

Item 3(b) of the provisional agenda

**REVISION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD
CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (ISCED)**

Report prepared by the UNESCO Division of Statistics

1. For international statistics of education to be of effective use to policy-makers, analysts and an informed public, they should be based upon standard terminology, concepts, definitions and classifications. Without these, comparability of statistics cannot be contemplated, much less achieved.
2. In order to meet this objective, the International Conference on Education (ICE), at its thirty-fifth session in September 1975, adopted the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). A recommendation passed at the same time called on UNESCO and Member States to adopt and apply this international instrument as a frame for the collection and reporting of internationally comparable education statistics.
3. At its twentieth session in Paris in 1978, the General Conference of UNESCO accepted the ICE recommendation and revised its 1958 recommendation on education statistics to take account of the availability of ISCED. Ever since, this classification system has been used by UNESCO, other international and intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations and countries to collect and present education statistics.
4. The process of elaborating ISCED began in the early 1960s and at an expert meeting on relevant data in comparative education held in March 1963 at the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg, the UNESCO Office of Statistics recognized that 'there is a need for work on an educational classification system capable of cross-classification with occupational and industrial classifications, one outcome of which would be the provision of a scheme helpful to manpower and educational planners'.
5. In a related remark, the 1963 meeting itself stressed that: 'a third area which might well benefit from further comparative analysis is that of out-of-school practices. Increasingly the

extramural side of school systems is becoming important in the total enterprise of education and many local agencies outside the school perform educational tasks.'

6. Experience over the years with the application of ISCED by national authorities and international organizations has resulted in a need for clarification and strengthening of the basic concepts and definitions to make it more reflective of current and emerging patterns and practices in education, including the growth of vocational training, the emergence of distance education, the increasing diversity of education providers (many non-traditional), and the role of non-formal education, etc.

7. This was confirmed by a Meeting of Experts on Education Indicators and the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) held in June 1992, where it was recognized that the increasing interest of national educational policy-makers in international education indicators had helped to bring to the fore long-standing questions of educational classification and terminology that had not been examined intensively at the international level since the late 1960s and early 1970s when ISCED was formulated.

8. The 1992 meeting concluded that an updated and revised version of ISCED was needed. Indeed, it was felt that the matter was now becoming urgent in view of the recent surge in demand from intergovernmental organizations for more comprehensive, reliable and internationally comparable educational statistics.

9. In order to have views of and suggestions from Member States, a certain number of international organizations, national institutions and specialists, a document entitled "Review of the International Standard Classification of Education" was prepared and widely distributed in early 1993. Later that same year, at its twenty-seventh session, the UNESCO General Conference adopted a programme resolution which invited the Director-General inter-alia "to finalize the revision of the International Standard Classification of Education by the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth session"

10. Following the twenty-seventh session of the General Conference, a meeting of experts was convened (10-14 October 1994) and recommendations were formulated on specific areas of ISCED to be revised. The meeting also recommended the establishment of a steering committee with the participation of representatives from OECD, EUROSTAT and ILO under the aegis of the UNESCO Secretariat. This indicated clearly that from the outset there was concern for close and effective collaboration between various international organizations dealing with education and related statistics.

11. On the basis of the comments received in 1993-94 on the above-mentioned document and also taking into account the findings and conclusions of several expert consultations on the subject, a revised version I of ISCED was despatched in October 1995 for reactions and further comments.

12. At about the same time, the General Conference at its twenty-eighth session, adopted a Resolution requesting the Director-General to establish a task force "to ensure that the revised

version of the ISCED manual is submitted to the twenty-ninth session of the General Conference " (November 1997).

13. Subsequent to the adoption of this Resolution and to an informal meeting convened by the Delegation of the Netherlands and attended by representatives of some 20 Member States and OECD, proposals were formulated on how best to achieve the objectives outlined in the Resolution, especially the setting-up and functioning of the task force.

14. Ethiopia, France, the Netherlands and representatives from EUROSTAT, OECD and UNESCO comprise the task force which has, since last November, met at least once a month and prepared a revised text on the scope and coverage of education for the purposes of ISCED, as well as on the definitions and categorization of education by levels. These results and findings will be submitted to a "reference group" composed of a representative sub-set of experts from Member States. Several international agencies have also been invited to be represented in this group, the first meeting of which is scheduled for 20-21 May 1996 in Geneva.

15. Following the "reference group" meeting, the revised text will be adjusted to incorporate the comments and suggestions of this group. In parallel, work currently being undertaken by UNESCO and EUROSTAT on the revision of fields of study will be finalized and included in the revised ISCED document. This version will be submitted to an expert meeting to be held (30 September-1 October 1996) just prior to the 45th session of the International Conference on Education (2-5 October 1996) in Geneva.

16. Based on the results of the expert meeting, the task force will then modify the revised ISCED text and, if necessary, submit it to a second reference group meeting. After this meeting, the text will be finalized and ISCED 97 submitted to the 29th session of the UNESCO General Conference for approval.