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**REVISION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD  
CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (ISCED)**

**OUTLINE**

**Source:** 34 C/Resolution 20

**Background:** The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a framework which allows for the standardized reporting of a wide range of policy-relevant education statistics according to an internationally agreed set of common definitions and concepts thus ensuring cross-national comparability of resulting indicators. The General Conference adopted 34 C/Resolution 20, at its 34th session inviting the Director-General to initiate a review and revision of the 1997 version of the ISCED taking account of changes in education policies and structures over the preceding decade. An interim progress report was presented to the General Conference at its 35th session. Regular reports have also been submitted to the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations of the Executive Board.

**Purpose:** To submit to the General Conference, for approval, the revised International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011).

**Decision required:** paragraph 6.

1. The 34th session of the General Conference adopted 34 C/Resolution 20 which, *inter alia*,  
“Invites the Director-General to initiate a consultation of experts, with the participation of representatives of UNESCO and Member States concerned, and also representatives from other relevant international organizations, with a view to submitting an interim report to it at

its 35th session, and the revised version of the International Standard Classification of Education to it at its 36th session.”

2. The above interim report (35 C/INF.14), presented to the 35th session of the General Conference, detailed the activities undertaken since its 34th session, including the establishment of an ISCED Technical Advisory Panel of 15 international experts on education and statistics from Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, the Philippines, Saint Lucia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe including representatives of Eurostat, OECD, UNICEF and UNESCO. The report also set out the scope of the planned revision and the strategy to be adopted for consulting Member States and relevant international and regional organizations on the review.

3. Since the preparation of that report, detailed proposals for the revision developed in collaboration with the Technical Advisory Panel were discussed in separate regional meetings of experts from the Arab States, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Discussions on the proposals also took place with national experts attending meetings on education statistics held by Eurostat and OECD and with representatives of international organizations at an inter-agency meeting.

4. The initial proposals were revised in the light of feedback from the national, regional and international experts consulted and a global consultation of the draft ISCED 2011 text was launched in June 2010. All Member States of UNESCO – including Ministries of Education; with the assistance of the United Nations Statistical Division, all National Statistical Offices – were invited to comment. In addition, the proposals were sent to members of the United Nations’ Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications, members of the ISCED Technical Advisory Panel, national and regional experts who participated in the regional meetings and discussions on ISCED in 2009 and 2010, relevant international agencies and national contacts responsible for submitting data on education, literacy or educational attainment to the UIS or its education data collection partners, OECD and Eurostat.

5. The detailed feedback was reviewed by the Editorial Subgroup of the Technical Advisory Panel in December 2010 and a revised draft proposal was deliberated by the full Technical Advisory Panel at its final meeting in February 2011. The proposal submitted to the General Conference in Annex to this document takes account of the comments and suggestions received from over 110 respondents representing more than 80 countries and is endorsed by the Technical Advisory Panel.

### **Proposed resolution**

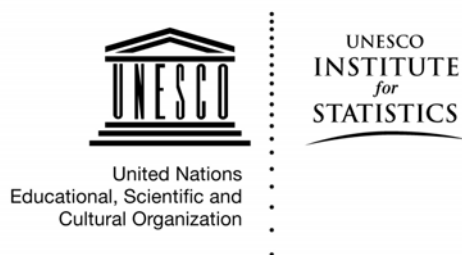
6. In the light of the above, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Having examined document 35 C/19,
2. Recalling 34 C/Resolution 20, concerning the Revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED),
3. Noting with satisfaction that in accordance with this resolution a Technical Advisory Panel was established and that detailed proposals were presented to and discussed with a large number of experts and ministries of education and national statistical offices,
4. Approves the revised version of ISCED contained in Annex as ISCED 2011;

5. Invites the Director-General:

- (a) to prepare an operational manual aimed at providing guidance to users on the interpretation and application of ISCED 2011;
- (b) to provide training and capacity-building support to countries to prepare them for the implementation of ISCED 2011 in national and international data collections exercises in the coming years;
- (c) to work with Member States to update the mappings of their national education systems to ISCED 2011 and to make these available to users of national and international education statistics;
- (d) to continue to review periodically and to revise the ISCED to ensure that it is consistent with developments in the policies and structures of education and training, in particular to undertake a review of the ISCED 1997 fields of education and training and to report back, ideally with a proposal for a revised classification of the fields, at an appropriate future session;
- (e) to submit a progress report of the work accomplished to the Executive Board at its 191st session and biennially thereafter.



## **International Standard Classification of Education**

**2011**

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## 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 world-wide with the purpose of assembling, compiling and analysing cross-nationally comparable data. ISCED is the reference classification for organizing educational 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 irrespective of the situation in a particular system.
3. ISCED classifies educational programmes by their content using two main cross-classification variables: levels of education (see Section 9) and fields of education (see Section 24 – Annex 4). This version of ISCED (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 recognized educational qualifications. The ISCED 1997 fields of education have been retained for the present time.
4. Information compiled according to ISCED can be used for assembling statistics on many different aspects of education of interest to policy-makers 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 on governance).
7. ISCED 2011 rests on three components: (i) internationally agreed concepts and definitions; (ii) the classification systems; and (iii) ISCED mappings of educational programmes and related qualifications in countries worldwide.
8. ISCED mappings are an essential tool for organizing information about 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 educational programmes and related qualifications into comparable categories for use in international statistics by linking the classification criteria to the properties of the educational programmes and their related qualifications.

## 2. UNIT OF CLASSIFICATION

10. The basic units of classification in ISCED are the national (and sub-national) educational programme and the related recognized educational qualification.
11. In ISCED, an **educational programme** is defined as a coherent set or sequence of educational activities or communication designed and organized to achieve predetermined 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 or trade or class of occupations or trades but may be related to personal development or leisure. A common characteristic of an educational programme is that, upon fulfilment of learning objectives or educational tasks, successful completion is certified.

The key concepts in this 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 or persons 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 educational programme can in a national context be strictly defined and regulated. The ISCED definition of an educational programme caters for the multiple possibilities available in different countries with the purpose of reaching comparability at the international level.
18. Within an educational 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 educational programme may have major components not normally characterized as courses – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects, and preparation of dissertations.
19. The classification of educational programmes determines the reporting of statistics on education systems, e.g., enrolment, entrants, teachers and other human and financial resources. Statistics on an educational 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

educational programme or of a stage of a programme. Qualifications can be obtained through: (i) successful completion of a full educational programme; (ii) successful completion of a stage of an educational programme (intermediate qualifications); or (iii) validation of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies independent of participation in an educational 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 recognized qualifications corresponding to an educational 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 recognized by the relevant national education authorities is the basis for statistics on educational attainment.
22. In ISCED, educational programmes are classified first and qualifications are subsequently classified. The ISCED mapping is the tool to show the links between educational programmes and qualifications. Normally one educational 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 educational programme and thereby measurable through a formal qualification.
24. ISCED 2011 is not designed to directly assess the competencies of individuals because there is no direct relationship between educational programmes or qualifications and actual educational achievement. The educational 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 for describing competencies and skill levels for the population in the sense of possibilities for educational achievement. It is recommended that countries make the links transparent between ISCED and their national or regional qualification framework where one exists.



### **3. PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS, SEQUENTIAL PROGRAMMES AND MODULAR PROGRAMMES**

26. When classifying national educational 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 educational programme with a duration exceeding the duration criteria provided for ISCED levels (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 level 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 6 grades in ISCED level 1 and the last 2 grades in 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. Further instructions are given in Sections 10 to 19 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, 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 may be used to define level completion.
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). 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 only their *combined* duration meets the minimum duration criteria. In such cases, the progression from the first to the second or subsequent programme in the education system is not reflected in reporting data in ISCED levels, but can be reflected by reporting any recognized intermediate qualifications obtained in subcategory “partial level completion” at ISCED levels 2 and 3 or “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 recognized successful completion of the final programme in the sequence counts as level completion. Recognized successful completion of earlier programmes in the sequence in the

ISCED level is reported as the subcategories “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 educational programme if it meets the ISCED definition for an educational programme (see Paragraph 11).
34. All participants in any modules that make up an educational 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 educational programme have been successfully completed.

#### 4. SCOPE OF EDUCATION IN ISCED

35. ISCED 2011 covers formal and non-formal educational programmes offered at any stage of a person's life. Qualifications which are recognized by the relevant national educational authorities however they are obtained (e.g. by successful completion of a formal educational programme or via a non-formal educational 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 recognized. Formal and non-formal education cover a variety of educational 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 defined as education that is institutionalized, intentional, planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies and, in their totality, make up the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognized as such by the relevant national educational authorities or equivalent, e.g. any other institution in co-operation with the national or sub-national educational authorities. Formal education consists mostly of initial education. Vocational education, special needs education and some parts of adult education are often recognized as being part of the formal education system. Qualifications from formal education are by definition recognized and are therefore within the scope of ISCED. Institutionalized education occurs when an organisation 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 institutions that are designed to provide full-time education for pupils and students in a system designed as a continuous educational pathway. This is referred to as initial education defined as 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 from initial education. Programmes that take place partly in the workplace may also be considered formal education if they lead to a qualification that is recognized by national educational 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 defined as education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided in order to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters for people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low in 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 recognized as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national educational authorities or to no qualifications at all. Nevertheless, formal recognized qualifications may be obtained through exclusive participation in specific non-formal educational 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 for improving or adapting 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 educational programme and/or a non-formal qualification does not normally give access to a higher level of education unless it is appropriately validated in the formal education system and recognized by the relevant national or sub-national educational 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 of resulting qualifications for the classification of non-formal educational programmes. Further guidance regarding the classification of non-formal educational programmes is provided in Section 26 – Annex 6. 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 recognized qualifications obtained via informal learning are considered when determining educational attainment levels. Informal learning is defined as forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate, but not institutionalized. 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, in the work place, in the local community, and in 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 that is not designed to bring about learning. Incidental or random learning may occur as a by-product of day-to-day activities or other 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, or whilst listening to a radio programme or watching a television broadcast that is not designed as an educational programme.

