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## Chapter 10

# ISCED 2011 level 7:

## Master's or equivalent level

Programmes at ISCED level 7, or Master's or equivalent level, have a significantly more complex content than programmes at ISCED level 6 and are usually more specialised. The content of ISCED level 7 programmes is often designed to provide participants with advanced academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a second degree or equivalent qualification. Programmes at this level may have a substantial research component but do not yet lead to the award of a doctoral qualification. The cumulative duration of studies at the tertiary level thus lasts from usually five to eight years or even longer.

Programmes classified at ISCED level 7 may be referred to in many ways, for example: Master programmes or Magister studies. For international comparability purposes, the term 'Master's or equivalent level' is used to label ISCED level 7.



## DESCRIPTION

### Definition

(§241)<sup>1</sup> Programmes at ISCED level 7, or Master's or equivalent level, are often designed to provide participants with advanced academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a second degree or equivalent qualification. Programmes at this level may have a substantial research component but do not yet lead to the award of a doctoral qualification. Typically, programmes at this level are theoretically-based but may include practical components and are informed by state of the art research and/or best professional practice.

(§243) ISCED level 7 programmes have a significantly more complex content than programmes at ISCED level 6 and are usually more specialised. Upon completion, individuals may continue their education at ISCED level 8 (doctoral-level education) although not all ISCED level 7 programmes give direct access to ISCED level 8.

### Classification criteria (§228)

#### Main criteria

- a) Theoretically- and/or professionally-based content

(§241) Programmes at this level are typically theoretically-based but may include practical components and are informed by state of the art research and/or best professional practice.

- b) Position in the national degree and qualification structure

(§246) Programmes at this level typically prepare for a second or further degree, following a first degree from ISCED level 6 or 7 programmes.

(§247) Programmes of at least five years' duration preparing for a long first degree/qualification are included at this level if they are equivalent to Master's-level programmes in terms of their complexity of content. Highly-specialised professional studies of similar or greater cumulative duration in tertiary education (e.g. medicine, dentistry, veterinary studies and, in some case, law or engineering) which cover – both in breadth and depth – an equivalent amount of content, are also included in this level.

- a) Entry requirements

(§243) Entry into ISCED level 7 programmes preparing for a second or further degree normally requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 6 or 7 programme. In the case of long programmes that prepare for a first degree equivalent to a Master's degree, entry requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education.

#### Subsidiary criteria

- b) Minimum cumulative duration of long first degree programme

(§247) Programmes of at least five years' duration preparing for a long first degree/qualification are included at this level.

- c) Direct access to ISCED level 8 programmes

(§249) Tertiary education programmes providing direct access to ISCED level 8 are normally classified at ISCED level 7. However, not all ISCED level 7 programmes provide access to ISCED level 8.



## Complementary dimensions

(§251) Two dimensions may differentiate programmes at ISCED level 7.

(§252) Programme orientation:

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

(§253) Programme duration and position in the national degree and qualification structure

- *Stage (or programme) within a first degree* at Master's or equivalent level with a cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of less than five years, therefore insufficient for completion of ISCED level 7;
- *Long first degree programme*, 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);
- *Second or further degree programme*, following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme, at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level); and *Second or further degree programme at Master's or equivalent level*, following successful completion of another Master's or equivalent programme, at ISCED level 7 (Master's or equivalent level).

## 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 7

ISCED level 7 programmes have a significantly more complex content than programmes at ISCED level 6 and are usually more specialised (§243). The content of ISCED level 7 programmes is often designed to provide participants with advanced academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a second degree or equivalent qualification. Programmes at this level may have a substantial research component but do not yet lead to the award of a doctoral qualification (§241).

They are traditionally offered by universities and equivalent tertiary educational institutions (§224). Programmes with a similar name to 'Master's' should only be included in ISCED level 7 if they are equivalent in complexity of content to programmes already classified at this level and fulfil the other main criteria (§244).

Entry into ISCED level 7 programmes preparing for a second or further degree normally requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 6 or 7 programme. In the case of long programmes that prepare for a first degree equivalent to a Master's degree, entry requires the successful completion of an ISCED level 3 or 4 programme with access to tertiary education. Entry may depend on subject choice and/or grades achieved at ISCED levels 3 and/or 4. It may also be necessary to take and succeed in entrance examinations (§243).

