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## Chapter 8

# ISCED 2011 level 5:

## Short-cycle tertiary education

The content of ISCED level 5 programmes is noticeably more complex than in upper secondary programme(s) giving access to this level. ISCED level 5 programmes serve to deepen knowledge by imparting new techniques, concepts and ideas not generally covered in upper secondary education (whereas ISCED level 4 programmes serve to broaden knowledge and are typically not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED level 3).

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



## DESCRIPTION

### Definition

(§207)<sup>1</sup> Programmes at ISCED level 5 – short-cycle tertiary education – are usually practically-based, occupationally-specific and prepare students to enter the labour market. However, they may also provide a pathway to other tertiary education programmes (ISCED levels 6 or 7). Some academic tertiary education programmes below the level of a Bachelor's programme or equivalent may also be classified as ISCED level 5.

(§208) Programmes at ISCED level 5 have more complex content than programmes at ISCED levels 3 and 4, but they are shorter and usually less theoretically-oriented than ISCED level 6 programmes.

### Classification criteria (§211)

#### Main criteria

##### a) Content

(§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 complex than in ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent level) programmes.

##### b) Entry requirements

(§208) Entry into ISCED level 5 programmes requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3 or 4 programmes that give access to tertiary education.

##### c) Minimum duration of level

(§213) ISCED level 5 has a minimum duration of 2 years.

#### Subsidiary criteria

##### a) Institutional transition point

(§214) The transition point from non-tertiary to tertiary educational institutions can help to identify the boundary between ISCED level 3, 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.

##### b) Typical duration of level

(§213) ISCED level 5 is typically but not always shorter than three years.

### Complementary dimensions

(§216) Two dimensions may differentiate programmes at ISCED level 5.

(§217) Programme orientation:

- General; and
- Vocational<sup>2</sup>.

(§218) Level completion:

- No completion of ISCED level 5: programme of less than 2 years' duration (insufficient for level completion); and
- Completion of ISCED level 5: programme with duration of 2 or more years (sufficient for level completion).



## CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ISCED 2011 AND ISCED 1997

See correspondence section in the tertiary education chapter.

## GUIDELINES FOR CLASSIFYING PROGRAMMES AND THEIR RELATED RECOGNISED QUALIFICATIONS AT ISCED LEVEL 5

The content of ISCED level 5 programmes is noticeably more complex than the upper secondary programme(s) giving access to this level. ISCED level 5 programmes serve to deepen knowledge by imparting new techniques, concepts and ideas not generally covered in upper secondary education (whereas ISCED level 4 programmes serve to **broaden** knowledge and are typically not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED level 3 (§191)). (**Examples Group 1**)

Programmes which require the successful completion of a programme at ISCED level 6 or 7 should not be classified at ISCED level 5 regardless of their duration.

Programmes of less than two years' duration immediately following upper secondary education should normally be classified at ISCED level 4 unless they are clearly directly equivalent to the first stage(s) of other programmes classified at ISCED level 5 (that meet the criteria for classification at ISCED level 5 including the minimum cumulative duration criterion of two years). (**Examples Group 2**)

In some cases, a sequence of short programmes may build to the equivalent of two to three years of study which meets the criteria for classification at ISCED level 5. Qualifications may exist at the end of each programme in the sequence. The first programme(s) in the sequence would therefore be classified at ISCED level 5 in ISCED-P ("insufficient for level completion", provided that the overall sequence is eligible for classification at level 5) and ISCED level 4 for educational attainment in ISCED-A (even if there is no corresponding ISCED level 4 programme at national level).

ISCED level 5 programmes may give credit for transfer into ISCED level 6 or 7 programmes (§209) meaning that participants are exempted from certain courses or modules of the ISCED level 6 or 7 programme to which they transfer because of their successful completion of the ISCED level 5 programme. (**Examples Group 3**)

The classification of very long programmes or of second programmes at the tertiary level need to be given careful consideration even if they were classified at ISCED 1997 level 5B. Second programmes representing at least five years' cumulative study at ISCED level 5 should normally be classified at ISCED level 6 (unless the resulting recognised qualification is clearly below the level of a Bachelor's degree). The resulting educational attainment would normally be at ISCED level 6 even if the duration of study in ISCED level 6 represents less than three years. This is because the total study at tertiary level is at least five years and hence the complexity of content mastered by the end of the programme should normally be equivalent to that covered in shorter first degree programmes at ISCED level 6.

