes spanning ISCED levels 3 and 5 need special consideration for classification. Only those grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 211 should be classified as ISCED level 5. Grades, stages or cycles corresponding to the criteria given in Paragraph 166 should be classified as ISCED level 3. If use of the classification criteria does not result in a clear boundary between ISCED levels 3 and 5, criteria to determine the end of ISCED level 3 and the beginning of ISCED level 5 are provided in Paragraph 173.

## D.    Complementary dimensions

216. Two dimensions differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 5:

- Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 217)*; and

- Level completion *(see Paragraph 218)*.

**Programme orientation**

217. The following two orientation categories are defined in Paragraphs 55 and 54:

- General; and

- Vocational.

When definitions for academic and professional programmes have been developed, they will be used for the orientation categories at ISCED level 5 instead of general and vocational.

**Level completion**

218. Two level completion categories are defined for ISCED level 5:

- *No completion of ISCED level 5*: stage (or programme) at ISCED level 5 of less than two years' duration, therefore insufficient for completion of ISCED level 5.

- *Completion of ISCED level 5*: programme at ISCED level 5 with duration of two or more years, therefore sufficient for completion of ISCED level 5.

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 5

219. This level includes adult or continuing education programmes equivalent in complexity of content to the education given in programmes already classified at this level.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 5

220. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for level completion. The codes to be used for ISCED level 5 are provided in **Table 11**.

## Table 11. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 5 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 54 | Short-cycle tertiary general education[1] | 541 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 544 | Sufficient for level completion |
| 55 | Short-cycle tertiary vocational education[1] | 551 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 554 | Sufficient for level completion |
| 1. To be used at ISCED level 5 in the absence of internationally agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level. | | | |

## G.   Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 5

221.   For educational attainment, recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of a stage (or programme) at ISCED level 5 which are insufficient for ISCED level 5 completion are classified at ISCED level 4. Participation without recognised successful completion in a programme at ISCED level 5 is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.

222.   Recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of a stage of programmes (prior to the first degree) are not considered as sufficient for ISCED level 6 completion and are classified at ISCED level 5 for educational attainment.

223.   The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 5 are provided in **Table 12**.

## Table 12. Classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 5 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion and access to higher ISCED levels) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 44 | Post-secondary non-tertiary general education | 444 | Recognised successful completion of a short-cycle tertiary general[1] programme (or stage) insufficient for level completion |
| 45 | Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education | 454 | Recognised successful completion of a short-cycle tertiary vocational[1] programme (or stage) insufficient for level completion |
| 54 | Short-cycle tertiary general education[1] | 540 | Not further defined[2] |
| 55 | Short-cycle tertiary vocational education[1] | 550 | Not further defined[2] |
| 56 | Short-cycle tertiary education, orientation unspecified[3] | 560 | Not further defined[2] |
| 1. To be used at ISCED level 5 in the absence of internationally agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level. | | | |
| 2. Including recognised successful completion of a programme in short-cycle tertiary education sufficient for ISCED 5 level completion or of a programme or stage of a programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level which is insufficient for ISCED 6 level completion. | | | |
| 3. To be used at ISCED level 6 in the absence of internationally agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level. | | | |

## ISCED LEVEL 6  BACHELOR'S OR EQUIVALENT LEVEL

### A.    Principal characteristics

224.  Programmes at ISCED level 6, or Bachelor's or equivalent level, are often designed to provide participants with intermediate academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a first degree or equivalent qualification. Programmes at this level are typically theoretically-based but may include practical components and are informed by state of the art research and/or best professional practice. They are traditionally offered by universities and equivalent tertiary educational institutions.

225.  Instruction at this level often takes the form of lectures by staff who are typically required to have attained ISCED levels 7 or 8 or have achieved experience as a senior professional in the field of work. Programmes at this level do not necessarily involve the completion of a research project or thesis, but if they do, it is less advanced, less independent or is undertaken with more guidance than those at ISCED level 7 or 8.

226.  Entry into these programmes normally requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education. Entry may depend on subject choice and/or grades achieved at ISCED levels 3 and/or 4. Additionally, it may be required to take and succeed in entry examinations. Entry or transfer into ISCED level 6 is also sometimes possible after the successful completion of ISCED level 5. Upon completion of ISCED level 6 programmes, individuals may continue their education at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level), although not all ISCED level 6 programmes provide access to ISCED level 7. ISCED level 6 programmes do not usually give direct access to programmes at ISCED level 8 (doctoral or equivalent level).

227.  Programmes classified at ISCED level 6 may be referred to in many ways, for example: Bachelor's programme, *licence*, or first university cycle. However, it is important to note that programmes with a similar name to 'bachelor' should only be included in ISCED level 6 if they satisfy the criteria described in Paragraph 228. For international comparability purposes the term 'Bachelor's or equivalent level' is used to label ISCED level 6.

### B.    Classification criteria

228.  For the definition of Bachelor's or equivalent level, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Theoretically- and/or professionally-based content *(see Paragraph 224)*;

b) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 226)*;

c) Minimum cumulative duration of (first degree) programme *(see Paragraph 229)*; and

d) Position in the national degree and qualification structure *(see Paragraph 230)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a) Staff qualifications *(see Paragraph 231)*; and

b) No direct access to ISCED level 8 programmes *(see Paragraph 226)*.

229. First degree programmes at this level typically have a duration of three to four years of full-time study at the tertiary level. For systems in which degrees are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required.

230. Programmes at this level typically lead to first degrees and equivalent qualifications in tertiary education (although individuals may have completed an ISCED level 5 qualification prior to enrolling in an ISCED level 6 programme). They may include practical components and/or involve periods of work experience as well as theoretically-based studies. Long first degrees of more than four years' duration are included at this level if equivalent to Bachelor's programmes in terms of complexity of content. In addition, programmes leading to a second or further degree may be included in ISCED level 6 if they are equivalent in complexity of content to programmes already classified at this level in the same education system *and* fulfil the other main criteria. Second or further degree programmes at this level are typically of one to two years' duration, often professionally-oriented offering more specialisation than the first degree, but do not include substantially more complex content. Programmes at ISCED level 6 do not necessarily require the preparation of a substantive thesis or dissertation.

231. Where appropriate, the requirement of ISCED level 8 qualifications for some of the teaching staff may be a good proxy criterion for education programmes at this level in education systems where such a requirement exists. This serves to distinguish ISCED level 5 programmes from ISCED level 6 programmes.

## C.  Programmes spanning ISCED levels

232. Not applicable.

## D.  Complementary dimensions

233. Two dimensions may be used to differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 6:

- Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 234)*; and

- Programme duration and position in the national degree and qualification structure *(see Paragraph 235)*.

**Programme orientation**

234. The following two orientation categories are available:

- Academic; and

- Professional.

**Programme duration and position in the national degree and qualification structure**

235. The following four sub-categories for programme duration and position in the national degree and qualification structure are defined for ISCED level 6:

- *Stage (or programme) within a first degree at Bachelor's or equivalent level* with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of less than three years, therefore insufficient for completion of ISCED level 6;

- *First degree programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level* with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of three to four years;

- *Long first degree programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level* with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of more than four years; and

- *Second or further degree programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme).*

### E.   Other programmes included in ISCED level 6

236. This level includes adult or continuing education programmes equivalent in complexity of content to the education given in programmes already classified at this level.

### F.   Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 6

237. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for programme duration/position in the national degree and qualification structure combined. The codes to be used for ISCED level 6 are provided in **Table 13**.

### Table 13. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 6 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (duration/position) | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 64 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, academic | 641 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 645 | First degree (3-4 years) |
| | | 646 | Long first degree (more than 4 years) |
| | | 647 | Second or further degree, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme |
| 65 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, professional | 651 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 655 | First degree (3-4 years) |
| | | 656 | Long first degree (more than 4 years) |
| | | 657 | Second or further degree, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme |
| 66 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[1] | 661 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 665 | First degree (3-4 years) |
| | | 666 | Long first degree (more than 4 years) |
| | | 667 | Second or further degree, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme |

1. To be used at ISCED level 6 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

## G.　Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 6

238.　For educational attainment, recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages of programmes (prior to the first degree) which are insufficient for ISCED level 6 completion are classified at ISCED level 5. Participation without recognised successful completion in a first programme at ISCED level 6 is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.

