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## Chapter 11

# ISCED 2011 level 8:

## Doctoral or equivalent level

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

The theoretical duration of these programmes is three years full-time in most countries, although the actual time that students take to complete the programmes is typically longer.

Programmes classified at ISCED level 8 may be referred to in many ways, for example: PhD, DPhil, D.Lit, D.Sc, LL.D, Doctorate or similar terms. For international comparability purposes the term, 'doctoral or equivalent level' is used to label ISCED level 8.



## DESCRIPTION

### Definition

(§259)<sup>1</sup> Programmes at ISCED level 8, or doctoral or equivalent level, are designed primarily to lead to an advanced research qualification. Programmes at this ISCED level are devoted to advanced study and original research and are typically offered only by research-oriented tertiary educational institutions such as universities. Doctoral programmes exist in both academic and professional fields.

(§261) Entry into ISCED level 8 programmes or junior research positions normally requires the successful completion of specific ISCED level 7 programmes. ISCED level 8 requires at least three years of full-time equivalent study, making a total cumulative duration of at least seven years of full-time education at the tertiary level.

(§260) ISCED level 8 usually concludes with the submission and defence of a thesis, dissertation or equivalent written work of publishable quality, representing a significant contribution to knowledge in the respective field of study. Therefore, these programmes are typically based on research and not only on course work.

### Classification criteria

#### Main criteria

- a) Written work requirements

(§260) ISCED 8 programmes require 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.

- b) Entry requirements

(§261) Entry into ISCED level 8 programmes or junior research positions normally requires the successful completion of specific ISCED level 7 programmes.

- c) Minimum duration of level

(§265) ISCED level 8 requires at least three years of full-time equivalent study.

#### Subsidiary criteria

- a) Doctoral degree/qualification required for specific occupations

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

### Complementary dimensions

(§268) One dimension may be used to differentiate education programmes at ISCED level 8:

(§269) Programme orientation

- Academic; and
- Professional<sup>2</sup>.



## 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 8

This level is reserved for tertiary programmes that lead directly to the award of an advanced research qualification. The theoretical duration of these programmes is three years full-time in most countries (for a cumulative total of at least seven years full-time equivalent (FTE) at the tertiary level), although the actual time that students take to complete the programmes is typically longer. The programmes are devoted to advanced study and original research.

Programmes with a similar name to 'doctor' should only be included in ISCED level 8 if they are equivalent in complexity of content to programmes already classified at this level and fulfil the other main criteria (§262).

These programmes are typically based on research and not only on course work. In some education systems, ISCED level 8 programmes contain very limited course work, or none at all, and individuals working towards a doctoral degree engage in research mostly independently or in small groups with varying degrees of supervision. In some education systems, doctoral research is undertaken by individuals employed by the university as junior researchers or research assistants who are undertaking at the same time their doctoral studies (§260).

Although most countries only have a 'first' advanced research qualification (**Examples Group 1**), some countries do award an 'intermediate' advanced research qualification prior to the doctorate (**Examples Group 2**). A small number of countries have 'second' advanced research qualifications (**Examples Group 3**). Accounting for these intermediate and second awards in the classification scheme is important for defining the boundary between the first advanced research qualifications and other qualifications at ISCED level 8.

Programmes requiring a Master's degree for entry and leading to intermediate research qualifications should be classified either as the first stage or component of ISCED level 8 programmes (where completing this component would not count as ISCED level 8 completion) or as ISCED level 7 second or further degree programmes following a Master's or equivalent. This allocation decision should be based on the degree to which the programme is designed to lead directly to the award of an advanced research qualification. It may also be helpful to consider whether students can transfer credits from this programme to a doctoral programme, or if the intermediate qualification is a requirement to enter a doctoral programme. Programmes that are primarily designed to prepare students for direct labour market entry with either basic or intermediate research skills should be classified at ISCED level 7, even if these programmes also allow students to continue studies toward an advanced research degree.

## 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.

Honorary doctorates awarded by universities on the basis of other considerations and not any research work are not recognised for the purposes of educational attainment.



## EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS CLASSIFIED AT ISCED LEVEL 8

(§262) Programmes classified at ISCED level 8 may be referred to in many ways, for example: PhD, DPhil, D.Lit, D.Sc, LL.D, Doctorate or similar terms. However it is important to note that programmes with a similar name to “doctor” should only be included in ISCED level 8 if they satisfy the criteria described in [ISCED 2011] Paragraph 263. For international comparability purposes, the term ‘doctoral or equivalent level’ is used to label ISCED level 8.