Similarly, consideration should be given to treating very long first programmes (representing at least five years of study) which otherwise meet the criteria for classification at ISCED level 5 as programmes spanning ISCED levels 5 and 6. The first stage(s) of such programmes should be classified at ISCED level 5 and later stages as ISCED level 6. As far as possible, the boundary between the two levels should be based on an assessment of the complexity of content of the different stages of the programme. As with second programmes, if the resulting qualification from the very long programme is clearly below the level of a Bachelor's degree, the whole programme should be classified at ISCED level 5 despite its long duration.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 5

Educational attainment at ISCED level 5 requires the successful completion – leading to a recognised qualification – of a programme representing a minimum cumulative duration at ISCED level 5 of at least two years. In the countries of the European Higher Education Area, this would be equivalent to at least 120 European Credit Transfer System credits.

The successful completion of programmes representing less than two years' study within ISCED level 5 normally gives rise to educational attainment at ISCED level 4 (even in countries which do not have any ISCED level 4 programmes). (**Examples Group 4**)

Where programmes of different durations lead to qualifications that are recognised as equivalent to each other, they should normally be classified at the same ISCED level.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, two or more different but equivalent qualifications should



normally give rise to educational attainment at the same ISCED level though not necessarily to the same code (e.g. if one is general and the other is vocational the ISCED-A codes would be 540 and 550 respectively). In addition, when an education programme is shorter than two years in duration (e.g. where it is a part of a sequence of programmes) but the qualification obtained is equivalent to other qualifications classified at ISCED level 5, the programme and qualification should be classified at ISCED level 5. (**Examples Group 5**)

(§221) For educational attainment, recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of programme at ISCED level 5 which are insufficient for level completion are classified at ISCED level 4.

(§222) Recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion 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.

The successful completion of first tertiary programmes representing less than three years' duration at ISCED level 6 gives rise to educational attainment at ISCED level 5 (even if there are no ISCED level 5 programmes in the given country). See **Examples Group 4** in the ISCED level 6 chapter.

## EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS CLASSIFIED AT ISCED LEVEL 5

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

### **Examples Group 1:**

#### **Programmes meeting all the criteria for classification at ISCED level 5 [ISCED-P: 544 or 554; ISCED-A: 540 or 550]**

**Australia** – *Para-professional/Technician courses*. These courses are designed to provide initial education and training to develop the breadth of specialised skills required for employment in para-professional vocations. Common awards are Associate Diploma or Advanced Certificate, and entry requirements usually specify that entrants hold a Certificate (ISCED 3) in the relevant field. Courses are generally of the order of two years' full-time equivalent duration. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Brunei Darussalam** – *Higher National Diploma (HND)*. This is a 2.5-year vocational programme which requires the completion of an upper secondary education programme with access to tertiary education, such as the A-level, a National Diploma (ND) or the *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Ugama* (STPU) from religious schools. (ISCED-P: 554, ISCED-A 550)

**Cambodia** – *Associate degree*. This is a two-year programme which requires the completion of Grade 12 or a technical/vocational certificate 3 (both ISCED level 3). The programme leads to associate degrees in tourism and hospitality, nursing and computer technology. (ISCED-P 554 / ISCED-A 550)

**France** – *Enseignement conduisant aux Brevets de techniciens supérieurs et équivalent* (Tertiary education leading to the *Brevet de techniciens supérieurs* (BTS) and equivalent). This is a two-year programme leading to the *Brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS). The admission requirement is the *baccalauréat* or the *brevet de technicien* complemented by sufficient marks and recommendations from teachers. Holders of a BTS may, under certain conditions, continue their studies at university or in higher institutions. This qualification is at the same level as the *diplôme universitaire de technologie* (DUT – university diploma of technology), although it is more specialised and offers fewer opportunities for further studies. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Japan** – *Koutou senmon gakko* (Colleges of Technology, years 4-5). This is the last two years of the *Koutou senmon gakko* five-year programme of professional education. Students study mainly specialised engineering education. Upon successful completion of the programme and after passing an entrance examination, students can transfer into the



third year of university programmes or advance to *Koutou senmon gakkō Senkōka* (Advanced Engineering Course). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550).