239.　Recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages of a first programme at ISCED level 7 (at the Master's or equivalent level – either a long first degree, or a second degree following a Bachelor's programme) which are insufficient for ISCED level 7 completion are classified at ISCED level 6 for educational attainment.

240.　The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 6 are shown in **Table 14**.

### Table 14. Classification codes for educational attainment at ISCED level 6 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 54 | Short-cycle tertiary general education | 540 | Not further defined[1] |
| 55 | Short-cycle tertiary vocational education | 550 | Not further defined[1] |
| 56 | Short-cycle tertiary education, orientation unspecified[2] | 560 | Not further defined[1] |
| 64 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, academic | 640 | Not further defined[3] |
| 65 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, professional | 650 | Not further defined[3] |
| 66 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[2] | 660 | Not further defined[3] |

1. Recognised successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 6 level completion.

2. To be used at ISCED levels 6 and 7 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

3. Including recognised successful completion of a programme at Bachelor's or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 6 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at Master's or equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 7 level completion.

## ISCED LEVEL 7  MASTER'S OR EQUIVALENT LEVEL

### A.    Principal characteristics

241.  Programmes at ISCED level 7, or Master's or equivalent level, are often designed to provide participants with advanced academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a second degree or equivalent qualification. Programmes at this level may have a substantial research component but do not yet lead to the award of a doctoral qualification. Typically, programmes at this level are theoretically-based but may include practical components and are informed by state of the art research and/or best professional practice. They are traditionally offered by universities and other tertiary educational institutions.

242.  Instruction at this level often takes the form of lectures by staff who are typically required to have attained ISCED levels 7 or 8. Programmes at this level may involve the completion of a research project or thesis that is more advanced than those expected at ISCED level 6 and less advanced than those expected at ISCED level 8.

243.  Entry into ISCED level 7 programmes preparing for a second or further degree normally requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 6 or 7 programme. In the case of long programmes that prepare for a first degree equivalent to a Master's degree, entry requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education. Entry into such programmes may depend on subject choice and/or grades achieved at ISCED levels 3 and/or 4. Additionally, it may be required to take and succeed in entry examinations. ISCED level 7 programmes have a significantly more complex content than programmes at ISCED level 6 and are usually more specialised. Upon completion, individuals may continue their education at ISCED level 8 (doctoral-level education) although not all ISCED level 7 programmes give direct access to ISCED level 8.

244.  Programmes classified at ISCED level 7 may be referred to in many ways, for example: master programmes or *magister*. However, it is important to note that programmes with a similar name to 'master' should only be included in ISCED level 7 if they satisfy the criteria described in Paragraph 245. For international comparability purposes the term 'Master's or equivalent level' is used to label ISCED level 7.

### B.    Classification criteria

245.  For the definition of Master's or equivalent level, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Theoretically- and/or professionally-based content *(see Paragraph 241)*;

b) Position in the national degree and qualification structure *(see Paragraphs 246 and 247)*; and

c) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 243)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a) Minimum cumulative duration of long first degree programme *(see Paragraph 247)*; and

b) Direct access to ISCED level 8 programmes *(see Paragraph 249).*

246. Programmes at this level typically prepare for a second or further degree, following a first degree from ISCED level 6 or 7 programmes. Equivalent qualifications, such as post-graduate professional qualifications, are also classified at ISCED level 7 unless already classified at ISCED level 6 *(see Paragraph 230)*.

247. Programmes of at least five years' duration preparing for a long first degree/qualification are included at this level if they are equivalent to Master's-level programmes in terms of their complexity of content. Such programmes usually involve the preparation of a substantive thesis or dissertation. In this case, the degree/qualification awarded gives direct access to ISCED level 8 or the programme is equivalent to a second or further degree programme already classified at the ISCED 7 level. Highly-specialised professional studies of similar or greater cumulative duration in tertiary education (e.g. medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and in some cases law or engineering) which cover – in both breadth and depth – an equivalent amount of content, though typically without the preparation of a thesis or dissertation, are also included at this level.

248. Second or further degree programmes at this level typically have a duration of one to four years of full-time study. For education systems in which degrees are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required. The cumulative duration of studies at the tertiary level thus lasts from usually five to eight years or even longer.

249. Tertiary education programmes providing direct access to ISCED level 8 are normally classified at ISCED level 7. However, not all ISCED level 7 programmes provide access to ISCED level 8.

## C.  Programmes spanning ISCED levels

250. Not applicable.

## D.  Complementary dimensions

251. Two dimensions differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 7:

- Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 252)*; and

- Position in the national degree and qualification structure *(see Paragraph 253)*.

**Programme orientation**

252. The following two orientation categories are available:

- Academic; and

- Professional.

**Position in the national degree and qualification structure**

253. The following four categories for a programme's position in the national degree and qualification structure are defined for ISCED level 7:

- *Stage (or programme) within a first degree* at Master's or equivalent level with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of less than five years, therefore insufficient for completion of ISCED level 7;

- *Long first degree programme at a Master's or equivalent level* with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of at least five years (that does not require prior tertiary education);

- *Second or further degree programme at Master's or equivalent level* (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme); and

- *Second or further degree programme at Master's or equivalent level* (following successful completion of another Master's or equivalent programme).

## E.    Other programmes included in ISCED level 7

254. ISCED level 7 includes programmes leading to the award of research qualifications that are designed explicitly to train participants in conducting original research but are below the level of a doctoral degree. These programmes will often meet many of the same criteria as an ISCED level 8 programme, although they tend to be of shorter duration (cumulative duration of five to six years from the start of tertiary education), typically lack the level of independence required of students seeking an advanced research qualification, and prepare for entry into ISCED level 8 programmes. Within the level, they are classified depending on their position in the national degree and qualification structure.

## F.    Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 7

255. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using categories for orientation and sub-categories for position in the national degree and qualification structure. The codes to be used for ISCED level 7 are shown in **Table 15**.

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 7

256. For educational attainment, recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) within a first degree at a Master's or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 7 completion are classified at ISCED level 6. Participation without recognised successful completion in any first degree at ISCED level 7 or a second or further degree at ISCED level 7 following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.

257. Recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) at the doctoral or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 8 completion are classified at ISCED level 7 for educational attainment.

258. The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 7 are shown in **Table 16**.

## Table 15. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 7 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (position) | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 74 | Master's or equivalent level, academic | 741 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 746 | Long first degree (at least 5 years) |
| | | 747 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) |
| | | 748 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Master's or equivalent programme) |
| 75 | Master's or equivalent level, professional | 751 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 756 | Long first degree (at least 5 years) |
| | | 757 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) |
| | | 758 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Master's or equivalent programme) |
| 76 | Master's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[1] | 761 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 766 | Long first degree (at least 5 years) |
| | | 767 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) |
| | | 768 | Second or further degree (following successful completion of a Master's or equivalent programme) |

1. To be used at ISCED level 7 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

## Table 16. Classification codes for educational attainment at ISCED level 7 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 64 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, academic | 640 | Not further defined[1] |
| 65 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, professional | 650 | Not further defined[1] |
| 66 | Bachelor's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[2] | 660 | Not further defined[1] |
| 74 | Master's or equivalent level, academic | 740 | Not further defined[3] |
| 75 | Master's or equivalent level, professional | 750 | Not further defined[3] |
| 76 | Master's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[2] | 760 | Not further defined[3] |

1. Recognised successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at Master's or equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 7 level completion.

2. To be used at ISCED levels 6 to 8 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

3. Including recognised successful completion of a programme at Master's or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 7 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at doctoral or equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 8 level completion.

# ISCED LEVEL 8  DOCTORAL OR EQUIVALENT LEVEL

## A.    Principal characteristics

259.   Programmes at ISCED level 8, or doctoral or equivalent level, are designed primarily to lead to an advanced research qualification. Programmes at this ISCED level are devoted to advanced study and original research and are typically offered only by research-oriented tertiary educational institutions such as universities. Doctoral programmes exist in both academic and professional fields.

