

Education system

Belgium

described and compared with
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of Belgium. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Belgium for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

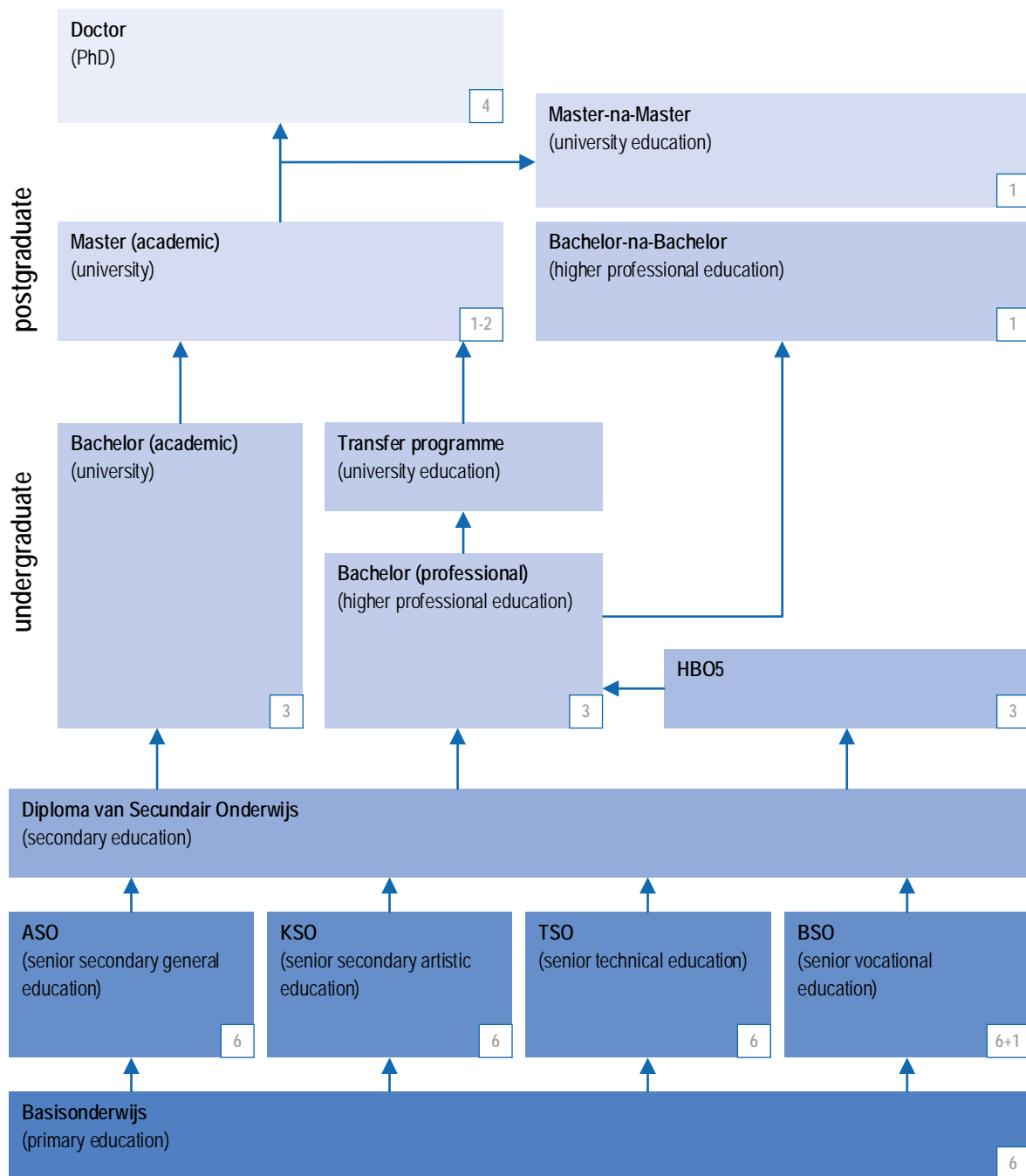
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system Belgium – Flanders