**Mauritania** – *Brevet de technicien supérieur* (Senior technician certificate). This three-year programme requires the completion of the national *Baccalauréat* (upper secondary education). By the end of the programme, graduates receive the senior technician certificate. (ISCED-P: 554 and ISCED-A: 550)

**Mexico** – *Técnico Superior* (Technical professional education). These programmes are offered in Technological Institutes and lead to the Vocational Associate Certificate. Graduates from these two-year programmes are considered qualified technicians. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Norway** – *Toårlige fagskoleutdanning* (Tertiary vocational education). These two-year vocational college programmes are designed to meet the requirements of master craftsmen, skilled technicians or para-professional vocations. They provide direct entry to the labour market. Graduates in technical studies, constituting the majority of graduates at this level, can get exemption for up to one year of a Bachelor's degree programme in engineering. The admission requirement is successful completion of upper secondary education or training (ISCED 3). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Saudi Arabia** – *برامج الدبلوم المتوسط العام* (Intermediate general diploma programmes). These programmes are offered in community colleges to upper secondary graduates in many fields of education. By the end of these two-year programmes, graduates are awarded the general intermediate diploma (*الدبلوم المتوسط العام*) in the respective field of education. (ISCED-P: 544; ISCED-A: 540)

**Spain** – *Ciclos Formativos de Formación Profesional de Grado Superior* (Vocational Training – Advanced Level). These programmes of two years' duration are included in the Spanish Higher Education Framework. The qualification obtained upon completion of this programme, *Técnico Superior* (Vocational training – advanced level Certificate and Title), is equivalent to that of a skilled technician in the given occupation. Admission is based on successful completion of the *bachiller* (ISCED level 3). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Ukraine** – *Неповна вища освіта* (Partial completion of higher education). These are two- to three-year programmes offered in higher education institutions. The minimum entry requirement is the completion certificate of upper secondary education. Upon completion of the programme, graduates receive the *диплом молодшого спеціаліста* (junior specialist diploma). (ISCED-P 554; ISCED-A 550)

#### Examples Group 2:

**Programmes of short duration but equivalent to the first stage(s) of another ISCED level 5 programme**  
[ISCED-P: 541 or 551; ISCED-A: 444 or 454]

**United Kingdom** – *Higher National Certificate (HNC)*. To be admitted to this programme, participants must be at least 18 years old and have an appropriate national qualification awarded by the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) or equivalent or a GCE A-level (ISCED 3 qualifications). The aim of the programme is to develop skills and provide training that will lead to many vocational activities. It is provided by colleges, certain universities and some training centres. HNCs are shorter than the *Higher National Diplomas (HND)* lasting about one year full-time. Holders of HNCs can enter the second year of HND programmes and holders of some HNCs can enter the second year of a Bachelor's degree programme. This programme is classified at ISCED level 5. The educational attainment associated with the resulting qualification is completion of ISCED level 4 (as the programme duration is too short – one year – for completion of ISCED level 5.) (ISCED-P: 551; ISCED-A: 454)

#### Examples Group 3:

**Programmes classified at ISCED level 5 giving credit towards further studies at ISCED levels 6 or 7**  
[ISCED-P: 544 or 554; ISCED-A: 540 or 550]

**France** – *Enseignement en institut universitaire de technologie (IUT)* (Education in a University Institute of Technology). A two-year programme in technology leading to the *Diplôme universitaire de technologie (DUT)*. Holders of a DUT may continue studies at the university level to earn the licence (an ISCED level 6 qualification), although the programme is primarily designed to prepare students for direct labour market entry. The entry requirement is the *baccalauréat*, complemented by sufficient marks and recommendations from teachers. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)



**Japan** – *Senmon gakko* (Professional Training College). This programme mainly provides professional training. The minimum entry requirement is the successful completion of upper secondary education (ISCED level 3). Following completion of the programme, and upon meeting other specific requirements, a student can acquire a Diploma (duration of at least two years) or an Advanced Diploma (duration of at least four years). In general, the student would simultaneously be given the qualifications to enter university (ISCED level 6 or 766) or graduate school (ISCED level 7). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Lebanon** – *برامج الامتياز الفني* (Technical Excellence programmes). These are two-year programmes that are offered in technical and vocational institutes to the holders of either the vocational or general *baccalaureate* (upper secondary education). By the end of the programmes, graduates receive the technical excellence certificate *Technique Supérieur (T.S.)*, which is designed to prepare skilled technicians for the labour market. This qualification is also considered as the entry requirement to the *Technical License* programme (*الإجازة الفنية العالية*), which is classified at the level of the Bachelor's (ISCED level 6). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Sudan** – *برامج الدبلوم التقنية* (Technical diploma programmes). These are three-year programmes offered by different national universities in various fields of education. Upon completion, participants are awarded the technical diploma certificate (*شهادة دبلوم تقني*). Although this certificate is mainly designed for the labour market, along with relevant work experience, it can provide credits towards further studies at the Bachelor's level (ISCED level 6). (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