260.   ISCED level 8 usually concludes with the submission and defence of a thesis, dissertation or equivalent written work of publishable quality, representing a significant contribution to knowledge in the respective field of study. Therefore, these programmes are typically based on research and not only on course work. In some education systems, ISCED level 8 programmes contain very limited course work, or none at all, and individuals working towards a doctoral degree engage in research mostly independently or in small groups with varying degrees of supervision. In some education systems, doctoral research is undertaken by individuals employed by the university as junior researchers or research assistants, in addition to their being enrolled as doctoral students.

261.   Entry into ISCED level 8 programmes or junior research positions normally requires the successful completion of specific ISCED level 7 programmes. ISCED level 8 qualifications give access to professions with high academic skill requirements and research posts in government and industry, as well as research and teaching positions in educational institutions offering education at ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8.

262.   Programmes classified at ISCED level 8 may be referred to in many ways, for example: PhD, DPhil, D.Lit, D.Sc, LL.D, Doctorate or similar terms. However, it is important to note that programmes with a similar name to 'doctor' should only be included in ISCED level 8 if they satisfy the criteria described in Paragraph 263. For international comparability purposes, the term 'doctoral or equivalent level' is used to label ISCED level 8.

## B.    Classification criteria

263.   For the definition of doctoral or equivalent level, the following criteria are relevant:

**Main criteria**

a) Written work requirements *(see Paragraph 264)*;

b) Entry requirements *(see Paragraph 261)*; and

c) Minimum duration of level *(see Paragraph 265)*.

**Subsidiary criteria**

a) Doctoral degree/qualification required for specific occupations *(see Paragraph 266)*.

264. Successful completion of an ISCED level 8 programme requires the submission of a thesis, dissertation or equivalent written work of publishable quality that is the product of original research and represents a significant contribution to knowledge in the respective field of study.

265. ISCED level 8 requires at least three years of full-time equivalent study, making a total cumulative duration of at least seven years of full-time education at the tertiary level.

266. Achievement of an ISCED level 8 qualification is often a condition for entering into faculty posts in educational institutions that offer ISCED level 6, 7 and 8 programmes, as well as research posts in government and industry.

## C.　Programmes spanning ISCED levels

267. Not applicable.

## D.　Complementary dimensions

268. One dimension may be used to differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 8:

- Programme orientation *(see Paragraph 270)*.

**Programme orientation**

269. The following two orientation categories are available:

- Academic; and

- Professional.

## E.　Other programmes included in ISCED level 8

270. Second advanced research qualifications or higher doctorates may also be classified at ISCED level 8. These qualifications require the submission of a second substantial piece of research (further to the first doctoral thesis) usually at a considerably later stage of an academic career and often without formal supervision. Examples are the *habilitation* or *doktor nauk* qualifications, although most education systems only have one advanced research qualification granting doctoral degrees or equivalent qualifications. They are not usually linked with an education programme (i.e. candidates are not usually enrolled in a programme which leads to these qualifications). Second research qualifications are not coded separately within ISCED. Honorary doctorates given by universities on the basis of other considerations and not any research work are not covered under ISCED 8.

## F.　Classification of education programmes at ISCED level 8

271. Education programmes at ISCED level 8 are either full doctoral-level programmes or stages (or programmes) at the doctoral level insufficient for completion of ISCED level 8. The use of one complementary dimension allows for reporting using categories for orientation. The codes to be used for ISCED level 8 are shown in **Table 17**.

## Table 17. Classification codes for education programmes at ISCED level 8 (ISCED-P)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category (level completion) | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 84 | Doctoral or equivalent level, academic | 841 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 844 | Sufficient for level completion |
| 85 | Doctoral or equivalent level, professional | 851 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 854 | Sufficient for level completion |
| 86 | Doctoral or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[1] | 861 | Insufficient for level completion |
| | | 864 | Sufficient for level completion |

1. To be used at ISCED level 8 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

## G.    Classification of educational attainment at ISCED level 8

272.    For educational attainment, recognised intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) within a first degree at doctoral or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 8 completion are classified at ISCED level 7. Participation without recognised successful completion in any first programme at ISCED level 8 is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.

273.    The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 8 are shown in **Table 18**.

## Table 18. Classification codes for educational attainment at ISCED level 8 (ISCED-A)

| Category (orientation) | | Sub-category | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 74 | Master's or equivalent level, academic | 740 | Not further defined[1] |
| 75 | Master's or equivalent level, professional | 750 | Not further defined[1] |
| 76 | Master's or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[2] | 760 | Not further defined[1] |
| 84 | Doctoral or equivalent level, academic | 840 | Not further defined |
| 85 | Doctoral or equivalent level, professional | 850 | Not further defined |
| 86 | Doctoral or equivalent level, orientation unspecified[2] | 860 | Not further defined |

1. Recognised successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at doctoral or equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 8 level completion.

2. To be used at ISCED levels 7 and 8 in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

## SECTION 10  CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ISCED 2011 AND ISCED 1997 LEVELS

274. This section describes the correspondence (or concordance) between levels in the ISCED 2011 classification and the earlier framework, ISCED 1997.

275. In ISCED 2011, level 0 covers early childhood education for all ages, including very young children. Programmes are sub-classified into two categories depending on the level of complexity of the educational content: early childhood educational development (code 010) and pre-primary education (code 020). Early childhood educational development programmes (code 010) are generally designed for children younger than 3 years. It is introduced as a new category in ISCED 2011 and is not covered by ISCED 1997. Pre-primary education (code 020) corresponds exactly to level 0 in ISCED 1997.

276. Level 1, primary education, in ISCED 2011 corresponds to level 1 in ISCED 1997.

277. ISCED 2011 levels 2 and 3, lower secondary and upper secondary education, correspond mainly to levels 2 and 3 in ISCED 1997. However, due to the clarification of criteria and subsidiary criteria, ISCED 2011 may be implemented differently than ISCED 1997 (i.e. with some programmes being classified at different levels than before). Such differences may affect time series data for some countries.

278. ISCED 2011 simplifies the complementary dimensions at ISCED levels 2 and 3 compared to 1997:

- Programme orientation in ISCED 2011 differentiates only between vocational programmes and general programmes. ISCED 1997 classified pre-vocational education separately. Such programmes do not provide labour market-relevant qualifications and are now mainly classified as general education;

- ISCED 2011 identifies only one group of programmes that provides access to higher ISCED levels. By comparison, ISCED 1997 differentiated access to education at higher ISCED levels in categories A and B, dependent on the type of subsequent education. The ISCED 2011 sub-category 'level completion with access to higher ISCED levels' corresponds to the combined categories A and B in ISCED 1997;

- ISCED 2011 sub-classifies programmes which do not provide access to higher ISCED levels into the sub-categories 'no level completion', 'partial level completion' and 'level completion'. These three sub-categories in ISCED 2011 typically correspond to category C and ISCED level 3 categories 'C short' and 'C long' in ISCED 1997.

279. ISCED 2011 level 4, post-secondary non-tertiary education, corresponds largely to level 4 in ISCED 1997. However, programmes leading to a qualification equivalent to upper secondary general education are classified as level 3 in ISCED 2011, while they were often classified as level 4 in ISCED 1997. In addition, due to the clarification of criteria and subsidiary criteria, ISCED 2011 may be implemented differently than ISCED 1997. Such differences may affect time series data for some countries.

280. ISCED 2011 simplifies the orientation dimensions at ISCED level 4 as for levels 2 and 3 *(see Paragraphs 194, 153, 175)*. The ISCED 2011 sub-categories 'access to higher ISCED levels' and 'no access to higher ISCED levels' correspond to the destinations A and B, respectively, in ISCED 1997.

281. ISCED 2011 has four levels of tertiary education compared to two levels in ISCED 1997. Levels 5, 6 and 7 in ISCED 2011 together correspond to level 5 in ISCED 1997. Level 8 in ISCED 2011 corresponds to level 6 in ISCED 1997.

282. ISCED 2011 simplifies the complementary dimensions at the tertiary ISCED levels compared to 1997:

- At level 5 in ISCED 2011, vocational programmes are differentiated from general programmes at the second digit. In ISCED 1997, this differentiation did not exist. It will also be possible to distinguish between academic and professional orientations within ISCED 2011 levels 6 to 8 once internationally-agreed definitions have been developed.