Programmes at this level typically prepare for a second (**Examples Group 1**) or further degree, following a first degree from ISCED level 6 or 7 programmes (§248). Equivalent qualifications, such as post-graduate professional qualifications (**Examples Group 1**), are also classified at ISCED level 7 unless already classified at ISCED level 6 (§246). Both types of programmes typically have a duration of one to four years of full-time study. In education systems in which degrees are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required. The cumulative duration of studies at the tertiary level thus lasts from usually five to eight years or even longer (§248).

Programmes of at least five years' duration preparing for a long first degree/qualification are included at this level if they are equivalent to Master's level programmes in terms of their complexity of content. Such programmes usually involve the preparation of a substantive thesis or dissertation (§247). (**Examples Group 2**)

Highly-specialised professional studies of similar or greater cumulative duration in tertiary education (e.g. medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and in some cases law or engineering) which cover – in both breadth and depth – an equivalent amount of content, though typically without the preparation of a thesis or dissertation, are also included at this level (§247). (**Examples Group 3**)



Upon completion, individuals may continue their education at ISCED level 8 (doctoral-level education) although not all ISCED level 7 programmes give direct access to ISCED level 8 (§243).

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 7

Educational attainment at ISCED level 7 requires the successful completion – leading to a recognised qualification – of a programme representing a minimum cumulative duration at tertiary level of at least five years. In the countries of the European Higher Education Area, this would be equivalent to at least 300 European Credit Transfer System credits.

(§256) For educational attainment, recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) within a first degree at a Master's or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 7 completion are classified at ISCED level 6.

The successful completion of programmes representing less than five years' study within tertiary level normally gives rise to educational attainment at ISCED level 6. (**Examples Group 4**)

(§257) Recognized intermediate qualifications from the successful completion of stages (or programmes) at the doctoral or equivalent level but insufficient for ISCED level 8 completion are classified at ISCED level 7 for educational attainment.

Honorary degrees 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 7

(§244) Programmes classified at ISCED level 7 may be referred to in many ways, for example: master programmes or magister. However it is important to note that programmes with a similar name to “master” should only be included in ISCED level 7 if they satisfy the criteria described in [ISCED 2011] Paragraph 245. For international comparability purposes the term “Master's or equivalent level” is used to label ISCED level 7.

#### **Examples Group 1:**

**Second or further degree programme at Master's or equivalent level (following successful completion of a Bachelor's or equivalent programme) [ISCED-P: 747, 757 or 767; ISCED-A: 740, 750 or 760]**

**Australia** – *Master's degree*. This is a higher degree, obtained typically after a period of two years' study following a Bachelor's degree (honours). Following a Bachelor's degree (pass), entry to a Master's degree may be possible by completing a Master's qualifying course of one year. Master's degrees may be obtained by research (usually entered after a period of employment) culminating in the submission of a thesis or by course work often undertaken in conjunction with professional employment. (ISCED-P: 767; ISCED-A: 760)

**Colombia** – *Maestría* (Master's degree). This programme leads to the title of Magister (Master's) and requires a professional title or a university degree in the fields of technology, science, humanities, arts or philosophy for entry. The programme duration is usually two years (ISCED-P: 767, ISCED-A: 760)

**Japan** – *Daigakuin Shushi katei*. (University graduate programme leading to the *shushi* (Master's degree)). Completion of the *shushi* degree requires two years' full-time study following the *gakushi* (Bachelor's degree), including 30 credits and a substantial amount of research culminating in a thesis. (ISCED-P: 767; ISCED-A: 760)

**Mexico** – *Maestría* (Master's degree programmes). This programme involves advanced research and the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge about specific subjects and fields of study. The duration of the programme is commonly two years. The entry requirement is a four- or five-year *Licenciatura* (Bachelor's degree) programme. (ISCED-P: 767; ISCED-A: 760)



**Sao Tome and Principe** – *Mestrado* (Master's programme). This is a two-year classical post-graduate programme leading to a second degree following the successful completion of a Bachelor's equivalent programme (*License*). Completion of this programme, which is the highest within the national education system, leads to a Master's degree (*Mestrado*). (ISCED-P: 767; ISCED-A: 760)

**Slovenia** – *Magistrsko izobraževanje (2. bolonjska stopnja)* (Master's degree). The duration of these studies is of one to two years, after successful completion of ISCED level 6 (1<sup>st</sup> Bologna cycle). Graduates obtain a Master's diploma (with the professional title) which give access to doctorate studies. (ISCED-P: 767; ISCED-A: 760)

