

Table III: Qualifications

Level of qualification	
Low	(Pre)primary and lower secondary (ISCED 0-2, plus 3c short)
Medium	Upper and post-secondary (ISCED 3-4, excluding 3c short)
High	Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)

ISCED 0: pre-primary education

Programs at level 0, (pre-primary) defined as the initial stage of organised instruction are designed primarily to introduce young children to a school-type environment, i.e. to provide a bridge between the home and a school based atmosphere. Upon completion of these programs, children continue their education at level 1 (primary education).

ISCED 1: primary education or first stage of basic education

Programmes at level 1 are normally designed on a unit or project basis to give students a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics along with an elementary understanding of other subjects such as history, geography, natural science, social science, art and music. In some cases religious instruction is featured. The core at this level consists of education provided for children, the customary or legal age of entrance being not younger than five years or older than seven years. This level covers, in principle, six years of full-time schooling.

ISCED 2: lower secondary education or second stage of basic education

The contents of education at this stage are typically designed to complete the provision of basic education which began at ISCED level 1. In many, if not most countries, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development. The programmes at this level are usually on a more subject oriented pattern using more specialised teachers and more often several teachers conducting classes in their field of specialisation. The full implementation of basic skills occurs at this level. The end of this level often coincides with the end of compulsory schooling where it exists.

ISCED 3: upper secondary education

This level of education typically begins at the end of full-time compulsory education for those countries that have a system of compulsory education. More specialisation may be observed at this level than at ISCED level 2 and often teachers need to be more qualified or specialised than for ISCED level 2. The entrance age to this level is typically 15 to 16 years. The educational programmes included at this level typically require the completion of some nine years of full-time education (since the beginning of level 1) for admission or a combination of education and vocational or technical experience.

- ISCED 3A: programmes designed to provide direct access to ISCED 5A;
- ISCED 3B: programmes designed to provide direct access to ISCED 5B;
- ISCED 3C: programmes not designed to lead to ISCED 5A or 5B.

ISCED 4: post-secondary non tertiary education

ISCED 4 captures programmes that straddle the boundary between upper secondary and post-secondary education from an international point of view, even though they might clearly be considered as upper secondary or post-secondary programmes in a national context. These programmes can, considering their content, not be regarded as tertiary programmes. They are often not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED 3 but they serve to broaden the knowledge of participants who have already completed a programme at level 3.

Typical examples are programmes designed to prepare students for studies at level 5 who, although having completed ISCED level 3, did not follow a curriculum which would allow entry to level 5, i.e. pre-degree foundation courses or short vocational programmes. Second cycle programmes can be included as well.

- ISCED 4A: see text for ISCED 3
- ISCED 4B: see text for ISCED 3
- ISCED 4C: see text for ISCED 3

ISCED 5: first stage of tertiary education (not leading directly to an advanced research qualification)

This level consists of tertiary programmes having an educational content more advanced than those offered at levels 3 and 4. Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3A or 3B or a similar qualification at ISCED level 4A. They do not lead to the award of an advanced research qualification (ISCED 6). These programmes must have a cumulative duration of at least two years.

ISCED 5A: programmes that are largely theoretically based and are intended to provide sufficient qualifications for gaining entry into advanced research programmes and professions with high skills requirements.

ISCED 5B: programmes that are practically oriented/ occupationally specific and are mainly designed for participants to acquire the practical skills and know-how needed for employment in a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades, the successful completion of which usually provides the participants with a labour-market relevant qualification

ISCED 6: second stage of tertiary education (leading to an advanced research qualification)

This level is reserved for tertiary programmes which lead to the award of an advanced research qualification. The programmes are, therefore, devoted to advanced study and original research and not based on course-work only. They typically require the submission of a thesis or dissertation of publishable quality which is the product of original research and represents a significant contribution to knowledge. They prepare graduates for faculty posts in institutions offering ISCED 5A programmes, as well as research posts in government, industry, etc.

Documentation by EULFS: Levels of education and training ISCED 1997 (http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/employment/info/data/eu_lfs/Related_documents/ISCED_EN.htm)