- At levels 6 and 7 of ISCED 2011, the third digit of the classification distinguishes programmes according to duration and position in the national degree and qualification structure for the calculation of statistics such as entry and graduation rates. In ISCED 1997, programme orientation or 'type of programme' was used to sub-classify ISCED 5A into first degree programmes and second and further degree programmes (now corresponding to ISCED 2011 levels 6 and 7 combined). The third digit of the programme classification distinguishes between first degree and second or further degrees at both levels.

283. **Table 19** shows the correspondence (or concordance) between ISCED levels in the 2011 and 1997 versions.

### Table 19. Correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997 levels

| ISCED 2011 | ISCED 1997 |
|---|---|
| ISCED 01 | - |
| ISCED 02 | ISCED 0 |
| ISCED level 1 | ISCED level 1 |
| ISCED level 2 | ISCED level 2 |
| ISCED level 3* | ISCED level 3 |
| ISCED level 4* | ISCED level 4 |
| ISCED level 5 | ISCED level 5 |
| ISCED level 6 | |
| ISCED level 7 | |
| ISCED level 8 | ISCED level 6 |
| * Content of category has been modified slightly. | |

284. **Table 20** and **Table 21** show the detailed correspondence (or concordance) between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997, including complementary dimensions, categories and sub-categories.

## Table 20. Detailed correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997, levels 0 to 4

| ISCED 2011 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level label** | **Level** | **Category** | **Sub-category** | **Notes on sub-categories** |
| Early childhood educational development | 0 | 01 | 010 | Education programmes targeting children under 3 years old |
| Pre-primary education | | 02 | 020 | |
| Primary education | 1 | 10 | 100 | |
| Lower secondary education | 2 | 24 General | 241 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 242 | Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 243 | Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 244 | Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | 25 Vocational | 251 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 252 | Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 253 | Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education |
| | | | 254 | Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education |
| Upper secondary education | 3 | 34 General | 341 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | | 342 | Partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | | 343 | Level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education)[1] |
| | | | 344 | Level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education)[1] |
| | | 35 Vocational | 351 | Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | | 352 | Partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education |
| | | | 353 | Level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes (but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education)[1] |
| | | | 354 | Level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes (may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary education)[1] |
| Post-secondary non-tertiary education | 4 | 44 General | 441 | Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education[2] |
| | | | 443 | Level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes[2] |
| | | | 444 | Level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes[2] |
| | | 45 Vocational | 451 | Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education[2] |
| | | | 453 | Level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes[2] |
| | | | 454 | Level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes[2] |

1. May include programmes previously classified at ISCED level 4 if they are equivalent to ISCED level 3 programmes.
2. Except programmes previously classified at ISCED level 4 if they are equivalent to ISCED level 3 programmes.

| ISCED 1997 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Level label** | **Level** | **Destination** | **Orientation** |
| *Not covered in ISCED 1997* | | | |
| Pre-primary education | 0 | n.a. | n.a. |
| Primary education or first stage of basic education | 1 | n.a. | n.a. |
| Lower secondary education or second stage of basic education | 2 | C | General/pre-vocational |
| | | C | |
| | | C | |
| | | A/B | |
| | | C | Vocational |
| | | C | |
| | | C | |
| | | A/B | |
| Upper secondary education | 3 | C | General/pre-vocational |
| | | C | |
| | | C | |
| | | A/B | |
| | | C | Vocational |
| | | C | |
| | | C | |
| | | A/B | |
| Post-secondary non-tertiary education | 4 | B | General/pre-vocational |
| | | B | |
| | | A | |
| | | B | Vocational |
| | | B | |
| | | A | |

## Table 21. Detailed correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997, tertiary levels

| ISCED 2011 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level label | Level | Category | Sub-category | Notes on (sub-)categories | Notes |
| Short-cycle tertiary education | 5 | 54 General | 541 | Insufficient for level completion | |
| | | | 544 | Sufficient for level completion | |
| | | 55 Vocational | 551 | Insufficient for level completion | |
| | | | 554 | Sufficient for level completion | |
| Bachelor's or equivalent level | 6 | 66[1] Orientation unspecified | 661 | Insufficient for level completion | |
| | | | 665 | First degree (3-4 years) | |
| | | | 666 | Long first degree (more than 4 years) (Bachelor's or equivalent programme) | |
| | | | 667 | Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) | If equivalent to programmes already classified in level 6 |
| Master's or equivalent level | 7 | 76[1] Orientation unspecified | 761 | Insufficient for level completion | |
| | | | 766 | Long first degree (at least 5 years) (Master's or equivalent programme) | Unless equivalent to programmes already classified in level 6, then 666 |
| | | | 767 | Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) | |
| | | | 768 | Second or further degree (following a Master's or equivalent programme) | |
| Doctor or equivalent level | 8 | 86[1] Orientation unspecified | 861 | Insufficient for level completion | |
| | | | 864 | Sufficient for level completion | Programmes that lead directly to a doctoral degree only |

1. The correspondences (or concordances) for academic and professional programmes at ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8 are identical to those for programmes where orientation is unspecified.

| ISCED 1997 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level label | Level | Type | Position | Cumulative duration in tertiary education |
| First stage of tertiary education | 5 | B | n.a. | <2 years |
| | 5 | B | n.a. | ≥2 years |
| | 5 | B | n.a. | <2 years |
| | 5 | B | n.a. | ≥2 years |
| | 5 | A | Intermediate | <3 years |
| | 5 | A | 1st | 3-4 years |
| | 5 | A | 1st | >4 years |
| | 5 | A | 2nd/further | ≥4 years |
| | 5 | A | Intermediate | <4 years |
| | 5 | A | 1st | ≥5 years |
| | 5 | A | 2nd/further | ≥4-5 years |
| | 5 | A | 2nd/further | ≥6 years |
| Second stage of tertiary education | 6 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| | 6 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |

# ANNEX I  ISCED 2011 POTENTIAL EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

**Figure 2. ISCED 2011 potential educational pathways**
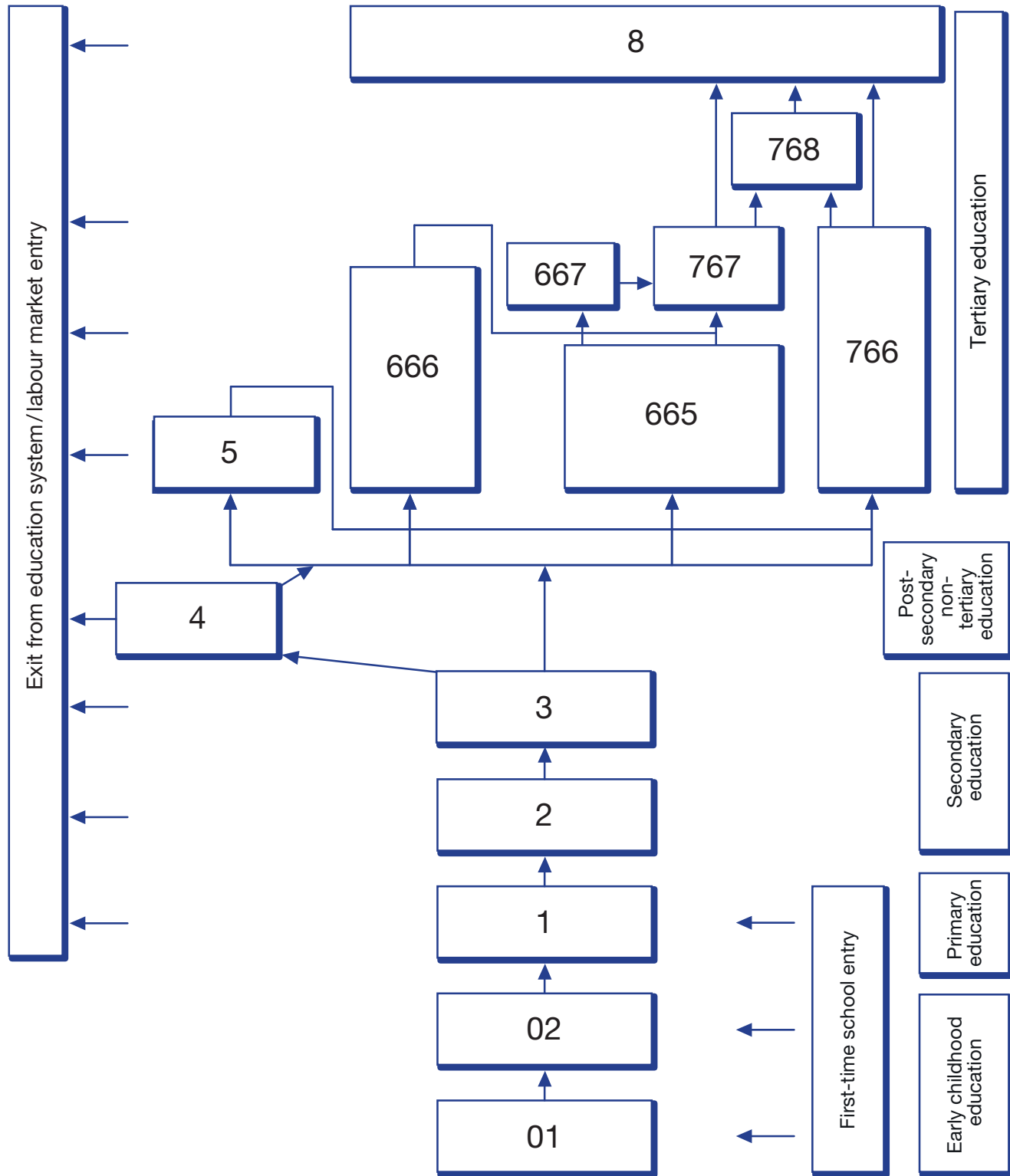
# ANNEX II  CODING OF EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