**United States** – *First-professional degree programmes*. Completion of these programmes signifies both completion of the academic requirements to begin practicing in a given profession and a level of professional skill beyond that normally required from a Bachelor's degree. These programmes typically last three years and require at least two years at ISCED level 6 prior to entrance (although most require a four-year Bachelor's degree). These first professional degrees are the normal route to qualify as a professional in the fields of dentistry, medicine, optometry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, law and theological professions. (ISCED-P: 757; ISCED-A: 750)

#### Examples Group 2:

#### Long first degree programme at Master's or equivalent level (at least five years) [ISCED-P: 746, 756 or 766; ISCED-A: 740, 750 or 760]

**Gambia** – *Medical degree*. This is a seven-year programme after the completion of upper secondary education. At the end of the programme, learners are awarded a Master's degree in Medicine. (ISCED-P: 766, ISCED-A: 750)

**Germany** – *Universitäten – Diplom, Magister*. (University – Magister Diploma) These former university programmes have not been adapted to the Bologna structure. They led after 8 to 10 semesters to a first degree equivalent to a Master's degree (ISCED-P: 746; ISCED-A: 740). These programmes involved the preparation of a substantive thesis or dissertation in addition to coursework in the earlier semesters of the programme. Graduates of the programme could enter doctoral programmes. (ISCED-P: 746; ISCED-A: 740)

**Germany** – *Universitäten – Staatsexamen* (University programmes in the fields of teacher training, dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, law and theological professions). After 8 to 10 semesters of university studies, these programmes lead to a state examination equivalent to a Master's degree (ISCED level 7). (ISCED-P: 746; ISCED-A: 740)

**Japan** – *Daigaku Yakugaku Ishigaku Juigaku* (University undergraduate programme). The *gakushi* is the first qualification awarded after six years in pharmacy (practical course only) medicine, dentistry and veterinary studies. In addition to study in one of these specialised fields, general education (which includes humanities, social and natural sciences) is obligatory for every student. (ISCED-P: 766; ISCED-A: 760)

**Kyrgyzstan** – *Высшее профессиональное образование, ведущее к поступлению в программы продвинутых научных исследований и получению диплома специалиста* (Long first tertiary degree programme, leading to a specialist diploma). This first university degree has a duration of five years. The minimum entry requirement is the certificate of upper secondary education. The programme includes courses with significantly more complex content than other common programmes at ISCED 6. At the end of the programme, graduates receive a specialist diploma. (ISCED-P: 766, ISCED-A: 760)

**Lao People's Democratic Republic** – *Licence de médecine* (Bachelor's degree in medicine). This is a long first tertiary degree programme (six years in duration) that requires the completion of upper secondary education with access to tertiary education (*Certificat de Baccalauréat*) for entry. This is a highly-specialised programme of very long duration. Although the title of the degree received is a Bachelor's in medicine, it involves substantially more complex studies than a regular Bachelor's and therefore is considered to be at the level of a Master's. (ISCED-P 766; ISCED-A 760)

**Mozambique** – *Mestrado Integrado* (Integrated Master's). This is five-year first degree programme which requires the completion of upper secondary education as the minimum entry requirement. By the end of the programme, graduates are awarded a Master's degree. (ISCED-P: 766, ISCED-A: 760)

**Portugal** – *Ensino Superior – Licenciatura* (Tertiary education – long first degree, four to six years). These are pre-Bologna programmes. These four- to six-year programmes, usually offered by universities, were entered following successful completion of secondary education. In most fields of education, the programmes lasted four to five years. In certain fields



of study there were also six-year programmes. Students with a graduation mark of 16 or higher could access directly the doctoral level. The final qualifications obtained from these pre-Bologna programmes are nationally recognised as equivalent to ISCED 7 in ISCED 2011. (ISCED-P: 766; ISCED-A: 760)

### Examples Group 3:

#### Second or further degree programme at Master's or equivalent level (following a Master's or equivalent programme) [ISCED-P: 748, 758, 768; ISCED-A: 740,750,760]

**Australia** – *Doctor of Philosophy by coursework*. These three-year programmes may be entered following successful completion of a first Master's degree. They offer more specialisation in professional and academic fields of study. The programme is course-based and does not lead to a doctoral-level thesis of original research representing a significant contribution to knowledge within the field of study. Therefore the degree obtained is still considered similar to the Master's level (ISCED level 7). (ISCED-P: 748; ISCED-A: 740)