**Timor-Leste** – *Politecnic Diploma 2* (Professional programmes, Polytechnic Diploma 2). These are two-year vocational programmes which require the completion of upper secondary education (with access to tertiary education). Upon completion of these programmes, graduates receive the *Diploma 2*, which also provides credits for further education programmes, some of which are at the Bachelor's level. (ISCED-P: 554, ISCED-A: 550)

**United Kingdom** – *Higher National Diploma (HND)*. To be admitted to this programme, participants must be at least 18 years old and have an appropriate national qualification awarded by the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) or equivalent or a GCE A-level (ISCED 3 qualifications). The aim is to develop skills and provide training that will lead to many vocational activities. It is provided by colleges, certain universities and some training centres and generally leads to the level of senior technician or junior management. The duration is either two years full time or three years part time. Holders of some HNDs can enter the second or third year of a Bachelor's degree programme. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

#### Examples Group 4:

**Programmes at ISCED level 5 insufficient for level completion therefore leading to educational attainment at ISCED level 4 [ISCED-P: 541 or 551; ISCED-A: 444 or 454]**

**Denmark** – *Merkonom, tekonom, datanom, revision* (Short-cycle higher education, open adult education). The entry requirement for this vocational programme is an upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) giving access to tertiary education. The programme is of one year's duration and the content is similar to the first year of two-year short-cycle tertiary education programmes classified as ISCED 5 in the country. As it is shorter than these programmes, it gives rise to educational attainment at ISCED level 4. (ISCED-P: 551; ISCED-A: 454)

**United Kingdom** – *Higher National Certificate (HNC)*. This programme is classified at ISCED level 5 (insufficient for level completion) for the reasons described in **Examples Group 2** above. The educational attainment associated with the resulting qualification is completion of ISCED level 4. (ISCED-P: 551; ISCED-A: 454)

#### Examples Group 5:

**Programmes of less than two years' duration leading to attainment at ISCED level 5 [ISCED-P: 544 or 554; ISCED-A: 540 or 550]**

**Slovak Republic**<sup>4</sup> – *Tančné konzervatórium – 8 ročné štúdium* (Dance conservatory – eight years). This is an eight-year programme starting at age 10 to train professional dancers and provide them both with the school-leaving certificate (*maturita*, an ISCED 3 level qualification) – *vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške* – and a graduate diploma – *absolventský diplom* – which is an ISCED level 5 qualification allowing holders to teach dance in the basic school of arts. The programme spans ISCED levels 2, 3 and 5 with Grades 1 to 4 classified at ISCED level 2, Grades 5 to 7 at ISCED level 3 and Grade 8

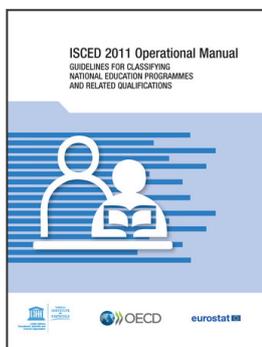


at ISCED level 5. The qualification *absolventský diplom* is also awarded at the end of two other programmes meeting all the criteria for ISCED level 5: *pomaturitné špecializačné štúdium* (post-secondary specialised study) and *vyššie odborné štúdium* (higher professional studies) respectively two- and three-year programmes following successful completion of upper secondary education. Successful completion of the 8th grade of *tanečné konzervatórium* leads to educational attainment at ISCED level 5. Although only one year of the programme is classified at ISCED level 5, it leads to the same qualification as awarded at the end of other ISCED level 5 programmes. (ISCED-P: 554; ISCED-A: 550)

### Notes

1. Paragraph numbers are references to the main ISCED 2011 classification document. See more details in the Reader's Guide.
2. If international definitions for: "academic" and "professional" programmes are developed, they will be used for the orientation categories at ISCED level 5 instead of "general" and "vocational".
3. Note that qualifications with the same name are not necessarily equivalent to each other especially where they can be taken in very different fields of study or where the qualification name is very generic (e.g. certificate, diploma, etc.).
4. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the European Union (EU) use "Slovakia" as the official name of "Slovak Republic".





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