## 5. CROSS-CLASSIFICATION VARIABLES

45. The main cross-classification variables of ISCED are levels and fields of education (for fields of education see Section 24 – Annex 4). 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 subcategories provided by these complementary dimensions allow more detailed collecting and reporting of cross-nationally comparable data. The following subsections describe the complementary dimensions further.
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 in defining the scope of data collections.

### LEVELS

47. The notion of “levels” of education is represented by an ordered set of categories, intended to group educational programmes in relation to gradations of learning experiences and the knowledge, skills and competencies which each programme is designed to impart. The concept of the ISCED level reflects the degree of complexity and specialisation of the content of an educational programme, from foundational to complex.
48. Levels of education are therefore a construct based on the assumption that educational 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 educational 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 Section 21 – Annex 1). 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 educational programmes by level aims to reflect their content. However, curricula are too diverse, multi-faceted 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 educational 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 summarized at the end of this section.
51. These proxy criteria are comprised of main and subsidiary criteria. Main criteria indicate necessary characteristics of educational programmes at the respective ISCED

level. Subsidiary criteria indicate characteristics shared by many but not all educational programmes at this ISCED level (see Sections 10 to 19).

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 6-8. 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 educational programmes that are designed for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies specific for a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades. Such programmes may have work-based components (e.g. apprenticeships). Successful completion of such programmes leads to labour-market relevant vocational qualifications which are acknowledged as occupationally oriented by the relevant national authorities and/or the labour market.
55. **General** education is defined as educational programmes that are designed to develop learners' general knowledge, skills and competencies and literacy and numeracy skills, often to prepare participants for more advanced educational 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 educational programmes that are designed to prepare participants for entry into vocational educational programmes but do not prepare for employment in a particular occupation or 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 educational 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 recognized by the relevant national education authorities.

58. Educational 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 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 levels 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 4-8 is considered as level completion. However, recognized qualifications obtained before completing the programme (e.g. from the successful completion of a stage of the programme resulting in a recognized intermediate qualification) are classified at a lower ISCED level.
60. Educational programmes and corresponding qualifications within ISCED levels 2 and 3 are distinguished by four subcategories:
  1. **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);
  2. **partial level completion without direct access** to a higher ISCED level;
  3. **level completion without direct access** to a higher ISCED level; and
  4. **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 levels 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 2 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.
62. Programmes which do not meet the content, minimum duration and cumulative duration criteria are classified as category 1 (no level completion). Programmes which meet the content, minimum duration and cumulative duration criteria which are part of a sequence of programmes within the same ISCED level and which do not give direct access to a higher ISCED level are classified as category 2 (partial level completion). Terminal programmes which meet the content, minimum duration and cumulative duration criteria are classified as category 3 (level completion without direct access). Such programmes usually lead directly to labour market relevant qualifications. In addition, ISCED level 3 programmes which give access to ISCED level 4 programmes only are also classified as category 3 (level completion without direct access). Programmes which give direct access to tertiary education at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7 are classified as category 4 (level completion with direct access).
63. Programmes for specific groups of participants (adults or individuals with special needs) may have a shorter or longer duration than similar programmes 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 completion and, except at ISCED levels 0 and 1, is not considered for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels. Thus the educational attainment level of individuals who do not successfully complete a given programme is at the level of attainment they had achieved before entering the programme.
65. While the criteria for level completion apply to successful completion and are thus only directly applicable to individuals, educational 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/qualification programmes. All other ISCED level 6 programmes are classified as second or further degree/qualification programmes.
68. ISCED level 7 programmes that do not require prior completion of a level 6 programme for entry are classified as first degree/qualification programmes. Other level 7 programmes may require either prior completion of a level 6 programme or of another level 7 programme. These programmes are classified separately in ISCED in order to better identify first-time entrants to and graduates from ISCED level 7.

### **DURATION AND CUMULATIVE DURATION CRITERIA**

69. Because of their importance to 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 Sections 10 to 19.
70. ISCED uses the following ranges of programme duration as criteria for classifying formal educational programmes by level:
  - 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 covered;
  - ISCED 1: programme duration typically varies from 4 to 7 years. The most common duration is 6 years;
  - ISCED 2: programme duration typically varies from 2 to 5 years. The most common duration is 3 years;
  - ISCED 3: programme duration typically varies from 2 to 5 years. The most common duration is 3 years;



- ISCED 4: programme duration typically varies from 6 months to 2-3 years;
  - ISCED 5: programme duration typically from 2 to 3 years;
  - ISCED 6: programme duration typically varies from 3 to 4 or more years when directly following ISCED level 3 and 1-2 years when following another ISCED level 6 programme;
  - ISCED 7: programme duration typically varies from 1 to 3 years when following ISCED level 6 or from 5 to 7 years when directly following ISCED level 3; and
  - ISCED 8: programmes typically have duration of at least 3 years, but may be longer.
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 to 10 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 14 years. Entrance to tertiary education 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 recognized that nationally distinct conditions may exist that require flexibility in the definition of duration by level. Therefore, Paragraphs 70 and 71 provide a range of years of duration. 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 educational programmes, not (cumulative) duration.

## **6. TYPES OF DATA AND ISCED**

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

### **ENROLMENT, ATTENDANCE AND ENTRANTS**

76. In order to accurately measure enrolment, attendance and entrants by ISCED levels and categories, students must be assigned to an ISCED level, category and subcategory. The institutional context should not be used as basis for assembling statistics. Students within the same institution in different ISCED levels and categories need to be reported separately, if necessary using estimation. Students in educational programmes spanning ISCED levels should to 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 age 3 and above, but children below 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 individual students' pathways.
78. New entrants to an ISCED level must be distinguished from entrants to educational programmes but who do not enter a new level (i.e. who have entered the same ISCED level before). Entrants to an educational programme that is preceded by a programme at the same level are excluded when reporting entrants to a level. For programmes spanning 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 continue their education within the same programme.

### **GRADUATES**

79. Graduates from an ISCED level include those who entered and successfully completed an educational programme classified as "level completion". In principle, only those students who successfully complete the full level or a set of levels (for instance first graduation in tertiary education) in which they enrolled should be counted in order to maintain the link between entrants, enrolments and graduations. Students who receive the same or equivalent qualification by successfully completing only a stage of a 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 for deriving 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 the individual has completed. For operational purposes, educational attainment is usually measured with respect to the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognized qualification. Recognized intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
82. The concept of “educational programme successfully completed” usually corresponds to the situation in which a pupil or student attends and completes a formal educational programme (see also Paragraphs 56 to 58).
83. Relevant national educational authorities may recognize qualifications obtained through non-formal education programmes or through the validation of skills gained by means of informal learning as equivalent to formal educational qualifications. These qualifications are also covered by the concept of educational attainment as defined by ISCED. Qualifications from non-formal education or validation of skills that are *not* recognized as equivalent to formal qualifications are not within the scope of ISCED (see Paragraph 35).
84. The ISCED definition of education attainment should be distinguished from other concepts related to an individual’s educational achievements. These may include educational levels attended but not successfully completed, or an individual’s actual knowledge, skills and competencies (e.g. levels of literacy and numeracy) as may be determined through standardised testing or years of schooling.
85. Individuals who attend only part of an educational programme or who do not meet the completion requirements (e.g. fail the final exams) 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 educational programmes: it means not having successfully completed ISCED level 1. This includes individuals who have never attended an educational programme, or who have attended early childhood or primary education without successfully completing primary education. Several subcategories are considered for this attainment level (see table 5).
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. Educational attainment statistics report on individuals of all age groups, some or many of whom may have completed educational programmes or obtained qualifications different from those currently provided. In order to achieve comparability of educational attainment indicators over time and across education cohorts, educational attainment should be classified on the basis of the characteristics of educational programmes and recognized qualifications at the time of successful completion.

## 7. THE ISCED CLASSIFICATION AND CODING SCHEMES

89. The ISCED classification consists of parallel coding schemes for educational 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 both for educational programmes and for educational attainment.