**0 Early childhood education**
    01 Early childhood educational development
        010 Early childhood educational development
    02 Pre-primary education
        020 Pre-primary education

**1 Primary education**
    10 Primary education
        100 Primary education

**2 Lower secondary education**
    24 General
        241 Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        242 Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        243 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        244 Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education
    25 Vocational
        251 Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        252 Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        253 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education
        254 Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education

**3 Upper secondary education**
    34 General
        341 Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        342 Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        343 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        344 Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education
    35 Vocational
        351 Insufficient for level completion or partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        352 Sufficient for partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        353 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        354 Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education

**4 Post-secondary non-tertiary education**
    44 General
        441 Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        443 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        444 Sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary education
    45 Vocational
        451 Insufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        453 Sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary education
        454 Sufficient for level completion with, direct access to tertiary education

**5 Short-cycle tertiary education**
    54 General[1]
        541 Insufficient for level completion

544 Sufficient for level completion
55 Vocational[1]
    551 Insufficient for level completion
    554 Sufficient for level completion

## 6 Bachelor's or equivalent level
64 Academic
    641 Insufficient for level completion
    645 First degree (3-4 years)
    646 Long first degree (more than 4 years)
    647 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)
65 Professional
    651 Insufficient for level completion
    655 First degree (3-4 years)
    656 Long first degree (more than 4 years)
    657 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)
66 Orientation unspecified[1]
    661 Insufficient for level completion
    665 First degree (3-4 years)
    666 Long first degree (more than 4 years)
    667 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)

## 7 Master's or equivalent level
74 Academic
    741 Insufficient for level completion
    746 Long first degree (at least 5 years)
    747 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)
    748 Second or further degree (following a Master's or equivalent programme)
75 Professional
    751 Insufficient for level completion
    756 Long first degree (at least 5 years)
    757 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)
    758 Second or further degree (following a Master's or equivalent programme)
76 Orientation unspecified[1]
    761 Insufficient for level completion
    766 Long first degree (at least 5 years)
    767 Second or further degree (following a Bachelor's or equivalent programme)
    768 Second or further degree (following a Master's or equivalent programme)

## 8 Doctoral or equivalent level
84 Academic
    841 Insufficient for level completion
    844 Sufficient for completion of level
85 Professional
    851 Insufficient for level completion
    854 Sufficient for completion of level
86 Orientation unspecified[1]
    861 Insufficient for level completion
    864 Sufficient for completion of level

## 9 Not elsewhere classified
99 Not elsewhere classified
    999 Not elsewhere classified

1. To be used in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

# ANNEX III  CODING OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**0 Less than primary education**

01 Never attended an education programme

010 Never attended an education programme

02 Some early childhood education

020 Some early childhood education

03 Some primary education (without level completion)

030 Some primary education (without level completion)

**1 Primary education**

10 Primary

100 Including recognised successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial level completion

**2 Lower secondary education[1]**

24 General[1]

242 Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education

243 Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education

244 Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education[1]

25 Vocational[1]

252 Partial level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education

253 Level completion, without direct access to upper secondary education

254 Level completion, with direct access to upper secondary education[1]

**3 Upper secondary education[1]**

34 General[1]

342 Partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

343 Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

344 Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1]

35 Vocational[1]

352 Partial level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

353 Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

354 Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1]

**4 Post-secondary non-tertiary education[1]**

44 General[1]

443 Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

444 Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1]

45 Vocational[1]

453 Level completion, without direct access to tertiary education

454 Level completion, with direct access to tertiary education[1]

**5 Short-cycle tertiary education[1]**
    54 General[1,2]
        540 Not further defined[1]
    55 Vocational[1,2]
        550 Not further defined[1]
    56 Orientation unspecified[1,2]
        560 Not further defined[1]

**6 Bachelor's or equivalent level[1]**
    64 Academic[1]
        640 Not further defined[1]
    65 Professional[1]
        650 Not further defined[1]
    66 Orientation unspecified[1,2]
        660 Not further defined[1]

**7 Master's or equivalent level[1]**
    74 Academic[1]
        740 Not further defined[1]
    75 Professional[1]
        750 Not further defined[1]
    76 Orientation unspecified[1,2]
        760 Not further defined[1]

**8 Doctoral or equivalent level[1]**
    84 Academic[1]
        840 Not further defined
    85 Professional[1]
        850 Not further defined
    86 Orientation unspecified[1,2]
        860 Not further defined

**9 Not elsewhere classified**
    99 Not elsewhere classified
        999 Not elsewhere classified

---

1. Including successful completion of a programme at the given level sufficient for level completion or successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at a higher ISCED level insufficient for completion or partial completion of the higher level.

2. To be used in the absence of internationally-agreed definitions for academic and professional orientations at the tertiary level.

## ANNEX IV  BROAD GROUPS AND FIELDS OF EDUCATION

285. The current fields of education remain unchanged from the ISCED 1997 framework. The UIS plans to develop a three-level  hierarchical classification of fields of education and training, building on a draft coding developed for UNESCO in 1999. This coding has been used by Eurostat and the OECD for more than a decade but requires further updating. Once the new classification of fields of education and training has been formally adopted by the UNESCO General Conference, it will be established as a separate and independent classification from ISCED levels and this section of the current ISCED will be removed.

286. There are 25 fields of education organized in 9 broad groups. It is recommended that inter- or multi-disciplinary programmes should be classified according to a majority rule, i.e. in the field of education in which the students spend most of their time.

ISCED fields of education:

**0  General programmes**

**01  Basic programmes**
Basic general programmes pre-primary, elementary, primary, secondary, etc.

**08  Literacy and numeracy**
Simple and functional literacy, numeracy.

**09  Personal development**
Enhancing personal skills, e.g. behavioural capacities, mental skills, personal organizational capacities, life orientation programmes.

**1  Education**

**14  Teacher training and education science**

Teacher training for pre-school, kindergarten, elementary school, vocational, practical, non-vocational subject, adult education, teacher trainers and for handicapped children. General and specialised teacher-training programmes.

Education science: curriculum development in non-vocational and vocational subjects. Educational assessment, testing and measurement, educational research, other education science.

**2  Humanities and arts**

**21  Arts**

Fine arts: drawing, painting, sculpture;

Performing arts: music, drama, dance, circus;

Graphic and audio-visual arts: photography, cinematography, music production, radio and television production, printing and publishing;

Design; craft skills.

**22  Humanities**

Religion and theology;

Foreign languages and cultures: living or 'dead' languages and their literature, area studies;

Native languages: current or vernacular language and its literature;

Other humanities: interpretation and translation, linguistics, comparative literature, history, archaeology, philosophy, ethics.

