

Statement of the European University Association (EUA) on the revision of ISCED

The European University Association (EUA) contributes at European level to research and education policy development and to the identification and dissemination of good practices. EUA's members are 34 national rectors' conferences and more than 800 universities and other research intensive higher education institutions from 46 European countries. It is a requirement that institutional members award at least two out of three cycles.

As a representative of the European universities, EUA is a consultative member of the Bologna Process, and has actively contributed to the definition and development of the three degree cycles of Bachelor, Master and Doctorate.

- EUA welcomes the new ISCED HE levels 5-8, as they are broadly identical to the degree structure introduced in European higher education by the Bologna process and to the levels in the European Qualifications Framework. They correspond to short degrees (5), Bachelor (6), Master (7), and doctorate (8).
- We also find the tabulation of the correspondence between ISCED 97 and 2010 (table 17, p.53) useful in the context of the recognition of pre-Bologna qualifications.
- While we understand that ISCED is descriptive rather than prescriptive, nonetheless we would see its revision as a good opportunity to address the issue of Bachelor qualifications at Master level and vice versa. It should be noted that the existing misleading designations in Europe consist of a few exceptions, which are regarding the number of programmes and students involved not very significant, and of little interest for international students. In view of the general trend of bachelors and Masters programmes following the Bologna principles and the Dublin Descriptors, and the progressing development of regional and national QFs, they can be expected rather to decrease than to increase. These issues have been discussed in detail in a study undertaken by EUA on the European Masters. http://www.eua.be/typo3conf/ext/bzb_securelink/pushFile.php?cuid=400&file=file_admin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_Survey_Of_Master_Degrees_In_Europe_FINAL_www.pdf
- In the current draft the access route to the Doctorate remains slightly ambiguous: In para.273 it is stipulated that the Doctorate is 'normally' accessed from the ISCED Level 7. However, para.213 and 278 are more categorical: 'the successful completion of ISCED level 7 is required for entry into ISCED level 8'. We would propose to change this into: 'normally, the successful completion of ISCED level 7 is required for entry into ISCED level 8'. While one would assume that the sequence Bachelor – Master – Doctorate will gain more and more ground, at this stage this cannot be stated with certainty. In some countries, a Bachelor degree is still a regular access route to the Doctorate, and in others this is either practised in certain disciplines or at some institutions.
- We welcome the reference to non-formal learning – as this indeed is facilitated by at least some universities, and may be of increased importance in the future.

In addition, we would like to provide the following remarks for consideration regarding the terminology and definitions used:

- Regarding paragraph 20 we would like to remark that this is generally true, but that there are also shorter courses provided at higher education level would that are formal, but would be according to ISCED classified as non-formal. To give one example, some institutions follow a trimesterial study structure. The attribute "normally" or "generally" should be added, to prevent a too rigorous application.
- While we agree in principle that informal learning cannot be included in ISCED, we would just like to highlight that informal learning is of growing importance, especially regarding the recognition of prior learning for the purpose of lifelong learning.

Brussels, 28 October 2010