

PART III

ISCED LEVELS 5 TO 8: TERTIARY EDUCATION



7

Chapter 7

Overview of ISCED 2011 tertiary education levels

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

There is usually a clear hierarchy between qualifications granted by tertiary education programmes. It comprises ISCED levels 5 (short-cycle tertiary education), 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level), 7 (Master's or equivalent level) and 8 (doctoral or equivalent level). The content of programmes at the tertiary level is more complex and advanced than in lower ISCED levels.



DESCRIPTION

Definition

(§200)¹ Tertiary education builds on secondary education providing learning activities in specialised fields of study. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialisation. Tertiary education includes what is commonly understood as academic education but also includes advanced vocational or professional education. It comprises ISCED levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are labelled as short-cycle tertiary education, Bachelor's or equivalent level, Master's or equivalent level, and doctoral or equivalent level, respectively. The content of programmes at the tertiary level is more complex and advanced than in lower ISCED levels.

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

(§205) The successful completion of ISCED level 7 is usually required for entry into ISCED level 8 (see figure 1).

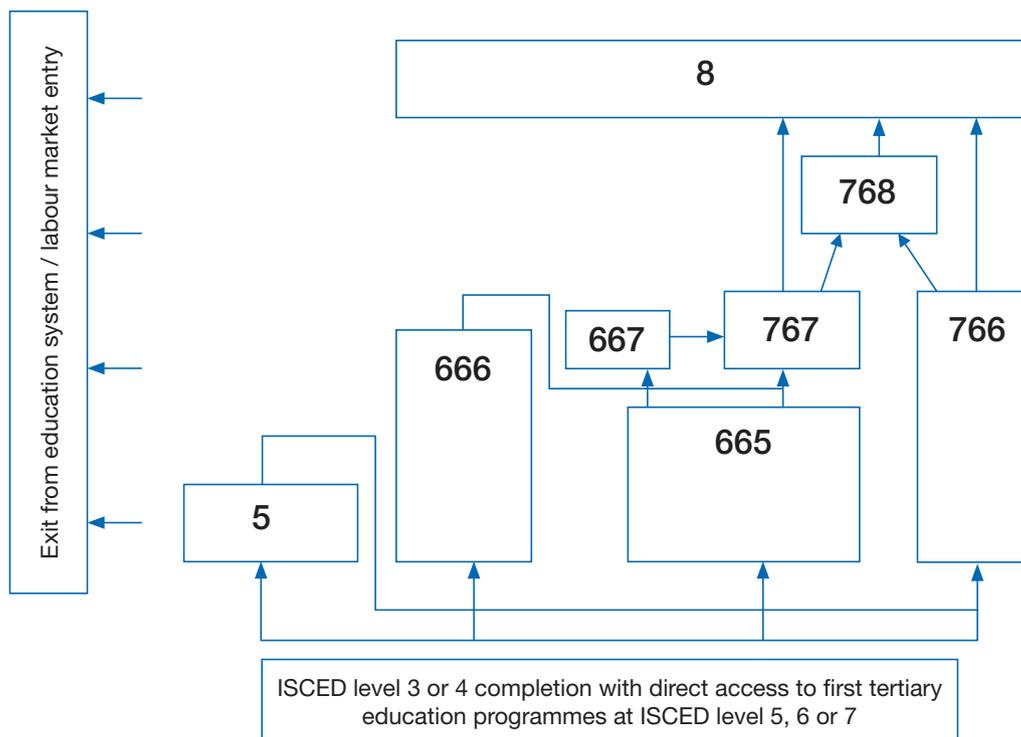
(§203) There is usually a clear hierarchy between qualifications granted by tertiary education programmes. However, unlike programmes at ISCED levels 1, 2, 3 and 4, national programmes at ISCED levels 5, 6 and 7 can exist in parallel rather than as one ISCED level building sequentially on another.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the groups of tertiary education programmes (which will be described in more detail in the following chapters) and the pathways between them. These categories are:

- Short-cycle tertiary education programmes at ISCED level 5 (see group 5);
- First tertiary degree programmes with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of three to four years, at ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) (see group 665);
- Long first tertiary degree programmes with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of more than four years, at ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) (see group 666);
- Second or further tertiary degree programmes, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme, at ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) (see group 667);
- Long first tertiary degree programmes with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of at least five years (that does not require prior tertiary education), at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level) (see group 766);
- Second or further tertiary degree programmes, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme, at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level) (see group 767);
- Second or further degree programmes, following successful completion of another Master's or equivalent programme, at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level) (see group 768); and
- Doctoral or equivalent programmes at ISCED level 8 (see group 8).



▪ Figure 7.1 ▪
Tertiary education pathways in ISCED 2011



CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ISCED 2011 AND 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.

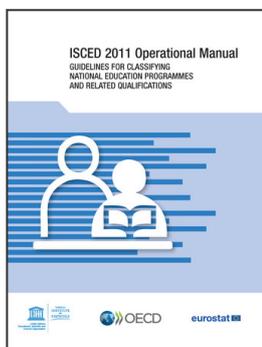
The new levels better identify the current structure of tertiary programmes, notably distinguishing Bachelor's programmes from Master's programmes.

(§282) ISCED 2011 simplifies the complementary dimensions at the tertiary ISCED levels compared to 1997.

- At level 5 in ISCED 2011, vocational programmes are differentiated from general programmes at the second digit. In ISCED 1997, this differentiation did not exist. It will also be possible to distinguish between academic and professional orientations within ISCED 2011 levels 6 to 8 once internationally-agreed definitions have been developed.
- At levels 6 and 7 of ISCED 2011, the third digit of the classification distinguishes programmes according to duration and position in the national degree and qualifications structure. The data reported by these sub-categories can be used for the calculation of statistics and indicators such as entry and graduation rates in tertiary education. In ISCED 1997, "type of programme" was used to sub-classify ISCED 5A into first degree programmes and second and further degree programmes (now corresponding to ISCED 2011 levels 6 and 7 combined).

Note

1. Paragraph numbers are references to the main ISCED 2011 classification document. See more details in the Reader's Guide.



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