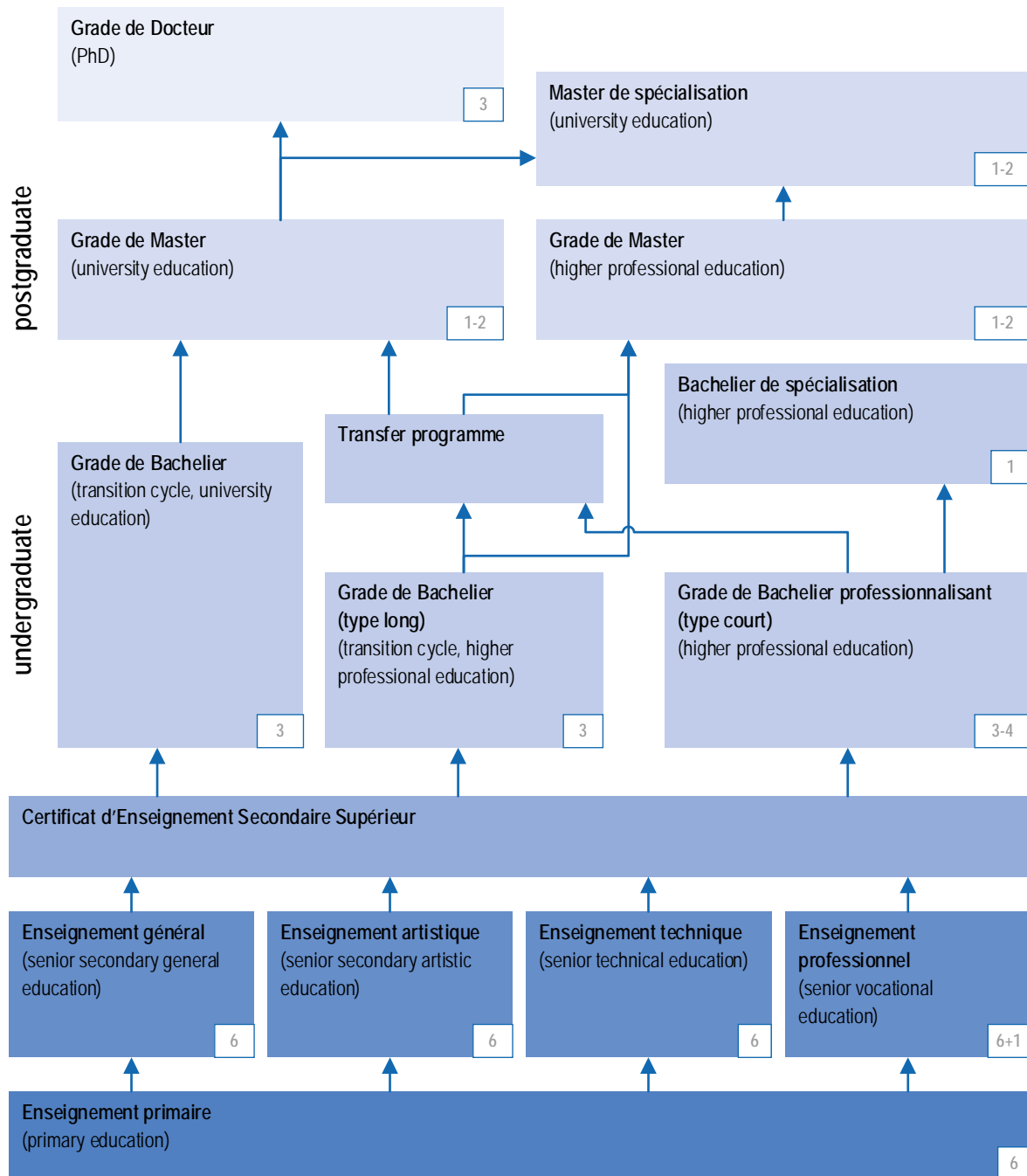
0 Duration of education

■ National Framework of Qualifications

The Flemish Qualification Framework (FQF) distinguishes 8 qualification levels:

- Level 1 : Primary education
- Level 2 : Secondary education, stage 2 of BSO
- Level 3 : Secondary education, second year of stage 3 of BSO
- Level 4 : Secondary education, *diploma secundair onderwijs*, post-secondary, *secundair-na-secundair (Se-n-Se)*
- Level 5 : Higher professional education (HBO5)
- Level 6 : Bachelor
- Level 7 : Master
- Level 8 : Doctoral

Education system Belgium – French community



0 Duration of education

National Framework of Qualifications

The Qualification Framework in the French-speaking community of Belgium will also distinguish 8 qualification levels, but has not yet been finalized. See: [European inventory on NQF 2014](#).

However, the upper 3 levels have been determined:

