TERMS OF REFERENCE:
INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (ISCED) COMMITTEE

Prepared by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

TCG 9 Working Group on Administrative Data/EMIS

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Overview

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics seeks approximately 10 experts to serve on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Committee.

The ISCED Committee will review the current version of ISCED 2011 and ISCED Fields of Education and Training 2013 and identify potential areas for further development of the classifications.

Background

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a member of the United Nations International Family of Classifications. It is a comprehensive framework for organising education programmes and the related qualifications by education levels and fields based on uniform and internationally agreed definitions to facilitate comparisons of education systems across countries.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the custodian of ISCED and responsible for its development and maintenance. The UIS is also responsible for providing guidance on the effective and consistent use of ISCED for data collection and analysis.

ISCED was developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011. The current version of ISCED was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 36th session in November 2011.[2] ISCED 2011 includes a classification of education programmes (ISCED-P) and a classification of educational attainment (ISCED-A). The accompanying ISCED Fields of Education and Training 2013 (ISCED-F) classifies education programmes and related qualifications by fields of study.[3]

ISCED 2011 contains a recommendation for establishment of an ISCED Committee to advise the UIS on the classification of national programmes and qualifications, to review the current version of ISCED and to identify areas for further development.

Mandate of the ISCED Committee

The ISCED Committee will have the following mandate:

- Analyse the working documents prepared by UIS which include a compilation of issues encountered over the last 10 years or so of implementation of ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013.

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[1] "Committee" is used instead of "Review Panel" because the former is the term that appears in ISCED 2011.
[2] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2012. *International Standard Classification of Education: ISCED 2011*. Montreal: UIS. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000219109.
[3] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2014. *ISCED Fields of Education and Training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013)*. Montreal: UIS. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000228085.

- Review the current version of the classifications, the related questionnaires and manuals, and provide recommendations, especially if addressing these issues requires a revision of the classifications.
- If a revision of the classifications is required, support the recommendations with the identification of potential areas for further developments of these classifications, and provide guidance and indicative timeframe for the revision of the classifications.
- If an immediate revision of the classifications is not required:
  - Review existing quality assurance mechanisms for application of the classifications.
  - Advise the UIS for the classification of problematic national education programmes and related qualifications.
  - Propose a mechanism for peer review and validation of national ISCED mappings.
  - Review the operational manual for ISCED 2011 and propose necessary amendments.[4]
  - Review the description of fields of education and training in ISCED-F 2013 and propose modifications, if necessary.[5]

For a full revision and update of ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013, the related ToR will be prepared subsequently, and the revision task is not expected to be within the remit assigned to the current Committee.

Composition of the ISCED Committee

The ISCED Committee is envisaged to have approximately 10 members, representing UNESCO (as lead agency for education within the UN system), custodians of other related classifications as appropriate, and key education data collection partners, such as OECD and Eurostat. The composition of the Committee should be balanced both technically and geographically and represent all UNESCO regions. The Committee should include educational, statistical, and classification experts, as well as representatives from the research and user community.

Required expertise

Committee members must have the following qualifications:

- Familiarity with ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013 and/or experience in their application.
- Knowledge of national education programmes, fields of education, qualifications, and related statistics.
- Experience working in an international organisation, government agency, or academic institution.
- Strong communication skills in English or French.

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[4] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Eurostat, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2015. *ISCED 2011 Operational Manual: Guidelines for Classifying National Education Programmes and Related Qualifications*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232343.

[5] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2015. *International Standard Classification of Education: Fields of Education and Training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013) - Detailed Field Descriptions*. Montreal: UIS. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235049.

Main responsibilities of ISCED Committee members

The ISCED Committee will be established for one year[6] with the following responsibilities:

- Take part in three annual meetings planned for March, May, and November 2023. The meetings will likely be virtual, although in-person meetings may be considered.
- Participate in discussions through email and other means of communication.
- Study the working documents on 10 years stock-take implementation of ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013 and formulate recommendations on quality assurance of the application of the classifications, need for revisions and potential areas for further developments, as defined in the mandate of the Committee.
- Assure that national, regional and global views are reflected in the review of ISCED and the resulting recommendations.

Working methods and modalities

- The UIS will be responsible for technical coordination, as well as overall planning and management of activities of the ISCED Committee.
- The ISCED Committee will conduct regular discussions over email and during virtual meetings, facilitated by the UIS with the support of an external consultant.
- A chair and a co-chair will be elected at the first meeting of the Committee and provide necessary support.
- Decisions will be reached by consensus.

The work of the ISCED Committee will be informed by the following documents and other materials:

- Analytical report by the UIS with a summary of issues encountered (by UIS and by ISCED users) during the application of ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013 over the last 10 years or so.
- UIS database with national ISCED mappings.[7]
- Any issues in national education systems that would necessitate a review of the ISCED classifications, e.g. the distinction between academic and professional programmes at the tertiary level of education.
- New developments that lead to changes in national education programmes, e.g. emergence of new fields of education and training following commitment to the Transforming Education Summit or changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or in anticipation to similar major crises.
- ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013 documents.
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Amount of effort

Committee members are expected to devote approximately 15 days of work to the activities within the scope of Committee.