– **Table 1. ISCED coding: First digit – levels**

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

– **Table 2. ISCED coding: Second digit – categories<sup>1</sup>**

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 educational programme
2	Pre-primary education	2	Some early childhood education
3	Not used	3	Some primary (without completion of ISCED level 1)
4	General / academic	4	General / academic
5	Vocational / professional	5	Vocational / professional
6	Orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	6	Orientation unspecified <sup>3</sup>
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 6-8

3. Used at ISCED-A levels 5-8

– **Table 3. ISCED coding: Third digit – sub-categories<sup>1</sup>**

ISCED-Programmes (ISCED-P)		ISCED-Attainment (ISCED-A)	
0	Not further defined	0	Not further defined <sup>2</sup>
1	Recognized successful completion of programme is insufficient for completion or partial completion of ISCED level (and thus without direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level)	1	Not used
2	Recognized successful completion of programme is sufficient for partial completion of ISCED level but without direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level	2	Partial level completion – without direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level
3	Recognized successful completion of programme is sufficient for completion of ISCED level but without direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level <sup>3</sup>	3	Level completion – without direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level <sup>2</sup>
4	Recognized successful completion of programme is sufficient for completion of ISCED level and with direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level <sup>3,4</sup>	4	Level completion - with direct access to programmes at a higher ISCED level <sup>2,3, 5</sup>
5	First degree/qualification programme - bachelor or equivalent (3-4 years)	5	Not used
6	Long first degree/qualification programme - bachelor or master, or equivalent	6	Not used
7	Second or further degree/qualification programme - following a bachelor or equivalent programme	7	Not used
8	Second or further degree/qualification programme - following a master or equivalent programme	8	Not used
9	Not elsewhere classified	9	Not elsewhere classified
<p>1. Programmes: completion/access (ISCED-P levels 2-5 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)</p> <p>2. At ISCED-A levels 1 and 5-7, including successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at a higher ISCED level insufficient for level or partial level completion.</p> <p>3. In the case of ISCED level 3, 'higher ISCED level' refers to ISCED-P levels 5-7.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>5. At ISCED-A levels 2-4, including successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at a higher ISCED level insufficient for level or partial level completion.</p>			

90. Not all combinations of categories and subcategories 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 Sections 22 and 23 (Annexes 2 and 3) of this document. If users of ISCED identify additional combinations of categories and

subcategories, the list of three-digit codes can be expanded using the existing codes provided for the complementary dimensions.

## **8. ISCED 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 and for guidance on the effective and consistent use of ISCED for data collection and analysis. UIS should aim to maintain links with custodians of other relevant classifications, in order to ensure consistency across related classifications.
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; and forming an ISCED Committee with other data collection partners to review the classification, and to advise on its implementation (see Paragraphs 96 and 97).
93. The UIS plans to produce an operational manual to facilitate the work with countries in classifying and mapping national education systems (initially on formal educational programmes and qualifications) to ISCED. The manual should provide detailed guidelines and explanatory notes (including some country examples) for the interpretation of ISCED. Additional guidance and training materials could be provided as necessary and as requested by users of the classification. Where appropriate, these materials should be made publicly available in electronic form on the UIS website.
94. Training for implementation should be arranged through regional workshops and technical assistance and cooperation, in accordance with countries' needs and existing capacities. 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 the ISCED 1997 to the ISCED 2011 version and to guidance on the classification of new or reformed programmes. It is expected that the first international education data collections using ISCED 2011 will begin in 2013 or 2014.
95. The UIS plans to maintain a database comprising mappings of national education systems (formal educational programmes and qualifications) to ISCED which will be accessible on the UIS website and updated as appropriate to reflect changes over time in national education systems.
96. To ensure compliance with the new ISCED, quality assurance mechanisms should be established for the implementation of the ISCED. 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 educational 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.



## 9. ISCED LEVELS

98. The following sections define the nine ISCED levels. The sections for each ISCED level are 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 their entry requirements. For some ISCED levels, common or well-known national names of programmes are indicated to facilitate understanding of the correspondence between national educational programmes and ISCED levels.
  - B. *Classification criteria* define more formally how educational 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. *Considerations concerning programmes spanning ISCED levels* provide further guidelines for the classification of educational programmes that encompass but also extend beyond one ISCED level. For more information on the underlying concept of educational 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 level programmes, programme duration, or position in the national degree/qualification structure. For more general information on these complementary dimensions in ISCED, see Section 5.
  - E. *Programmes also included in ISCED level* indicate less typical or non-formal educational programmes (e.g. in special needs, second chance or adult education) that may not fulfil all classification criteria (e.g. typical entry age), but which are equivalent to other programmes 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 educational programmes* provides the detailed codes for ISCED-P levels, categories and subcategories that are assigned to educational programmes.
  - G. *Classification of educational attainment* provides the detailed codes for ISCED-A levels, categories and subcategories that are assigned to educational qualifications and similar measures of the successful completion of educational 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 educational programme through which the qualification is usually obtained.
99. Following the description of the ISCED levels, Section 20 provides correspondence tables (Table 20 and Table 21) linking ISCED 2011 to ISCED 1997.

## 10. 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 those early childhood programmes that have an intentional education component. These programmes aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society and to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare them for entry into primary education.
101. In 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 in 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 0-2 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 are referred to in many ways across the world, for example early childhood education and development, play school, reception, pre-primary or pre-school or *educación inicial*. For programmes provided in *crèches*, day-care 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 Paragraph 105 and 106);
- b. Institutional context (see Paragraph 107);
- c. Typical target age of children for which 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** can be described as follows: the learning environment is visually stimulating and language-rich and fosters 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 in

interaction with staff. Programmes providing only childcare (supervision, nutrition and health) are not covered by ISCED.

106. The educational properties of **pre-primary education** can be described as follows: through interaction with peers and educators, children improve their use of language and their social skills, start to develop logical and reasoning skills, and talk through their thought processes. They are also introduced to alphabetical and mathematical concepts, understanding and use of language, 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 institutionalized in a context organised 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).
108. Within ISCED 0, early childhood educational development programmes are targeted at children aged 0-2 years; and pre-primary education programmes are targeted at children aged 3 to the start of 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 (but see Paragraph 117).
109. Integrated early childhood education programmes that span the two sub-categories of ISCED 0 (i.e. educational 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: educational 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 educational programme in those education systems in which such a requirement exists. It serves to distinguish early childhood education from child care for which no explicitly pedagogically trained staff is required.
112. Where relevant, the existence of a reference or regulatory framework issued or recognized by relevant national authorities (e.g. a Ministry of Education, other relevant Ministry or affiliated institution) is a good proxy criterion for an educational 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 educational programmes which are designed to take place before they 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

114. Educational programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 need special consideration for classification. In education systems where a part of early childhood education is included in “basic 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, ISCED recommends: 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; ii) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 0 and 1 not divided into stages, grades targeting children under the age of 6 should be classified as ISCED level 0, and the remaining grades should be classified as ISCED level 1.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

116. One dimension differentiates educational programmes in ISCED level 0:
- Target age group (see Paragraph 102).

### **E. PROGRAMMES ALSO 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 the age of the children.

### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 0**

118. Educational programmes in 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 subcategories 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) is used for individuals who never attended an educational programme, who attended some early childhood education (ISCED 0), or who attended some primary 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.

## **11. ISCED LEVEL 1 – PRIMARY**

### **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 to establish a sound foundation for learning and understanding of core areas of knowledge, personal and social development, preparing 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 in charge of 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 neither younger than 5 years nor older than 7 years. Most programmes at this level last 6 years, although their duration ranges 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 are referred to in many ways across the world, e.g. primary education, elementary education or basic education (stage 1/lower grades if an education system has one programme that spans ISCED levels 1 and 2). For international comparability purposes the term “primary” is used to label ISCED level 1.

### **B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA**

124. For the definition of primary, 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 ISCED 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, therefore not sufficiently fulfilling the criteria to classify them in ISCED level 1. The transition from pre-primary to primary education is typically marked by entry into the nationally designated primary, elementary or basic educational institutions or programmes.
126. Typically, one main teacher is in charge of 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 specialized 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

128. Educational 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 educational programme of 8 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, and any of those 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, criteria to determine the end of ISCED level 0 and the beginning of ISCED level 1 are provided in Paragraphs 114 and 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 6 years after the start of ISCED level 1 should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 1 and 2; ii) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 1 and 2 not divided into stages, only the first 6 years should be classified as ISCED level 1, and the remaining years are classified as ISCED level 2 (see Paragraph 149).

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

131. None.

### **E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 1**

132. ISCED level 1 also 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 educational programmes usually target individuals who left school before completing primary, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete primary education; or who completed primary but wish to enter an educational 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 in primary, for adults and youth older than typical ISCED level 1 students, are also included at this level.

### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 1**

135. All educational programmes in ISCED level 1 are coded 100. There are no categories or subcategories 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, recognized qualifications from ISCED level 2 programmes which are not considered sufficient for ISCED level 2 completion or partial completion are classified as ISCED level 1 (e.g., programmes with less than 2 years duration at ISCED level 2 or with less than 8 years cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1).
138. The classification codes for educational attainment related to ISCED level 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		Subcategory	
0	Less than primary	01	never attended an educational programme	010	never attended an educational 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	10	primary	100	including recognized successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial level completion

## 12. ISCED LEVEL 2 – LOWER SECONDARY

### A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

139. Programmes at ISCED level 2, or “lower secondary” education, are typically designed to build upon the learning outcomes from ISCED level 1. Usually, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which education systems may systematically 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 who have specialized knowledge of the subjects they teach.
141. ISCED level 2 begins after 4 to 7 years of ISCED level 1 education, with 6 years of ISCED level 1 being the most common duration. Students enter ISCED level 2 typically between age 10 and 13 (age 12 being the most common).
142. Programmes classified at ISCED level 2 are referred to in many ways across the world, for example secondary school (stage one/lower grades if there is nationally 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” is used to label ISCED level 2.

### B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

143. For the definition of lower secondary, 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 teacher qualifications (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 education systems from which subject-oriented instruction is emphasized.
  145. This level requires completion of ISCED level 1 or the ability to study ISCED level 2 content through a combination of prior education and life and work experience. 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 age 14 to 16 (most often age 15).
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 specialization.
148. In many education systems with compulsory education legislation, the end of lower secondary education coincides with the end of compulsory (general) education.