### 3  Social sciences, business and law

#### 31  Social and behavioural science

Economics, economic history, political science, sociology, demography, anthropology (except physical anthropology), ethnology, futurology, psychology, geography (except physical geography), peace and conflict studies, human rights.

#### 32  Journalism and information

Journalism; library technician and science; technicians in museums and similar repositories;

Documentation techniques;

Archival sciences.

#### 34  Business and administration

Retailing, marketing, sales, public relations, real estate;

Finance, banking, insurance, investment analysis;

Accounting, auditing, bookkeeping;

Management, public administration, institutional administration, personnel administration;

Secretarial and office work.

#### 38  Law

Local magistrates, *'notaires'*, law (general, international, labour, maritime, etc.), jurisprudence, history of law.

### 4  Science

#### 42  Life sciences

Biology, botany, bacteriology, toxicology, microbiology, zoology, entomology, ornithology, genetics, biochemistry, biophysics, other allied sciences, excluding clinical and veterinary sciences.

#### 44  Physical sciences

Astronomy and space sciences, physics, other allied subjects, chemistry, other allied subjects, geology, geophysics, mineralogy, physical anthropology, physical geography and other geosciences, meteorology and other atmospheric sciences including climatic research, marine science, vulcanology, palaeoecology.

#### 46  Mathematics and statistics

Mathematics, operations research, numerical analysis, actuarial science, statistics and other allied fields.

#### 48  Computing

Computer sciences: system design, computer programming, data processing, networks, operating systems – software development only (hardware development should be classified with the engineering fields).

### 5  Engineering, manufacturing and construction

#### 52  Engineering and engineering trades

Engineering drawing, mechanics, metal work, electricity, electronics, telecommunications, energy and chemical engineering, vehicle maintenance, surveying.

### 54 Manufacturing and processing

Food and drink processing, textiles, clothes, footwear, leather, materials (wood, paper, plastic, glass, etc.), mining and extraction.

### 58 Architecture and building

Architecture and town planning: structural architecture, landscape architecture, community planning, cartography;

Building, construction;

Civil engineering.

## 6 Agriculture

### 62 Agriculture, forestry and fishery

Agriculture, crop and livestock production, agronomy, animal husbandry, horticulture and gardening, forestry and forest product techniques, natural parks, wildlife, fisheries, fishery science and technology.

### 64 Veterinary

Veterinary medicine, veterinary assisting.

## 7 Health and welfare

### 72 Health

Medicine: anatomy, epidemiology, cytology, physiology, immunology and immunohaematology, pathology, anaesthesiology, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, internal medicine, surgery, neurology, psychiatry, radiology, ophthalmology;

Medical services: public health services, hygiene, pharmacy, pharmacology, therapeutics, rehabilitation, prosthetics, optometry, nutrition;

Nursing: basic nursing, midwifery;

Dental services: dental assisting, dental hygienist, dental laboratory technician, odontology.

### 76 Social services

Social care: care of the disabled, childcare, youth services, gerontological services;

Social work: counselling, welfare not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.)

## 8 Services

### 81 Personal services

Hotel and catering, travel and tourism, sports and leisure, hairdressing, beauty treatment, and other personal services: cleaning, laundry, dry-cleaning, cosmetic services, domestic science.

### 84 Transport services

Seamanship, ship's officer, nautical science, air crew, air traffic control, railway operations, road motor vehicle operations, postal service.

### 85 Environmental protection

Environmental conservation, control and protection, air and water pollution control, labour protection and security.

### 86 Security services

Protection of property and persons: police work and related law enforcement, criminology, fire-protection and fire fighting, civil security;

Military.

## Not known or unspecified

(This category is not part of the classification itself but in data collection '99' is needed for 'fields of education not known or unspecified'.)

## ANNEX V  NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ISCED: FURTHER ISSUES

287. ISCED 2011 defines non-formal education (Paragraph 39) and provides the types of non-formal education (Paragraph 40). It underlines that non-formal education does not normally give access to a higher level of education unless it is appropriately validated in the formal education system (Paragraph 41) and recommends using the criteria of equivalency of content and/or resulting qualifications for the classification of non-formal education programmes (Paragraph 42).

288. This annex presents some additional characteristics of non-formal education programmes. The concept of non-formal education programmes would need to be further developed in order to accurately measure them for international statistical purposes. A few examples of international data collection experiences exist and can be consulted for giving specific advice.

289. ISCED 2011, Paragraph 40 stipulates that, depending on the national context, non-formal education and training can cover programmes:

i)  contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children (alternative programmes to initial education); and

ii) focused on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.

The latter can include:

- training in a workplace to improve or adapt existing qualifications and skills, and training for unemployed or economically inactive persons; and

- learning activities pursued for self-development (during a person's private (leisure) time).

290. The heterogeneity of non-formal education programmes means that it is difficult to provide general guidelines for their application in statistical instruments given the purpose of international comparability. ISCED 2011 recommends using the criteria of equivalency of content for the classification of non-formal education programmes. The equivalency of content relates non-formal programmes to formal programmes with similar content within ISCED. This would in principle allow for a classification of non-formal programmes by level. For example, where a programme of adult education satisfies the content-based criteria of ISCED level 1, it could be classified at ISCED level 1.

291. The qualification awarded upon successful completion of a non-formal education programme can often support the classification of the education programme. For example, non-formal vocational training might be classified based on the equivalence of the level and type of qualification (if any) that is awarded upon its successful completion compared to a formal education programme. To establish content equivalencies between programmes and qualifications in the same education system, national and regional qualification frameworks – where they exist – can provide guidance. ISCED 2011 recommends a transparent identification of respectively formal and non-formal programmes.

292. Non-formal education can be provided by a wide range of bodies; including educational establishments, private enterprises, non-governmental organizations and public institutions. In some cases, those same institutions that provide formal education may also provide non-formal education and training. However, as with formal education programmes, the type of provider should not be used as a main criterion for differentiating non-formal education and training, nor should it be used as a main criterion for distinguishing formal and non-formal education.

293. The duration of a non-formal programme may be very short. In particular, job- and leisure-time training activities may cater to particular practical purposes related to the specific job or private-life context. A non-formal programme may therefore often be described as a (training) course.

294. Non-formal programmes are frequently directed to acquiring practical knowledge, skills or competencies in a concrete context and are therefore often focused less on theoretical learning. For example, a formal programme could teach computer science (e.g. for acquiring a recognised qualification as an I.T. engineer), whereas a non-formal programme may teach specific I.T. programmes for practical computer use in job contexts.

295. Alternative programmes exist mainly in countries where the formal education system is less developed or restricted in scope. These programmes are not recognised as formal by education authorities. They normally cover ISCED levels 0 to 3 and may be provided by private organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

296. While non-formal education is a recognised part of ISCED, it is likely that international data collection exercises (mappings, surveys, censuses, etc.) will restrict their coverage to formal programmes for the sake of international comparability and feasibility. The boundary between formal and non-formal programmes is therefore important and should be given specific attention. However, at this stage, ISCED 2011 does not give specific advice on the development of mappings for non-formal programmes or any related non-formal educational qualifications.

# ANNEX VI  **GLOSSARY**

**Academic year.** The annual teaching or examination period during which students attend courses or take final examinations, not taking minor breaks into account. It may be shorter than 12 months but would typically not be shorter than 9 months. It may vary for different levels of education or types of educational institutions within a country. This is also referred to as the 'school year', mainly for the pre-tertiary level.

**Adult education.** Education specifically targeted at individuals who are regarded as adults by their society to improve their technical or professional qualifications, further develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge with the purpose to complete a level of formal education, or to acquire, refresh or update their knowledge, skills and competencies in a particular field. This also includes what may be referred to as 'continuing education', 'recurrent education' or 'second chance education'.

**Assessment of learning outcomes.** Evaluation of an individual's achievement of learning objectives, using a variety of assessment methods (written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios) during or at the end of an education programme.

**Completion of an education programme.** Participation in all components of an education programme (including final examinations if any), irrespective of the result of any potential assessment of achievement of learning objectives.