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[6] The suggestion to establish the new ISCED Committee for a pre-defined period (here, one year) is consistent with the "non-permanent basis" status of the Committee membership as mentioned in paragraph 97 of ISCED 2011 manual. The membership of the Committee should be revised in a future iteration of the establishment of the ISCED Committee.
[7] http://uis.unesco.org/en/isced-mappings

Expected outputs and timeline

- December 2022: ISCED Committee established.
- January-February 2023: Documents and necessary materials for the work of the Committee provided.
- March 2023: First Committee meeting: Objectives, timeline, working methods and road map discussed and agreed.
- April-May 2023: Mid-term report of the Committee, including recommendations as outlined in the Committee mandate, drafted.
- End of May 2023: Second Committee meeting: mid-term report and recommendations discussed and finalised.

Scenario A: an immediate revision of the classifications is recommended
- June to September 2023: Potential areas for further developments of the classifications identified. Guidance and indicative timeframe for the revision of the classifications provided.
- October 2023: Summary report of the Committee, including final recommendations and next steps prepared.
- November 2023: Third Committee meeting: summary report, final recommendations and next steps discussed and finalised.

Scenario B: an immediate revision of the classifications is not recommended

- June to September 2023:
    - Existing quality assurance mechanisms for application of the classifications reviewed.
    - Advices on the classification of problematic national education programmes and related qualifications provided.
    - A mechanism for peer review and validation of national ISCED mappings proposed.
    - The operational manual for ISCED 2011[8] reviewed, and necessary amendments proposed.
    - The description of fields of education and training in ISCED-F 2013[9] reviewed, and necessary modifications proposed.
- October 2023: Summary report of the Committee, including final recommendations and next steps prepared.
- November 2023: Third Committee meeting: summary report, final recommendations and next steps discussed and finalised.

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[8] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Eurostat, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2015. *ISCED 2011 Operational Manual: Guidelines for Classifying National Education Programmes and Related Qualifications*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232343.
[9] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2015. *International Standard Classification of Education: Fields of Education and Training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013) - Detailed Field Descriptions*. Montreal: UIS. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235049.

References

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Eurostat, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). 2015. *ISCED 2011 Operational Manual: Guidelines for Classifying National Education Programmes and Related Qualifications*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232343.

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Annex: Classification issues to be reviewed by the ISCED Review Committee

1. **Review of consistency of classification of some programmes across regions:**

Review of the consistency of classification across countries of some programmes that might present some difficulties. This could be done through the review of ISCED mappings:

1. Programmes in ISCED (2, 3) at partial level completion;
2. Classification of programmes that span two ISCED levels (e.g. integrated ISCED 0 programmes);
3. Classification of programmes at ISCED 4 and ISCED 5;
4. Classification of programmes of Long first-degree programmes at ISCED 6 and ISCED 7 levels (e.g. Some countries in Latin America classifying medical programmes of 6 years as ISCED 766 while others classifying them as ISCED 666. Also some countries in the former USSR classifying first-degrees of 5 years-duration as ISCED 766 whereas in other countries these programmes are classified as ISCED 666);
5. Second or further degree for specialization (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme): some countries might classify it as ISCED 7.

2. **Unresolved broad classification issues in ISCED 2011:**
1. Classification in ISCED 2011 of home schooling: under which conditions home schooling is considered as formal education that can be classified in ISCED 2011?
2. Could some early childhood programmes intended for children aged 3 or 4 be classified as ISCED 01?
3. Definition of academic and professional programmes for ISCED 6-8?
4. Requirement to enter ISCED 3 as ISCED 2011 specifies: *"ISCED level 3 requires the completion of lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) or the ability to handle ISCED level 3 content through a combination of prior education as well as life and work experiences. A specific ISCED level 2 qualification or a specific level of achievement may be required for entering some or all ISCED level 3 programmes."* (e.g. Monaco). Could this be further clarified, as some countries are classifying certain programmes that do not require any prior academic qualification as ISCED 3?

3. **Specific country requests:**

Ukraine: see request below

Ukraine has developed a proposal regarding a possible change and addition to the existing ISCED Fields of Education and Training classification (ISCED-F 2013) in developing its future revision. Ukraine contacted the UIS in 2021 and proposed to expand the field of education and training (ISCED-F) under

the code 03 Social sciences, journalism and information by adding to it a new component – "international relations". It considers that a new title for this field of education, namely: 03 "Social sciences, journalism, information and international relations" will better reflect the growing importance of this academic field.

4. Advise on the process of the next Revision of ISCED 2011 and ISCED-F 2013:

As ISCED 2011 is now an 11 years-old classification, it would be good to start the process of updating it. ISCED-F 2013 is also an almost 10-years old classification and it would be good to establish a plan for updating it.