### **C. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

149. Educational programmes spanning ISCED levels 1 and 2 or 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, and those 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 Paragraphs 128 and 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 9 years after the start of ISCED level 1 should be used as the transition point between ISCED levels 2 and 3; ii) for programmes spanning ISCED levels 2 and 3 not divided into stages, only the grades between the end of ISCED level 1 until the end of 9 years of schooling after the start of ISCED level 1 should be classified as ISCED level 2, and the remaining years are classified as ISCED level 3 (see Paragraph 171).

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

152. Two dimensions differentiate educational programmes in ISCED level 2:
  - Programme orientation (see Paragraph 153);
  - Level completion and access to higher ISCED level programmes (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 level programmes**

154. The following four level completion and access subcategories are defined for ISCED level 2:
  1. *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 2 years at ISCED level 2 or that end after less than 8 years 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.

2. *Partial completion of ISCED level 2 without direct access to higher ISCED levels:* programmes which are part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 2 with a duration of at least 2 years at the level and that end after at least 8 years cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. 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).
3. *Completion of ISCED level 2 without direct access to higher ISCED levels:* programmes with a duration of at least 2 years at ISCED level 2 and that end after at least 8 years 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 successful completion of them qualifies for completion of ISCED level 2.
4. *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. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 2**

155. ISCED level 2 also includes programmes suited to individuals with special needs that are designed to build upon 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 educational programmes usually target individuals who left education after completing primary but before completing lower secondary education, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete a lower secondary education programme or who completed lower secondary but wish to enter an educational 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 other programmes at this level.

#### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 2**

158. The use of two complementary dimensions allows for reporting using orientation as categories and level completion and access to the next higher ISCED level as subcategories. The codes for lower secondary programmes are shown in Table 5.

– **Table 5. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 2 (ISCED-P)**

Categories (Orientation)		Subcategories (Level completion and access to higher level programmes)	
24	Lower secondary general	241	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		242	sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		243	sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
		244	sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary
25	Lower secondary vocational	251	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		252	sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		253	sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
		254	sufficient for level completion , with direct access to upper secondary

#### **G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 2**

159. For educational attainment, recognized qualifications from ISCED level 2 programmes which are not considered sufficient for ISCED level 2 completion or partial completion are classified as ISCED level 1 (also Table 4).
160. Similarly, recognized qualifications from ISCED level 3 programmes which are insufficient for consideration as ISCED level 3 completion or partial completion are classified as ISCED level 2.
161. The classification codes for educational attainment related to lower secondary 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)**

Categories (Orientation)		Subcategories (Level completion and access to higher level programmes)	
10	Primary	100	recognized successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial completion
24	Lower secondary general	242	partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		243	level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
		244	level completion, with direct access to upper secondary <sup>1</sup>
25	Lower secondary vocational	252	partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
		253	level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
		254	level completion, with direct access to upper secondary <sup>1</sup>

1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at upper secondary insufficient for level or partial level completion.

### **13. ISCED LEVEL 3 – UPPER SECONDARY**

#### **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 to 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 age 14 and 16. ISCED level 3 programmes usually end 12 or 13 years after the beginning of ISCED level 1 (or around age 18), with 12 years being the most widespread cumulative duration. However, exit from upper secondary may range across education systems from usually 11 to 14 years of education since the beginning of ISCED level 1 (or around age 17 to 20).
165. Programmes classified at ISCED level 3 are referred to in many ways across the world, e.g. secondary school (stage two/upper grades), senior secondary school or (senior) high school. For international comparability purposes the term “upper secondary” is used to label ISCED level 3.

#### **B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA**

166. For the definition of upper secondary, 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 4, and/or 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 (ISCED level 2) or the ability to handle ISCED level 3 content through a combination of prior education and life and work experience. 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 education systems at which programmes offer students more varied, specialised and

in-depth instruction in specific subjects or fields. Typically, programmes are more differentiated, with an increased range of options and streams 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

171. Educational programmes spanning ISCED levels 2 and 3 or 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, and those 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 Paragraphs 149 and 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 (ISCED level 3) and post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED level 4) or short-cycle tertiary (ISCED level 5). The grades, stages or cycles which extend beyond the general ISCED level 3 programme should be classified as ISCED levels 4 or 5 depending on the complexity of their content.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

174. Two dimensions differentiate educational programmes in ISCED level 3:
- Programme orientation (see Paragraph 175); and
  - Level completion and access to higher ISCED level programmes (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 level programmes**

176. The following four level completion and access subcategories are defined for ISCED level 3:

1. *No completion of ISCED level 3 (and thus without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7):* short terminal (or sequence of) programmes with a duration of less than 2 years at ISCED level 3 or that end after less than 11 years cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. These programmes do not give direct access to ISCED levels 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.
2. *Partial completion of ISCED level 3 without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7:* programmes which are part of a sequence

of programmes at ISCED level 3 with a duration of at least 2 years at the level and that end after at least 11 years cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. These programmes do not give direct access to ISCED levels 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 levels 5, 6 or 7). Note also that these programmes do not give direct access to ISCED level 4 either.

3. *Completion of ISCED level 3 without direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7:* programmes with a duration of at least 2 years at the level and that end after at least 11 years cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1. These programmes may be terminal or may give direct access to ISCED level 4. Successful completion of such programmes qualifies for completion of ISCED level 3.
4. *Completion of ISCED level 3 with direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7:* any programmes that give direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7 regardless of their duration at the level or their cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1. These programmes may also give direct access to ISCED level 4.

#### **E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 3**

177. ISCED level 3 also includes programmes suited to individuals with special needs that are equivalent in complexity of content to other ISCED level 3 programmes.
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 educational programmes usually target individuals who left education before completing upper secondary education, allowing them to re-enter the education system and complete upper secondary education or who completed upper secondary but wish to enter an educational 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 other programmes at this level.

#### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 3**

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

– **Table 7. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 3 (ISCED-P)**

Categories (Orientation)	Subcategories (Level completion and access to higher level programmes)
34 Upper secondary general	341 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	342 sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	343 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary [but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary]
	344 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary [may also give direct access to ISCED level 4]
35 Upper secondary vocational	351 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	352 sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	353 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary [but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary]
	354 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary [may also give direct access to ISCED level 4]

### G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 3

182. For educational attainment, recognized 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, recognized 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 programmes and qualifications are shown in Table 8.



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

Categories (Orientation)	Subcategories (Level completion and access to higher level programmes)
24 Lower secondary general	244 recognized successful completion of an upper secondary general programme insufficient for level or partial level completion
25 Lower secondary vocational	254 recognized successful completion of an upper secondary vocational programme insufficient for level or partial level completion
34 Upper secondary general	342 partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	343 level completion, without direct access to tertiary [but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary]
	344 level completion, with direct access to tertiary <sup>1</sup> [may also give direct access to ISCED level 4]
35 Upper secondary vocational	352 partial level completion, without direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary
	353 level completion, without direct access to tertiary [but may give direct access to ISCED level 4]
	354 level completion, with direct access to tertiary <sup>1</sup> [may also give direct access to ISCED level 4]

1. Including recognized successful completion of a stage of a programme at post-secondary non-tertiary insufficient for level completion.

## 14. ISCED LEVEL 4 – POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY

### A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

185. Post-secondary non-tertiary education provides learning experiences building on secondary education and preparing for labour market entry as well as tertiary education. It aims at the individual acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies below the high 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 that they require 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 qualification or specialise further. Given the complexity of their content, ISCED level 4 programmes cannot be regarded as tertiary education programmes, although they are clearly post-secondary education.
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 levels 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 to be classified at ISCED level 4 are referred to in many ways across the world, e.g. technician diploma, primary professional education, *préparation aux carrières administratives*. For international comparability purposes the term “post-secondary non-tertiary” is used to label ISCED level 4.

### B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

189. For the definition of post-secondary non-tertiary 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 as 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. However, programmes designed to review the contents 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 specialized or detailed than at the

upper secondary level. 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.

### **C. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

192. Not applicable.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

193. Two dimensions differentiate educational programmes in ISCED level 4:

- Programme orientation (see Paragraph 194); and
- Access to higher ISCED level programmes (see Paragraph 195).

#### **Programme orientation**

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

- General; and
- Vocational.

#### **Access to higher ISCED level programmes**

195. The following three level completion and access subcategories 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 levels 5-7. 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 levels 5, 6 or 7* (primarily designed for direct labour market entry); and
- *Completion of ISCED level 4 with direct access to first tertiary programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7* or expanding access to tertiary education.

### **E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 4**

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

### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 4**

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

– **Table 9. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 4 (ISCED-P)**

Categories (Orientation)	Subcategories (Access to higher level programmes)
44 Post-secondary non-tertiary general	441 insufficient for level completion and without direct access to tertiary
	443 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary
	444 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary
45 Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational	451 insufficient for level completion and without direct access to tertiary
	453 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary
	454 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary

**G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 4**

198. For educational attainment, recognized 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 qualifications are shown in Table 10.