**Canada** – *Graduate qualifying programme (third cycle)*. Entry into these one- to two-year programmes requires the successful completion of a first Master's degree. These programmes prepare students to pursue studies at the doctoral level if their previous education did not meet all the necessary requirements (for example, students who initially studied in one field and wish to pursue further studies at the doctoral level in a different or more specialised area; or whose first Master's degree was more professional than academic). The qualification obtained is considered at the Master's level (ISCED level 7). Upon completion, students may then apply to enter a doctoral programme. (ISCED-P: 768; ISCED-A: 760)

**Germany** – *Universitäten – zweiter Master* (University studies – second Master's). Entry into these one- to two-year programmes requires the successful completion of a first Master's degree and offer more specialisation in professional and academic fields of study. The degree obtained is still considered similar to the Master's level (ISCED 7). Upon completion, students may enter doctoral studies (*Promotionsstudium*). (ISCED-P: 748; ISCED-A: 740)

**Italy** – *Master di 2° livello* (Second level Master's). These one-year programmes may be entered following successful completion of a *Master di 1° livello* (first level Master's of one year's duration) and offer more specialisation in a given area of study. The degree obtained is still considered to be at the Master's level (ISCED level 7). Upon completion, students may enter a *Dottorato di ricerca* (Research Doctorate programme). (ISCED-P: 768; ISCED-A: 760)

**Kazakhstan** – *Резидентура, послевузовское углублённое медицинское образование* (Medical residency, in-depth post-graduate medical education). These post-graduate programmes range in duration from two to four years depending on the medical speciality. Access to these programmes requires the successful completion of a first Master's degree (a combination of a general medical degree and an internship). The programmes, which include both research and classroom components in addition to a hospital-based residency, lead to a certificate of medical education completion (*Свидетельство об окончании резидентуры*). (ISCED-P: 768, ISCED-A: 760)

**Mauritania** – *Formation des enseignants au secondaire* (Secondary education teacher training). This one-year programme requires a Master's degree as the minimum entry requirement. By the end of the programme, graduates receive the *Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement secondaire (CAPES)*, which enables holders to practise as qualified teachers in secondary education. (ISCED-P: 768, ISCED-A: 760)

**Nepal** – *Master of Philosophy (MPhil)*. This is a two-year programme that requires the completion of a Master's degree for entry. By the end of the programme, graduates receive a *Master's of Philosophy (MPhil)* degree. (ISCED-P 768; ISCED-A 760)

**Spain** – *Especialidades Sanitarias* (Post-degree health studies). These programmes may be entered following successful completion of a first Master's degree and offer specialisation in areas related to health studies. The programmes have a duration of two to five years depending on the topic. The degree obtained (*Título de Especialista Sanitarios*) is still considered to be at the Master's level (ISCED level 7). These programmes generally allow access to doctoral programmes. (ISCED-P: 758; ISCED-A: 750)

**Tunisia** – *المراجعة في المحاسبة* (National Diploma in Auditing). This is a one-year programme following a two-year second degree programme at the Master's level in Auditing (*Révision comptable*). By the end of the programme, participants receive the National Diploma in Auditing (*Diplôme national de la révision comptable*). (ISCED-P: 768, ISCED-A: 760)

**Examples Group 4:**

**Stage (or programme) within a first degree at Master's or equivalent level insufficient for completion of ISCED level 7 (cumulative theoretical duration at tertiary level of less than five years), therefore leading to educational attainment at ISCED level 5 or 6 [ISCED-P: 741, 751 or 761; ISCED-A: 540, 550, 640, 650 or 660]**

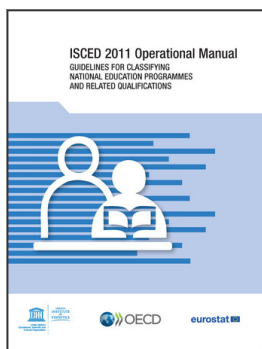
**Tunisia** – *المرحلة التحضيرية* (Preparatory cycle). This programme is considered as the first stage of the national engineering diploma programme, which is classified as a long first degree at Master's level. Only elite upper secondary graduates, theoretically from age 19, may be granted access to this two-year programme. At the end of the programme, participants are awarded the national diploma of the preparatory cycle, which is only valid for pursuing the national engineering diploma programme. (ISCED-P: 761; ISCED-A: 544)

**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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