**Completion of an ISCED level.** Successful completion of an education programme sufficient for level completion. At ISCED levels 1 and 4-8, the successful completion of a programme meeting the content and minimum duration criteria for the given level is considered as level completion. At ISCED levels 2 and 3 the successful completion of any programme granting access to programmes at higher ISCED levels (i.e. ISCED level 3 in the case of ISCED level 2 programmes and ISCED level 5, 6 or 7 in the case of ISCED level 3 programmes) is counted as level completion as is the completion of any terminal programme meeting the content, minimum duration (2 years) and cumulative duration criteria for the respective ISCED level (i.e. 8 years since the start of ISCED level 1 in the case of ISCED level 2 programmes and 11 years in the case of ISCED level 3 programmes).

**Course.** A unit of instruction comprising a sequence of educational activities in a particular field or range of related fields of education. This can also be referred to as a 'module', 'unit' or 'subject'.

**Credit.** Unit in which the successful completion of courses or modules is earned and documented during and at the end of an education programme. Credits express the volume of learning based on a typical workload needed to achieve the expected learning objectives.

**Cumulative duration.** The total theoretical duration of a sequence of education programmes. In ISCED, cumulative duration from the beginning of ISCED level 1 or 3, or since the beginning of tertiary education, is often required for the purpose of classifying an education programme.

**Degree.** Educational qualification awarded upon successful completion of specific education programmes in tertiary education (traditionally by universities or equivalent institutions).

**Dual-system education programmes.** Programmes that combine school- or college- and work-based education. Both components are substantial (i.e. go beyond a single internship or occasional class), although the work-based part usually occupies 50% of the programme time or more.

**Early childhood education (ISCED-P level 0).** Early childhood education provides learning and educational activities with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to organized instruction outside of the family context to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare them for entry into primary education.

**Education.** The processes by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies and behaviours across generations. It involves communication designed to bring about learning.

**Education programme.** A coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed and organized to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Within an education programme, educational activities may also be grouped into sub-components variously described in national contexts as 'courses', 'modules', 'units' and/or 'subjects'. A programme may have major components not normally characterised as courses, units or modules – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects and the preparation of dissertations.

**Education provider.** An organization that provides education, either as a main or ancillary objective. This can be a public educational institution, as well as a private enterprise, non-governmental organization or non-educational public body.

**Educational activity.** Deliberate activity involving some form of communication intended to bring about learning.

**Educational attainment.** The highest ISCED level of education an individual has successfully completed. This is usually measured with respect to the highest education programme successfully completed which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.

**Educational institution.** Established institution that provides education as its main purpose, such as a school, college, university or training centre. Such institutions are normally accredited or sanctioned by the relevant national education authorities or equivalent authorities. Educational institutions may also be operated by private organizations, such as religious bodies, special interest groups or private educational and training enterprises, both for profit and non-profit.

**Enrolment.** Individuals officially registered in a given education programme, or stage or module thereof, regardless of age.

**Entrants.** Individuals enrolling at the start of an education level, set of levels, programme, or stage or module thereof, regardless of age.

**Entry.** The act of starting participation in an education level, set of levels, programme, or stage or module thereof.

**Field of education.** Broad domain, branch or area of content covered by an education programme, course or module. Often referred to as a 'subject' or 'discipline'. This may also be referred to as 'field of study'.

**First degree.** A degree awarded on the successful completion of an education programme at ISCED level 6 or 7 that does not require prior successful completion of any degree at ISCED level 6 for entry into the respective education programme.

**Formal education.** Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private bodies and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by the relevant national education authorities or equivalent authorities, e.g. any other institution in cooperation with the national or sub-national education authorities. Formal education consists mostly of initial education. Vocational education, special needs education and some parts of adult education are often recognised as being part of the formal education system.

**Further degree.** See Second or further degree.

**General education.** Education programmes that are designed to develop learners' general knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as literacy and numeracy skills, often to prepare students for more advanced education programmes at the same or higher ISCED levels and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. General education programmes are typically school- or college-based. General education includes education programmes that are designed to prepare students for entry into vocational education but do not prepare for employment in a particular occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades, nor lead directly to a labour market-relevant qualification.

**Grade.** A specific stage of instruction in initial education usually covered during an academic year. Students in the same grade are usually of similar age. This is also referred to as a 'class', 'cohort' or 'year'.

**Graduate of an education programme.** An individual who has successfully completed an education programme.

**Graduation.** The successful completion of an education programme. It is possible for a graduate to have more than one graduation (even within the same academic year) if the student was enrolled simultaneously in two or more programmes and successfully completed them.

**Incidental or random learning.** Various forms of learning that are not organized or that involve communication not designed to bring about learning. Incidental or random learning may occur as a by-product of day-to-day activities, events or communication that are not designed as deliberate educational or learning activities. Examples may include learning that takes place during the course of a meeting, whilst listening to a radio programme, or watching a television broadcast that is not designed as an education programme.

**Informal learning.** Forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalised. It is consequently less organized and structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis.

**Initial education.** Formal education of individuals before their first entrance to the labour market, i.e. when they will normally be in full-time education. It thus targets individuals who are regarded as children, youth and young adults by their society. It typically takes place in educational institutions in a system designed as a continuous educational pathway.

**Intermediate qualification.** The official confirmation, usually in the form of a document, certifying the successful completion of a stage of an education programme.

**Learning.** The individual acquisition or modification of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies or behaviours through experience, practice, study or instruction.

**Learning activity.** Deliberate activity in which an individual participates with the intention to learn.

**Learning objectives.** Specification of learning outcomes to be achieved upon completion of an educational or learning activity. These encompass improving knowledge, skills and competencies within any personal, civic, social or employment-related context. Learning objectives are typically linked to the purpose of preparing for more advanced studies and/or an occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades.

**Learning outcomes.** The totality of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies or behaviours an individual is expected to master upon successful completion of an education programme.

**Less than primary education (ISCED-A level 0).** A broad level of educational attainment covering no participation in education, some participation in early childhood education and/or some participation in primary education.

**Levels of education.** An ordered set grouping education programmes in relation to gradations of learning experiences, as well as the knowledge, skills and competencies which each programme is designed to impart. The ISCED level reflects the degree of complexity and specialisation of the content of an education programme, from foundational to complex.

**Lower secondary education (ISCED level 2).** Programmes at ISCED level 2, or lower secondary education, are typically designed to build on the learning outcomes from ISCED level 1. Usually, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development upon which education systems may then expand further educational opportunities. Programmes at this level are usually organized around a more subject-oriented curriculum, introducing theoretical concepts across a broad range of subjects.

**Minimum duration.** The minimum theoretical duration of an education programme for the purposes of classifying a programme at a given ISCED level or for determining completion or partial completion of a given ISCED level.

**Modular programmes.** Education programmes in which students may compose the content of their education in a flexible way by combining different courses or modules. Modular programmes thus often do not have clearly-defined sequencing.

**Module.** A course or part of a course in the context of a modular programme. A module may be taken singularly or combined with other modules offered.

**Non-formal education.** Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.

**Non-formal (educational) qualification.** Qualification awarded upon achievement of the learning objectives of an education programme in non-formal education that is not recognised by the relevant national education authorities as being equivalent to a formal qualification.

**Partial completion of ISCED level 2.** Successful completion of a programme representing  at least two years at ISCED level 2 and a cumulative duration of at least eight years since the beginning of ISCED level 1, and which is part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 2 but is not the last programme in the sequence at this level. Such programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 3.

**Partial completion of ISCED level 3.**  Successful completion of a programme representing at least 2 years at ISCED level 3 and a cumulative duration of at least 11 years since the beginning of ISCED level 1, and which is part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 3 but is not the last programme in the sequence at this level. Such programmes do not give direct access to any higher ISCED level.

**Participant.** Individuals who attend or take part in an education programme, or stage or module thereof.

**Participation.** Attendance in or undertaking an education programme, or stage or module thereof.

**Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4).** Post-secondary non-tertiary education provides learning experiences building on secondary education, preparing for labour market entry as well as tertiary education. It typically targets students who have completed upper secondary education (ISCED level 3), but who want to increase their opportunities either to enter the labour market or progress to tertiary education. Programmes are often not significantly more advanced than those at upper secondary education as they typically serve to broaden – rather than deepen – knowledge, skills and competencies. It therefore aims at learning below the high level of complexity characteristic of tertiary education.