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

Categories (Orientation)	Subcategories (Access to higher level programmes)
34 Upper secondary general	344 recognized successful completion of a stage of a post-secondary non-tertiary general programme insufficient for level completion
35 Upper secondary vocational	354 recognized successful completion of a stage of a post-secondary non-tertiary vocational programme insufficient for level completion
44 Post-secondary non-tertiary general	443 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
	444 level completion, with direct access to tertiary <sup>1</sup>
45 Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational	453 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
	454 level completion, with direct access to tertiary <sup>1</sup>

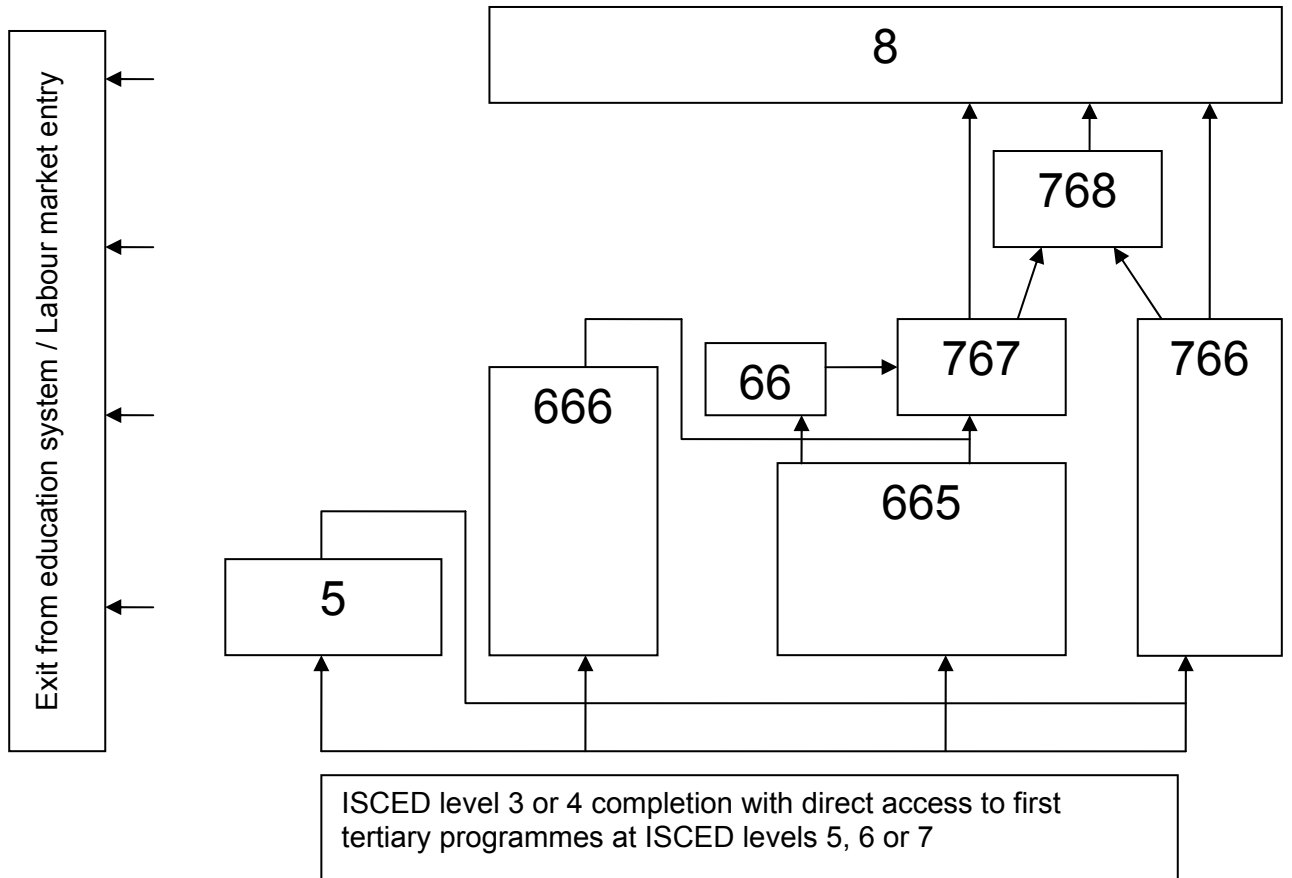
1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme or a stage of a programme at short-cycle tertiary insufficient for level completion.

## 15. 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 is broader than that because it also includes advanced vocational or professional education. Tertiary education comprises ISCED levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are labelled as short-cycle tertiary, bachelor or equivalent, master or equivalent and doctoral or equivalent, respectively. The content of programmes at the tertiary level is more complex and advanced than in lower ISCED levels.
201. First programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 or 7 require the successful completion of ISCED level 3 programmes that give direct access to first tertiary programmes. Access may also be possible from ISCED level 4. In addition to qualification requirements, entry to educational 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 educational 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 used for tertiary education.
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 programmes at ISCED levels 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 programmes at ISCED level 5 (at least 2 years);
  - bachelor or equivalent first degree programmes at ISCED level 6 (3-4 years);
  - bachelor or equivalent long first degree programmes at ISCED level 6 (more than 4 years); or
  - master or equivalent long first degree programmes at ISCED level 7 (at least 5 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 educational 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 educational 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 to 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**



## **16. ISCED LEVEL 5 – SHORT-CYCLE TERTIARY**

### **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, programmes may also provide a pathway to other tertiary education programmes. Academic tertiary education programmes below the level of a bachelor programme or equivalent are also classified as ISCED level 5.
208. Entry to 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 in 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 or equivalent) or long first degree ISCED level 7 (master or equivalent) programmes.
210. Programmes to be classified at ISCED level 5 are referred to in many ways across the world, e.g. master craftsman programme, (higher) technical education, community college education, technician or advanced/higher vocational training, associate degree or *bac + 2* programmes. For international comparability purposes the term “short-cycle tertiary” is used to label ISCED level 5.

### **B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA**

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

#### **Main criteria**

- a. Content of short-cycle tertiary programmes (see Paragraph 212);
- b. Entry requirements (see Paragraph 208); and
- c. Minimum duration of programme (see Paragraph 213).

#### **Subsidiary criteria**

- a. Institutional transition point (see Paragraph 214);
  - b. Typical duration of programme (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 or equivalent) programmes.
213. ISCED level 5 programmes have a minimum of two years duration and are 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

215. Educational 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. Those 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 educational 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:

- General; and
- Vocational.

Once definitions of academic and professional programmes have been developed they will be used at ISCED level 5 too.

#### **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. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 5**

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

### **F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 5**

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



– **Table 11. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 5 (ISCED-P)**

Categories (Orientation)	Subcategories (Level completion)	
54 Short-cycle tertiary general	541	insufficient for level completion
	544	sufficient for level completion
55 Short-cycle tertiary vocational	551	insufficient for level completion
	554	sufficient for level completion

#### **G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 5**

221. For educational attainment, recognized 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 recognized successful completion in a programme at ISCED level 5 is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.
222. Recognized 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)**

Categories (Orientation)		Subcategories (Level completion)	
44	Post-secondary non-tertiary general	444	recognized successful completion of a short-cycle tertiary academic programme (or stage) insufficient for level completion
45	Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational	454	recognized successful completion of a short-cycle tertiary professional programme (or stage) insufficient for level completion
54	Short-cycle tertiary general	540	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
55	Short-cycle tertiary vocational	550	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
56	Short-cycle tertiary orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	560	not further defined <sup>1,2</sup>
<p>1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at short-cycle tertiary sufficient for ISCED 5 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at bachelor and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 6 level completion.</p> <p>2. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of bachelor and equivalent programmes and qualifications.</p>			

## 17. ISCED LEVEL 6 – BACHELOR OR EQUIVALENT

### A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

224. Programmes at ISCED level 6, or “bachelor or equivalent”, 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 or less independent or is undertaken with more guidance than those at ISCED levels 7 or 8.
226. Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education. Entry to educational programmes at this level 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 level education or equivalent) 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).
227. Programmes to be classified at ISCED level 6 are referred to in many ways across the world, such as bachelor 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 or equivalent” is used to label ISCED level 6.

### B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

228. For the definition of bachelor or equivalent, 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);
  - b. No direct access to ISCED level 8 programmes (see Paragraph 226).
229. Programmes at this level typically have 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 4 years duration are included at this level if equivalent to bachelor programmes in terms of the 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 1-2 years' duration, are often professionally-oriented offering more specialization 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 educational 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

232. Not applicable.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

233. Two dimensions may be used to differentiate educational programmes in 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 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 or equivalent level with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of three to four years;*
  - *Long first degree programme at bachelor or equivalent level with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of more than four years; and*
  - *Second or further degree programme at bachelor or equivalent level (following successful completion of a bachelor or equivalent programme).*

**E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 6**

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

**F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 6**

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

– **Table 13. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 6 (ISCED-P)**

Categories (Orientation)	Sub-categories (Duration/position)	Description
64 Bachelor or equivalent 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 or equivalent programme)
65 Bachelor or equivalent 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 or equivalent programme)
66 Bachelor or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>1</sup>	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 or equivalent programme)

1. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of bachelor and equivalent programmes.

#### **G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 6**

238. For educational attainment, recognized 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 recognized successful completion in a first programme at ISCED level 6 is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.
239. Recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages of a first programme at ISCED level 7 (either a long first master or a master or equivalent following a bachelor programme) 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 (Completion)	Description
54 Short-cycle tertiary general	540	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
55 Short-cycle tertiary vocational	550	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
56 Short-cycle tertiary orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	560	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
64 Bachelor or equivalent academic	640	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
65 Bachelor or equivalent professional	650	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
66 Bachelor or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	660	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
<p>1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at short-cycle tertiary sufficient for ISCED 5 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at bachelor and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 6 level completion.</p> <p>2. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of bachelor or master and equivalent programmes and qualifications.</p> <p>3. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at bachelor or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 6 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at master and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 7 level completion.</p>		

## 18. ISCED LEVEL 7 – MASTER OR EQUIVALENT

### A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

241. Programmes at ISCED level 7, or “master or equivalent”, 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 in ISCED level 6 and less advanced than those expected in ISCED level 8.
243. Entry to 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 degree, entry requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education. Entry to 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 usually 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 to be classified at ISCED level 7 are referred to in many ways across the world such as 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 or equivalent” is used to label ISCED level 7.