### Examples Group 1:

#### Programmes at doctoral or equivalent level sufficient for completion of ISCED level 8 [ISCED-P: 844, 854 or 864; ISCED-A: 840, 850 or 860]

**Australia** – *Doctor’s degree or doctorate*. These programmes are entered after a Bachelor’s degree (high honours) or a Master’s degree and usually comprise three years of full-time study devoted to preparing a substantial thesis based on an original research project resulting in a significant contribution to knowledge, understanding and/or the application of knowledge within the field of study. (ISCED-P: 864; ISCED-A: 860)

**Bahrain** – *برامج الدكتوراه* (Doctorate programmes). These programmes require the completion of at least a Master’s degree for entry. The duration of these programmes is usually three to five years. By the end of the programme, graduates receive a Doctorate degree. (ISCED-P: 864, ISCED-A: 860)

**Colombia** – *Doctorado* (Doctorate). This is a doctorate-level programme that normally has a duration of five years. The minimum entry requirement to the programme may not necessarily include a Master’s degree but at least a professional title or a university degree in the fields of technology, science, humanities, arts or philosophy. (ISCED-P: 864, ISCED-A: 860)

**France** – *Doctorat* (Doctorate). The *Doctorat* is a three-year programme of study following a Master’s degree and represents a total of eight cumulative years of tertiary education) in fields such as the humanities, sciences, economics and law. The degree is awarded after the submission of a thesis based on original research acceptable to the *responsable de l’école doctorale* (Head of the doctoral school/college) or the *Conseil Scientifique* (Scientific Board) of the university. Candidates carry out personal research work constituting an original contribution to their chosen field of study. (ISCED-P: 864; ISCED-A: 860)

**Germany** – *Promotionstudium*. (Doctoral studies). These programmes have a duration of three to five years. In most cases, students must have successfully completed university programmes (i.e. in academic disciplines) of five to seven years prior to entering *Promotion* programmes. A doctoral degree is awarded to successful students on the basis of a thesis and an oral examination. A *Promotionsstudium* can be carried out in the form of a *freie Promotion* (individual supervised doctorate) which is the leading model in Germany or in the form of a *strukturierte Promotion* involving studies at *Graduiertenkollegs* (graduate colleges) or *Graduiertenschulen* (graduate schools). (ISCED-P: 844; ISCED-A: 840)

**Italy** – *Dottorati di ricerca*. (Doctorate of Research). This diploma is the highest academic degree awarded. It is granted after a minimum of three years spent in a university department carrying out a specific research programme under the direction of university professors. Admission to the *Dottorati di ricerca* is restricted and is by competitive examination among holders of the *Laurea magistrale* (Master’s degree). (ISCED-P: 864; ISCED-A: 860)

**Japan** – *Daigakuin Hakushi Katei* (Doctorate course). The *hakushi* (doctoral degree) is the highest degree, awarded to students who have completed a doctorate course at a post-graduate school or who have been recognised as holding equivalent qualifications. The requirement for completion of the doctorate course is more than five years of study at a post-graduate school (in addition to four years of undergraduate studies), with 30 or more credits, the submission of a dissertation and success in a final examination. Those who have completed highly-qualified research work may be awarded the *hakushi* after three years’ study at post-graduate school. (ISCED-P: 864; ISCED-A: 860)

**United States** – *Doctor of Philosophy* (PhD). The PhD is the highest academic degree and requires mastery within a field of knowledge and demonstrated ability to perform scholarly research (three to five years usually beyond the Master’s degree – which is eight to ten years of cumulative tertiary study). (ISCED-P: 844 or 854; ISCED-A: 840 or 850)



### Examples Group 2:

**Programmes at doctoral or equivalent level insufficient for completion of ISCED level 8 therefore leading to educational attainment at ISCED level 7 [ISCED-P: 841, 851 or 861; ISCED-A: 740, 750 or 760]**

**Portugal** – *Ensino Superior: Curso de Especialização – Curso de doutoramento* (Tertiary education: Specialisation course – Doctorate course). The *Curso de Especialização – Curso de doutoramento* forms the first part of the *Doutoramento – 3.º Ciclo* (third cycle of tertiary education). It consists of curricular units in research training. The diploma awarded (*Especialização* certification) does not confer a PhD degree. The programme is at the level of the doctorate but does not yet lead to completion of the doctoral degree. (ISCED-P: 861; ISCED-A: 760)

### Examples Group 3:

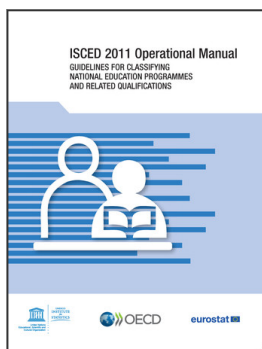
**Second advanced research qualification at ISCED level 8 (following a doctoral degree programme) [ISCED-P: 844, 854 or 864; ISCED-A: 840, 850 or 860]**

**Kyrgyzstan** – *Послевузовское профессиональное образование, степень доктора наук* (Postgraduate education, *Doktor nauk* programme). This is a second advanced research qualification following the *послевузовское профессиональное образование, степень кандидата наук* (Postgraduate education, *kandidat nauk* programme) leading to *kandidat nauk* degree, which is already classified at ISCED 8. The *doktor nauk* programme in general does not have any classroom component and does not necessarily require formal supervision. Usually it demands at least two years of research. By the end of the programme, graduates receive the *doctor nauk* degree (*диплом с присвоением ученой степени доктора наук*). (ISCED-P: 864; ISCED-A: 860)

## Notes

1. Paragraph numbers are references to the main ISCED 2011 classification document. See more details in the Reader's Guide.
2. Although there are as yet no internationally-agreed definitions of academic and professional orientations, some countries are applying their national definitions and making use of these codes in their ISCED mappings.





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