**Primary education (ISCED level 1).** Primary education provides learning and educational activities typically designed to provide students with fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy) and establish a solid foundation for learning and understanding core areas of knowledge and personal development, preparing for lower secondary education. It focuses on learning at a basic level of complexity with little, if any, specialisation.

**Qualification.** The official confirmation, usually in the form of a document, certifying the successful completion of an education programme or a stage of a programme. Qualifications can be obtained through: i) successful completion of a full education programme; ii) successful completion of a stage of an education programme (intermediate qualifications); or iii) validation of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, independent of participation in an education programme. This may also be referred to as a 'credential'.

**Random learning.** See Incidental or random learning.

**Recognised qualification.** The official sanction by the relevant national education authorities of a qualification awarded upon achievement of the learning objectives of an education programme.

**Regular education.** Initial education designed for individuals without special educational needs.

**School- or college-based education.** Educational activities taking place in institutions established for the education of children and youth in the course of initial education programmes which aim to achieve specific learning objectives through classroom instruction including courses in specialised learning environments (e.g. laboratory, music room, computer room or gym) and group work under the guidance of a teacher or teachers. Students are often grouped by grade, age or level of ability.

**Second chance education.** Education specifically targeted at individuals who, for a variety of reasons, never attended school or left school either before completion of the level of education in which they were enrolled or completed the level but wish to enter an education programme or occupation for which they are not yet qualified. Participants are often older than the typical target age group for the given ISCED level programme (but not necessarily adults). Sometimes also referred to as 'bridging programmes' or 're-integration programmes'.

**Second or further degree.** A degree awarded on the successful completion of an education programme at ISCED level 6 or 7 that requires prior successful completion of a programme at ISCED level 6 or 7 for entry into the respective education programme.

**Secondary education (ISCED levels 2 and 3).** Secondary education provides learning and educational activities building on primary education and preparing for labour market entry, post-secondary non-tertiary education and tertiary education. Broadly speaking, secondary education aims at learning at an intermediate level of complexity. ISCED distinguishes between lower and upper secondary education.

**Special needs education.** Education designed to facilitate learning by individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an education programme. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) disadvantages in physical, behavioural, intellectual, emotional and social capacities. Education programmes in special needs education may follow a similar curriculum as that offered in the parallel regular education system, but they take individual needs into account by providing specific resources (e.g. specially-trained personnel, equipment or space) and, if appropriate, modified educational content or learning objectives. These programmes can be offered to individual students within already-existing education programmes or as a separate class in the same or separate educational institutions.

**Stage.** A sub-level of an education programme, defined in terms of theoretical duration or a specified set of modules to complete or credits to achieve. A specific stage has characteristics which are distinct from other stages of the same education programme and may be individually certified by an intermediate qualification.

**Successful completion of an education programme.** Achievement of the learning objectives of an education programme typically validated through the assessment of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies. Successful completion of an education programme is usually documented by the award of an educational qualification.

**Tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 to 8).** Tertiary education builds on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialised fields of education. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialisation. Tertiary education includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education.

**Theoretical duration.** The time, expressed in academic years, it takes to deliver an education programme, assuming regular participation on a full-time basis.

**Training.** Education designed to achieve particular learning objectives, especially in vocational education. The definition of education in ISCED includes training.

**Typical duration.** The time, expressed in academic years, it usually takes students to successfully complete an education programme, assuming regular participation on a full-time basis.

**Unsuccessful completion of an education programme.** Failure to achieve the learning objectives of an education programme despite having attended or taken part in all components of the education programme (including final examinations if any). Unsuccessful completion implies that some assessment of the achievement of the learning objectives has been undertaken but the demonstrated acquired knowledge, skills or competencies were judged insufficient.

**Upper secondary education (ISCED level 3)** Programmes at ISCED level 3, or upper secondary education, are typically designed to complete secondary education in preparation for tertiary education or provide skills relevant to employment, or both. Programmes at this level offer students more varied, specialised and in-depth instruction than programmes at lower secondary education (ISCED level 2). They are more differentiated, with an increased range of options and streams available.

**Validation of learning outcomes.** Evaluation of an individual's achievement of learning objectives using a variety of assessment methods (written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios) not presuming participation in an education programme.

**Vocational education.** Education programmes that are designed for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies specific to a particular occupation, trade, or class of occupations or trades. Vocational education may have work-based components (e.g. apprenticeships, dual-system education programmes). Successful completion of such programmes leads to labour market-relevant vocational qualifications acknowledged as occupationally-oriented by the relevant national authorities and/or the labour market.
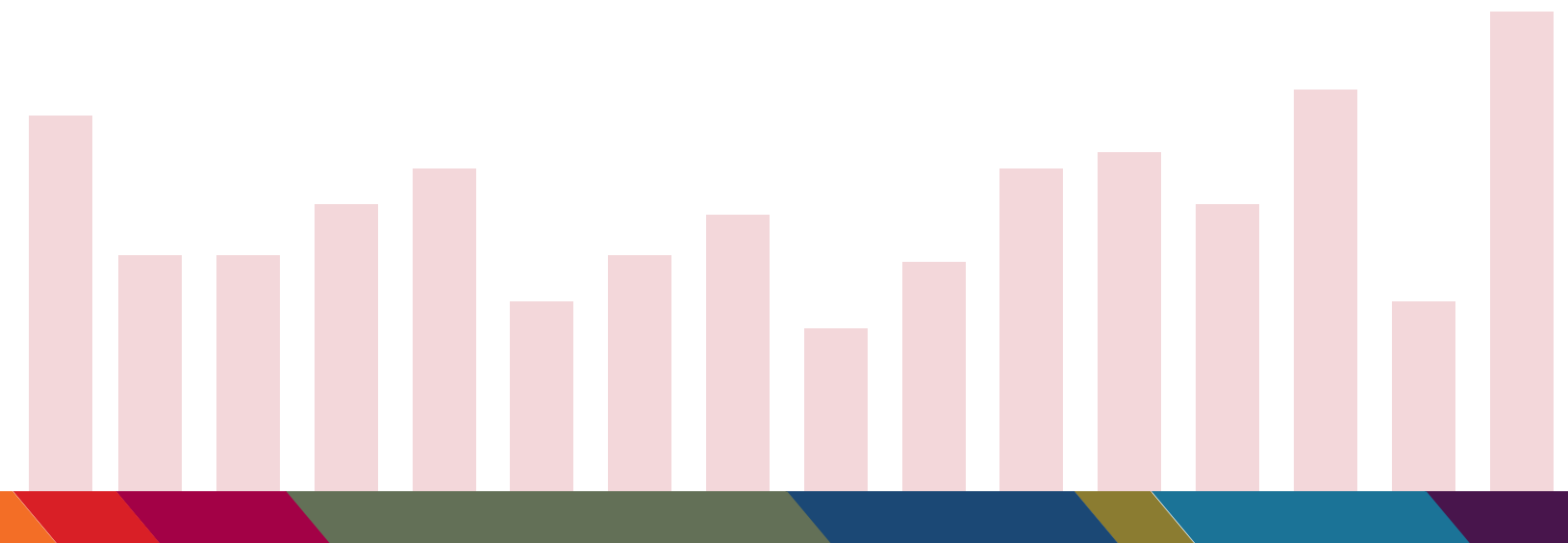
**Work-based education.** Educational activities which take place in a work environment, usually in the context of vocational education programmes. The aim is to achieve specific learning objectives through practical instruction and participation in work activities under the guidance of experienced workers or trainers.

Since education systems vary in structure and content across countries, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) provides the framework for presenting data in a comparable and uniform manner. It facilitates the transformation of national education data into internationally agreed categories that make cross-national comparisons possible.

ISCED is a reference classification within the United Nations International Family of Economic and Social Classifications. First developed by UNESCO in the 1970s, it has been updated periodically to reflect the ongoing evolution of education systems around the world. As such, the new ISCED 2011 classification (which replaces ISCED 1997) provides improved definitions and a greater scope to better monitor global patterns in education. To this end, the sections on tertiary and early childhood education have been substantially revised. In addition, ISCED 2011 presents new coding schemes for education programmes and educational attainment.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the custodian of ISCED, responsible for its development, maintenance, updating and revision. The Institute provides guidance on the effective and consistent use of ISCED for international data collection and analysis.