Cadre de Certifications de l'enseignement supérieur : niveaux, descripteurs et grades reconnus en Communauté française				
Niveau	Savoirs	Aptitudes	Compétences	Grades
Niveau 6	Savoirs approfondis dans un domaine de travail ou d'études requérant une compréhension critique de théories et de principes	Aptitudes avancées, faisant preuve de maîtrise et de sens de l'innovation, pour résoudre des problèmes complexes et imprévisibles dans un domaine spécialisé de travail ou d'études	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gérer des activités ou des projets techniques ou professionnels complexes, incluant des responsabilités au niveau de la prise de décisions dans des contextes professionnel ou d'études imprévisibles Prendre des responsabilités en matière de développement professionnel individuel et collectif 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelier de transition Bachelier professionnalisant Diplôme de spécialisation
Niveau 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Savoirs hautement spécialisés, dont certains sont à l'avant-garde du savoir dans un domaine de travail ou d'études, comme base d'une pensée originale et/ou de la recherche Conscience critique des savoirs dans un domaine et à l'interface de plusieurs domaines 	Aptitudes spécialisées pour résoudre des problèmes en matière de recherche et/ou d'innovation, pour développer de nouveaux savoirs et de nouvelles procédures et intégrer les savoirs de différents domaines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gérer et transformer des contextes professionnels ou d'études complexes, imprévisibles et qui nécessitent des approches stratégiques nouvelles Prendre des responsabilités pour contribuer aux savoirs et aux pratiques professionnelles et/ou pour réviser la performance stratégique des équipes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master – 60 crédits Master – 120 crédits Agrégé de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur Master complémentaire
Niveau 8	Savoirs à la frontière la plus avancée d'un domaine de travail ou d'études et à l'interface de plusieurs domaines	Aptitudes et techniques les plus avancées et les plus spécialisées, y compris en matière de synthèse et d'évaluation, pour résoudre des problèmes critiques de recherche et/ou d'innovation et pour étendre et redéfinir des savoirs existants ou des pratiques professionnelles	Démontrer un niveau élevé d'autorité, d'innovation, d'autonomie, d'intégrité scientifique ou professionnelle et un engagement soutenu vis-à-vis de la production de nouvelles idées ou de nouveaux processus dans un domaine d'avant-garde de travail ou d'études, y compris en matière de recherche	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificat de formation à la recherche Docteur

Source: [Cadre de Certifications de l'enseignement supérieur](#)

Evaluation chart Flanders (Belgium)

In the following chart, the left part lists the foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national qualification framework. The right part lists the Dutch comparisons, with corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification and FQF level	EQF level	Dutch equivalent and NLOF level	EQF level
<i>Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Beroepssecundair Onderwijs (BSO)</i>	4	MBO diploma (qualification level 4)	4
<i>Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Kunst Secundair Onderwijs (KSO)/Technisch Secundair Onderwijs (TSO)</i>	4	VWO diploma or HAVO diploma	4+ /4
<i>Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs (ASO)</i>	4	VWO diploma	4+
<i>Diploma van Gegradueerde (HBO5)</i>	5	Associate Degree	5
<i>Diploma Academisch gerichte Bachelor & Academisch gerichte Bachelor-na-bachelor</i>	6	WO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Diploma Professioneel gerichte bachelor & Bachelor-na-Bachelor</i>	6	HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Diploma Master & Master-na-Master</i>	7	WO master's degree, in some cases HBO master's degree	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.

Education system Belgium

- FQF = Flemish Qualification Framework; NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework; EQF = European Qualifications Framework
- The EQF/[NLQF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [the Dutch education system](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

Evaluation chart French community (Belgium)

In the following chart, the left part lists foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national qualifications framework. The right part lists the Dutch comparisons, with corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualification frameworks.

Degree or qualification and NQF level	EQF level	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level	EQF level
<i>Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement professionnel</i>		MBO diploma (qualification level 4)	4
<i>Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement artistique/technique</i>		VWO diploma or HAVO diploma	4+/4
<i>Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement general</i>		VWO diploma	4+
<i>Grade de Bachelier (university education)</i>	6	WO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Grade de Bachelier (type long)</i>	6	HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Grade de Bachelier professionnalisant (type court) & bachelier de spécialisation</i>	6	HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Grade de Master & Master de spécialisation (national degrees only)</i>	7	WO master's degree, in some cases HBO master's degree	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NQF = National Qualifications Framework; NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework; EQF = European Qualifications Framework

Education system Belgium

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- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

■ Introduction

Belgium is a federal state with 3 independent communities: the Flemish community ('Flanders'), the French community and the German-speaking community. Each community has its own competencies, including the right to their own legislation in certain policy areas such as education.

Each community has its own Ministry of Education, even though some educational matters remain the responsibility of the federal government. Compulsory education, the division of levels in the education system (primary, secondary and higher education), the duration of educational programmes, and teachers' pension schemes are decisions taken at federal level. The communities have their own (albeit restricted) competency with respect to the signing of international treaties.

In this country module the two largest communities (i.e. Flanders and the French community) will be described separately. The Flanders community will be described first. For information on the German-speaking community, please contact Nuffic directly. Or visit the [website](#) of the German-speaking community's ENIC/NARIC.

■ Flanders

The Flemish community is responsible for education in the Flemish region and for the Flemish institutions within the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region. The language of instruction and of public administration is Dutch. The *Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming* (the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training) is responsible for education.