### B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

245. For the definition of master or equivalent, 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 *first degree/qualification* are included in this level if equivalent to master level programmes in terms of the 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 specialized 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 durations 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. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

250. Not applicable.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

251. Two dimensions differentiate educational programmes in ISCED level 7:
- Programme orientation (see Paragraph 252);
  - 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 or equivalent level with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of less than five years, therefore insufficient for completion of ISCED level 7;
  - *First degree programme at a master 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 or equivalent level* (following successful completion of a bachelor or equivalent programme); and
  - *Second or further degree programme at master or equivalent level* (following successful completion of another master or equivalent programme).

**E. PROGRAMMES ALSO 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. Completion of ISCED level 7 programmes may reduce the study duration in a subsequent doctoral programme to less than three years. Within the level, they are classified depending on their position in the national degree and qualification structure.

**F. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 7**

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

– **Table 15. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 7 (ISCED-P)**

Category (Orientation)	Sub-category (Position)	Description
74 Master or equivalent 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 or equivalent programme)
	748	second or further degree (following successful completion of a master or equivalent programme)
75 Master or equivalent 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 or equivalent programme)
	758	second or further degree (following successful completion of a master or equivalent programme)
76 Master or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>1</sup>	761	insufficient for level completion
	766	long first degree (at least 5 years)
	767	second or further degree (following successful completion of a bachelor or equivalent programme)
	768	second or further degree (following successful completion of a master or equivalent programme)
1. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of bachelor or master and equivalent programmes and qualifications.		

## G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 7

256. For educational attainment, recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) within a first degree at master or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 7 completion are classified at ISCED level 6. Participation without recognized 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 or equivalent programme is disregarded for the purposes of determining educational attainment levels.
257. Recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) at 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 16. Classification codes for educational attainment at ISCED level 7 (ISCED-A)**

Category (orientation)	Sub-category (Completion)	Description
64 Bachelor or equivalent academic	640	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
65 Bachelor or equivalent professional	650	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
66 Bachelor or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	660	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
74 Master or equivalent academic	740	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
75 Master or equivalent professional	750	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
76 Master or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	760	not further defined <sup>3</sup>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at bachelor or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 6 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at master and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 7 level completion.</li> <li>2. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of bachelor or master and equivalent programmes and qualifications.</li> <li>3. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at master or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 7 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at doctoral and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 8 level completion.</li> </ol>		

## **19. ISCED LEVEL 8 – DOCTORAL OR EQUIVALENT**

### **A. PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS**

259. Programmes at ISCED level 8, or “doctoral or equivalent”, are designed primarily to lead to an advanced research qualification. Programmes at this ISCED level are devoted to advanced study and original research and 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. These programmes therefore 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 to 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 to be classified at ISCED level 8 are referred to in many ways across the world such as 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” is used to label ISCED level 8.

### **B. CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA**

263. For the definition of doctoral or equivalent, 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 programme (see Paragraph 265).

#### **Subsidiary criteria**

- a. Doctoral degree/qualification required for specific occupations (see 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 programmes require 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. Prior completion of an advanced research programme at ISCED level 7 may reduce the time required for an individual to complete an ISCED level 8

programme (see Paragraph 254). Shorter, non-doctoral advanced research programmes are classified in ISCED level 7.

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

### **C. CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING PROGRAMMES SPANNING ISCED LEVELS**

267. Not applicable.

### **D. COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS**

268. One dimension may be used to differentiate educational programmes in ISCED level 8:
- Programme orientation (see Paragraph 270).

#### **Programme orientation**

269. The following two orientation categories are available:

- Academic; and
- Professional.

### **E. PROGRAMMES ALSO INCLUDED IN ISCED LEVEL 8**

270. Second advanced research qualifications or higher doctorates requiring 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. Second research qualifications are not separately accounted for by ISCED. They are not usually linked with an educational programme. 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 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT ISCED LEVEL 8**

271. Educational programmes in 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 orientation as categories. The codes to be used for ISCED level 8 are shown in Table 17.

– **Table 17. Classification codes for educational programmes at ISCED level 8 (ISCED-P)**

Category (Orientation)	Sub-category	Description
84 Doctoral or equivalent academic	841	insufficient for level completion
	844	sufficient for level completion
85 Doctoral or equivalent professional	851	insufficient for level completion
	854	sufficient for level completion
86 Doctoral or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>1</sup>	861	insufficient for level completion
	864	sufficient for level completion
<p>1. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of master or doctoral and equivalent programmes and qualifications.</p>		

#### **G. CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 8**

272. For educational attainment, recognized 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 recognized 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 or equivalent academic	740	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
75 Master or equivalent professional	750	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
76 Master or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	760	not further defined <sup>1</sup>
84 Doctoral or equivalent academic	840	not further defined
85 Doctoral or equivalent professional	850	not further defined
86 Doctoral or equivalent orientation unspecified <sup>2</sup>	860	not further defined
<p>1. Including recognized successful completion of a programme at master or equivalent level sufficient for ISCED 7 level completion or of a programme or a stage of a programme at doctoral and equivalent level insufficient for ISCED 8 level completion.</p> <p>2. To be used in the absence of internationally agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations of master or doctoral and equivalent programmes and qualifications.</p>		



## 20. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ISCED 2011 AND ISCED 1997 LEVELS

274. This section describes the correspondence between ISCED levels in the ISCED 2011 classification and the earlier version, 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 of the programmes: 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 three years. It was first introduced in ISCED 2011 and no corresponding category exists in 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 provide 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 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 not providing access to higher ISCED levels into the categories “partial level completion” and “level completion”. These two categories in ISCED 2011 typically correspond to the category C and at ISCED level 3 to 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 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 subcategories “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. The possibility of distinguishing between academic and professional orientations is also allowed for within ISCED at levels 6-8 once internationally agreed definitions have been developed.
- At levels 6 and 7 of ISCED 2011, the third digit of the classification distinguishes between programmes according to programme 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 (ISCED levels 6 and 7 combined in ISCED 2011). 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 between ISCED levels in the 1997 and 2011 versions.

– **Table 19. Correspondence between ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011 levels**

ISCED 1997	ISCED 2011
-	ISCED 01
ISCED 0	ISCED 02
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 6	ISCED level 8

\* content of category slightly changed

284. Table 20 and Table 21 and show the correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997, including complementary dimensions, categories and subcategories.

– Table 20. Correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997 in detail. Levels 0 to 4

ISCED 2011					ISCED 1997			
Level label	Level	Category	Subcategory	Notes on subcategories	Level label	Level	Destination	Orientation
early childhood educational development	0	01	010	Educational programmes targeting under 3 year olds	<i>not covered in ISCED 1997</i>			
pre-primary education		02	020		pre-primary education	0	n.a.	n.a.
primary	1	10	100		primary education or first stage of basic education	1	n.a.	n.a.
lower secondary	2	24 general	241	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary	lower secondary education or second stage of basic education	2	C	general/pre-vocational
			242	partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary			C	
			243	level completion, without direct access to upper secondary			C	
			244	level completion, with direct access to upper secondary			A/B	
		25 vocational	251	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary			C	vocational
			252	partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary			C	
			253	level completion, without direct access to upper secondary			C	
			254	level completion, with direct access to upper secondary			A/B	

ISCED 2011					ISCED 1997			
Level label	Level	Category	Subcategory	Notes on subcategories	Level label	Level	Destination	Orientation
upper secondary	3	34 general	341	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and thus without direct access to tertiary	upper secondary education	3	C	general/pre-vocational
			342	partial level completion and without direct access to tertiary			C	
			343	level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes [but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary] <sup>1</sup>			C	
			344	level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes [may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary] <sup>1</sup>			A/B	
		35 vocational	351	insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to tertiary			C	vocational
			352	partial level completion and without direct access to tertiary			C	
			353	level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes [but may give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary] <sup>1</sup>			C	
			354	level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes [may also give direct access to post-secondary non-tertiary] <sup>1</sup>			A/B	
post-secondary non-tertiary	4	44 general	441	insufficient for level completion and without direct access to tertiary <sup>2</sup>	post-secondary non-tertiary education	4	B	general/pre-vocational
			443	level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes <sup>2</sup>			B	
			444	level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes <sup>2</sup>			A	
		45 vocational	451	insufficient for level completion and without direct access to tertiary <sup>2</sup>			B	vocational
			453	level completion, without direct access to first tertiary programmes <sup>2</sup>			B	
			454	level completion, with direct access to first tertiary programmes <sup>2</sup>			A	

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

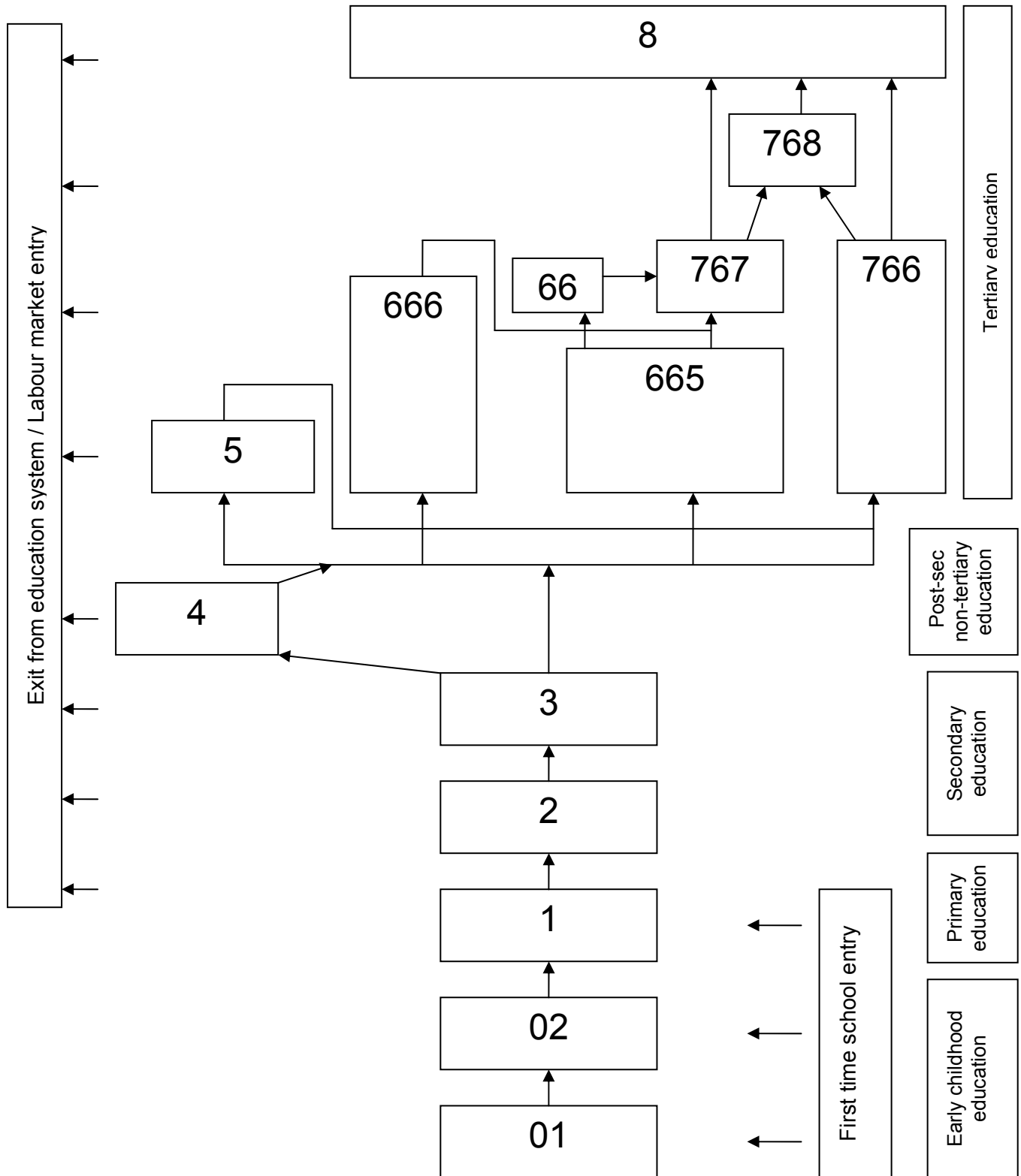
– Table 21. Correspondence between ISCED 2011 and ISCED 1997 in detail: Tertiary levels

ISCED 2011						ISCED 1997				
Level label	Level	Category	Subcategory	Notes on (sub) categories	Notes	Level label	Level	Type	Position	Cumulative duration in tertiary
short-cycle tertiary	5	54 general	541	insufficient for level completion		tertiary education, first stage	5	B	n.a.	<2 years
			544	sufficient for level completion			5	B	n.a.	<3 years
		55 vocational	551	insufficient for level completion			5	B	n.a.	<2 years
			554	sufficient for level completion			5	B	n.a.	<3 years
bachelor or equivalent	6	66 <sup>1</sup> orientation unspecified	661	insufficient for level completion			5	A	intermediate	<3 years
			665	1 <sup>st</sup> degree (3-4 years)			5	A	1 <sup>st</sup>	3-4 years
			666	Long 1 <sup>st</sup> degree (> 4 years) (bachelor or equivalent)			5	A	1 <sup>st</sup>	>4 years
			667	2 <sup>nd</sup> or further degree (following a bachelor or equivalent)	If equivalent to other programmes already classified in level 6.		5	A	2 <sup>nd</sup> /further	≥4 years
master or equivalent	7	76 <sup>1</sup> orientation unspecified	761	insufficient for level completion			5	A	intermediate	<3 years
			766	Long 1 <sup>st</sup> degree (≥ 5 years) (master or equivalent)	Unless equivalent to programmes already classified in level 6, then 666.		5	A	1 <sup>st</sup>	≥5 years
			767	2 <sup>nd</sup> or further degree (following a bachelor or equivalent)			5	A	2 <sup>nd</sup> /further	≥4-5 years
			768	2 <sup>nd</sup> or further degree (following a master or equivalent)			5	A	2 <sup>nd</sup> /further	≥6 years
doctoral or equivalent	8	86 <sup>1</sup> orientation unspecified	861	insufficient for level completion		tertiary education, second stage	6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
			864	sufficient for level completion	Programmes that lead directly to a doctoral degree only.	6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	

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

21. ANNEX 1: ISCED 2011 POTENTIAL EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

– Figure 2. ISCED 2011 potential educational pathways



## **22. ANNEX 2: CODING OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES**

### **0 Early childhood education**

- 01 early childhood educational development
  - 010 early childhood educational development
- 02 pre-primary
  - 020 pre-primary

### **1 Primary**

- 10 primary
  - 100 primary

### **2 Lower secondary**

- 24 general
  - 241 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 242 sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 243 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
  - 244 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary
- 25 vocational
  - 251 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 252 sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 253 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
  - 254 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to upper secondary

### **3 Upper secondary**

- 34 general
  - 341 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to tertiary
  - 342 sufficient for partial level completion and without access to tertiary
  - 343 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 344 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary
- 35 vocational
  - 351 insufficient for level completion or partial completion and without direct access to tertiary
  - 352 sufficient for partial level completion and without direct access to tertiary
  - 353 sufficient for level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 354 sufficient for level completion, with direct access to tertiary

### **4 Post-secondary non-tertiary**

- 44 general
  - 441 insufficient for level completion and 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 and 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**

- 54 general
  - 541 insufficient for level completion
  - 544 sufficient for level completion
- 55 vocational
  - 551 insufficient for level completion
  - 554 sufficient for level completion

## **6 Bachelor or equivalent**

- 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 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 or equivalent programme)
- 66 orientation unspecified
  - 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 or equivalent programme)

## **7 Master or equivalent**

- 74 academic
  - 741 insufficient for level completion
  - 746 long first degree (at least 5 years)
  - 747 second or further degree (following a bachelor or equivalent programme)
  - 748 second or further degree (following a master 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 or equivalent programme)
  - 758 second or further degree (following a master or equivalent programme)
- 76 orientation unspecified
  - 761 insufficient for level completion
  - 766 long first degree (at least 5 years)
  - 767 second or further degree (following a bachelor or equivalent programme)
  - 768 second or further degree (following a master or equivalent programme)

## **8 Doctoral or equivalent**

- 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
  - 861 insufficient for level completion
  - 864 sufficient for completion of level

## **9 Not elsewhere classified**

- 99 not elsewhere classified
  - 999 not elsewhere classified



## 23. ANNEX 3: CODING OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

### 0 Less than primary

- 01 never attended an educational programme
  - 010 never attended an educational 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

- 10 primary
  - 100 including recognized successful completion of a lower secondary programme insufficient for level completion or partial level completion

### 2 Lower secondary<sup>1</sup>

- 24 general<sup>1</sup>
  - 242 partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 243 level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
  - 244 level completion, with direct access to upper secondary<sup>1</sup>
- 25 vocational<sup>1</sup>
  - 252 partial level completion and without direct access to upper secondary
  - 253 level completion, without direct access to upper secondary
  - 254 level completion, with direct access to upper secondary<sup>1</sup>

### 3 Upper secondary<sup>1</sup>

- 34 general<sup>1</sup>
  - 342 partial level completion and without direct access to tertiary
  - 343 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 344 level completion, with direct access to tertiary<sup>1</sup>
- 35 vocational<sup>1</sup>
  - 352 partial level completion and without direct access to tertiary
  - 353 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 354 level completion, with direct access to tertiary<sup>1</sup>

### 4 Post-secondary non-tertiary<sup>1</sup>

- 44 general<sup>1</sup>
  - 443 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 444 level completion, with direct access to tertiary<sup>1</sup>
- 45 vocational<sup>1</sup>
  - 453 level completion, without direct access to tertiary
  - 454 level completion, with direct access to tertiary<sup>1</sup>

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

**5 Short-cycle tertiary<sup>1</sup>**

- 54 general<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 540 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 55 vocational<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 550 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 56 orientation unspecified<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 560 not further defined<sup>1</sup>

**6 Bachelor or equivalent<sup>1</sup>**

- 64 academic<sup>1</sup>
  - 644 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 65 professional<sup>1</sup>
  - 654 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 66 orientation unspecified<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 664 not further defined<sup>1</sup>

**7 Master or equivalent<sup>1</sup>**

- 74 academic<sup>1</sup>
  - 744 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 75 professional<sup>1</sup>
  - 754 not further defined<sup>1</sup>
- 76 orientation unspecified<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 764 not further defined<sup>1</sup>

**8 Doctoral or equivalent<sup>1</sup>**

- 84 academic<sup>1</sup>
  - 840 not further defined
- 85 professional<sup>1</sup>
  - 850 not further defined
- 86 orientation unspecified<sup>1,2</sup>
  - 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 of academic and professional orientations of programmes at ISCED levels 6-8.

## **24. ANNEX 4: BROAD GROUPS AND FIELDS OF EDUCATION**

285. Note: Fields of education remain unchanged from the ISCED 1997 version. Starting in 2011 the UIS plans to develop a three-digit detailed 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 OECD for more than a decade but requires further updating. The UIS will present the new coding for global review and consultation during 2012 with a view to adopting the classification in 2013. Once the new classification of fields of education and training has been formally adopted by the UNESCO General Conference of Member States, it will be established as a separate and independent classification from ISCED and this section of the current ISCED will be removed.
286. There are 25 fields of education organized in nine 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 specialized 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 TV 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.

## **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 immuno-haematology, 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, child care, youth services, gerontological services;

Social work: counselling, welfare 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”.)

## **25. ANNEX 5: GLOSSARY**

### **Core concepts:**

- 1 – Learning concepts
- 2 – Learning types
- 3 – Education concepts
- 4 – Education types
- 5 – Educational programme elements
- 6 – Educational programme process characteristics
- 7 – Qualifications & Educational attainment
- 8 – Education levels
- 9 – Duration
- 10 – Fields of Education

**Alphabetic list of Glossary items:  
(Core concept number in parentheses)**

Academic year (9)  
Adult education (4)  
Assessment of learning outcomes (7)  
Completion (of an educational programme) (6)  
Completion (of an ISCED level) (7)  
Course (5)  
Credit (7)  
Cumulative duration (9)  
Degree (7)  
Dual system educational programmes (4)  
Early childhood education (ISCED-P level 0) (8)  
Education (3)  
Education provider (3)  
Educational activity (3)  
Educational attainment (7)  
Educational institution (3)  
Educational programme (3)  
Enrolment (6)  
Entrants (6)  
Entry (6)  
Field of education (10)  
First degree (7)  
Formal education (4)  
Further degree (7)  
General education (4)  
Grade (5)  
Graduate (of an educational programme) (6)  
Graduation (from an educational programme) (6)  
Incidental or random learning (2)  
Informal learning (2)  
Initial education (4)  
Intermediate qualification (7)  
Learning (1)  
Learning activity (1)  
Learning objectives (1)  
Less than primary (ISCED-A level 0) (8)  
Levels of education (8)  
Lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) (8)  
Minimum duration (9)  
Modular programmes (5)  
Module (5)  
Non-formal education (4)  
Non-formal (educational) qualification (7)  
(Learning) outcomes (1)  
Partial completion (of an ISCED level) (7)  
Participant (6)  
Participation (6)  
Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4) (8)  
Primary education (ISCED level 1) (8)  
Qualification (7)  
Random learning (2)  
Recognized qualification (7)  
Regular education (4)  
School- or college-based education (4)  
Second chance education (4)  
Second or further degree (7)  
Secondary education (ISCED levels 2-3) (8)  
Special needs education (4)  
Stage (5)  
Successful completion (of an educational programme) (6)  
Tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8) (8)  
Theoretical duration (9)  
Training (4)  
Typical duration (9)  
Unsuccessful completion (of an educational programme) (6)  
Upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (8)  
Validation of learning outcomes (7)  
Vocational education (4)  
Work-based education (4)



## 1 – LEARNING CONCEPTS

**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 for an occupation or 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 educational programme.

## 2 – LEARNING TYPES

**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 or other events or communication that are not designed as deliberate educational or learning activities. Examples include learning that takes place during the course of a meeting, or whilst listening to a radio programme or watching a television broadcast that is not designed as an educational programme.

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

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

## 3 – EDUCATION CONCEPT

**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.

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

**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. 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.

**Educational 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 educational 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 characterized as courses, units, or modules – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects and the preparation of dissertations.

**Education provider.** Organisation 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.

#### 4 – EDUCATION TYPES

**Adult education.** Education specifically targeting individuals who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong 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 knowledge, skills and competencies in a new field or to refresh or update their knowledge in a particular field. This also includes what may be referred to as “continuing education”, “recurrent education” or “second chance education”.

**Dual system educational 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.

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

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

**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 the society to which they belong. It is typically provided by educational institutions in a continuous educational pathway.

**Non-formal education.** Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a 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 for 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 recognized as formal qualifications by the relevant national educational 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.

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

**Second chance education.** Education specifically targeting 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 who completed the level but wish to enter an educational 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”.

**Special needs education.** Education designed to facilitate the learning of 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 educational programme. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) disadvantages in physical, behavioural, intellectual, emotional and social capacities. Educational programmes in special needs education may follow a similar curriculum as that offered in the parallel regular education system, however they take individuals’ particular 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 for individual students within already existing educational programmes, or be offered as a separate class in the same or separate educational institutions.

**School- or college-based education.** Educational activities taking place in institutions established for the education of children and youth in the course of initial educational 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.

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

**Vocational education.** Education that is designed for learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies specific to a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades. Vocational education may have work-based components (e.g. apprenticeships). 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 taking place in a work environment, usually in the context of vocational educational programmes which aim to achieve specific learning objectives through practical instruction and participation in work activities under the guidance of experienced workers or trainers.

## 5 – EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

**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”.

**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”.

**Modular programmes.** Educational 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.

**Stage.** A sub-level of an educational 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 educational programme and may be individually certified by an intermediate qualification.

## 6 – EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS

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

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

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

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

**Graduate of an educational programme.** Individuals who have successfully completed an educational programme.

**Graduation (from an educational programme).** The successful completion of an educational programme. Note that it is possible for a single graduate to have more than one graduation (even within the same academic year) if they were enrolled simultaneously in two or more programmes and successfully completed them.

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

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

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

**Unsuccessful completion (of an educational programme).** Failure to achieve the learning objectives of an educational programme despite having attended or taken part in all components of the educational programme (including final exams 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.

## 7 – QUALIFICATIONS & EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**Assessment of learning outcomes.** Evaluation of individuals' 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 educational programme.

**Completion (of an ISCED level).** Successful completion of an educational 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 levels 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).

**Credit.** Unit in which the successful completion of courses or modules is earned and documented during and at the end of an educational programme. Credits express the volume of learning based on the workload students typically need in order to achieve the expected learning objectives.

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

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

**First degree.** A degree awarded on the successful completion of an educational 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 educational programme

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

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

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

**Partial completion (of an ISCED level).** At ISCED levels 2 or 3 only, the successful completion of a programme in a sequence within the given level which meets 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) but is not the last programme within the sequence in that ISCED level.

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

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

**Second or further degree.** A degree awarded on the successful completion of an educational 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 educational programme.

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

## 8 – EDUCATION LEVELS

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

**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.

**Less than primary (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.

**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 to establish a sound foundation for learning and solid understanding of core areas of knowledge and personal development, preparing for lower secondary education. It aims at learning at a basic level of complexity with little if any specialisation.

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

**Lower secondary education (ISCED level 2)** Programmes at ISCED level 2, or "lower secondary" education, are typically designed to build upon the fundamental teaching and learning processes which begin at ISCED level 1. Usually, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which education systems may systematically 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.

**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 to 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.

**Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4).** Post-secondary non-tertiary education provides learning and educational activities building on secondary education preparing for both labour market entry as well as tertiary education. It typically targets students who have completed upper secondary (ISCED level 3) but who want to increase their opportunities either to enter the labour market or to progress to tertiary education. Programmes are often not significantly more advanced than those at upper secondary 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.

**Tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8).** 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 is broader than that because it also includes advanced vocational or professional education.

## 9 – DURATION

**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 between different types of educational institutions within a country. This is also referred to as the *school year*, mainly for the pre-tertiary level.

**Cumulative duration.** The total theoretical duration of a sequence of educational 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 educational programme.

**Minimum duration.** The minimum theoretical duration of an educational 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.

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

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

## 10 – FIELDS OF EDUCATION

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

## 26. ANNEX 6: NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ISCED: FURTHER ISSUES

287. Paragraphs 39 to 42 of ISCED 2011 defines non-formal education (paragraph 39), provides the types of non-formal education (paragraph 40), 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 of resulting qualifications for the classification of non-formal education programmes (paragraph 42).
288. This annex gives some additional details regarding non-formal education programme characteristics. A thorough treatment of measurements of non-formal programmes for international statistical purposes would imply further developments of the concept of non-formal programmes through, for example, an operational manual. 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:
- 1) contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children (alternative programmes to initial education);
  - 2) as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.
- These latter can:
- 2a) include training in a workplace for improving or adapting existing qualifications and skills, and training for unemployed or economically inactive persons.
  - 2b) It can also include 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 an non-formal educational programme can often support the classification of the educational 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 educational programme. To establish content equivalencies between programmes and qualifications in the same educational 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 organisations, 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 educational programmes, the type of the provider should not be used as a main criterion for differentiating non-formal education and training, nor should it be used as a main criteria 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 for specific 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 focussed less on theoretical learning. For example, a formal programme could teach computer science (e.g. for acquiring a recognized qualification as an IT-engineer) whereas a non-formal programme may teach specific IT 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 and are not recognized as formal by educational authorities; they are normally covering ISCED levels 0-3 and may be provided by private organisations including non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
296. While non-formal education is a recognized part of ISCED it is likely that international data collection exercises (mappings, surveys and 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 qualifications.