Education in Flanders is compulsory for children aged 6 to 18.

The school year starts on 1 September and ends June 30th. In higher education the academic year runs from 1 September at the earliest till 1 October at the latest, always until the day before the start of the next academic year. The academic year is divided into semesters.

■ Primary and secondary education

The Flemish education system comprises 6 years of primary education (after 3 years of optional pre-school education) and 6 or 7 years of secondary education. Upon completion of secondary education, pupils are awarded the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs*, which grants admission to all types of higher education. Examinations for this certificate can be taken in 4 tracks, also referred to as *onderwijsvormen*:

- *Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs* (ASO, General Secondary Education);
- *Technisch Secundair Onderwijs* (TSO, Technical Secondary Education);
- *Kunstsecundair Onderwijs* (KSO, Secondary Art Education);
- *Beroepssecundair Onderwijs* (BSO, Secondary Vocational Education). In this track, the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs* is awarded after 7 years, instead of 6.

The ASO track contains general subjects.

In terms of level, the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs* (FQF level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a VWO diploma. A full description of all FQF levels is available on the [website](#) of the Flemish government.

Apart from general subjects, the TSO and KSO tracks may also contain artistic or vocational components (technical/economic/administrative), to a smaller or larger degree depending on the programme. After completion, many pupils continue to (related) higher education. In these cases Flemish programmes are often compared to a HAVO diploma with vocational subjects.

In terms of level, the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Kunst Secundair Onderwijs/Technisch Secundair Onderwijs* (FQF level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a VWO diploma, or a HAVO diploma with vocational subjects (in the case of general and vocational subjects).

The BSO track regards vocational education and can be compared with an MBO diploma at qualification level 4.

In terms of level, the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs, Beroepssecundair Onderwijs* (FQF level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 4¹.

NB More information about specializations in secondary education can be found on the [website](#) of the Flemish government (in Dutch only).

¹ The evaluation of the level of qualification (MBO 4) can differ when the diploma is being evaluated for other purposes than admission to higher education in the Netherlands, e.g. for the labour market.

■ Admission to higher education

Upon completion of secondary education, pupils are awarded the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs*. Flemish secondary education programmes prepare pupils for higher education, including university education. The *Diploma of Secundair Onderwijs*, in all its tracks, give access to all types of higher education.

Admission to HBO5

In general, the *hoger beroepsonderwijs 5* (HBO5), adult education stream, requires the minimum age for compulsory education, 18 years and up. Additionally, for admission into the nursing stream a *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs* may be required.

Admission to the Bachelor

An entrance examination is required for bachelor's programmes in medicine and dentistry. For more information, see the Flemish government website in [Dutch](#) or in [English](#). Additional requirements apply for admission to higher education in the fine arts (*artistieke toelatingsproeven*).

Students who do not meet the official criteria may be admitted under the *reglement afwijkende toelatingsvoorwaarden* (alternative admission criteria) of the higher education institution. A language proficiency test in the language of instruction may be part of the admission procedure.

Admission to the Bachelor-na-Bachelor

In general, the *Bachelor-na-bachelor* programmes are only accessible to applicants with a bachelor's degree. The organization of the programme and specific admission requirements are set by the institution. A language proficiency test may also be set as a requirement.

Admission to the Master

The general admission requirement for master's programmes is a (academically oriented) bachelor's degree. Admission (with or without credit transfer or exemptions) may be granted if the candidate holds another master's degree. All academically oriented bachelor's programmes grant direct access to at least one master's programme.

A (*professionally oriented*) bachelor's degree may also give access to a master's programme. In all cases the higher education institutions will set a bridging programme. A bridging programme consists of at least 45 and 90 credits at the most. The higher education institution can also take prior informal and non-formal learning, professional experience (*eerder verworven competenties* – EVC) and prior qualifications (*eerder verworven kwalificaties* – EVK) of the student into

account. An assessment of these may further reduce the duration of the bridging programme and even grant a full exemption.

NB For admission to a master's programme in medicine or dental medicine with a foreign qualification students must pass an entrance examination.

Admission to the *Master-na-Master*

Advanced master's programmes are only accessible to students who have already obtained a master's degree. Direct access may be restricted to graduates of master's programmes with specific programmes or specialisations. Institutions may require holders of other master's degrees to complete a preparatory programme as part of the admission procedure. The curriculum and workload of the preparatory programmes is set by the institution. This may vary according to the content relatedness of prior education and the advanced master's programme in question.

Admission to the *Doctoraat* (PhD)

Although a master's degree is the general entrance requirement for the *Doctoraat* (PhD) programme, universities can stipulate additional requirements. Separate admission procedures may apply for candidates without a master's degree. The requirements are set by the institution.

■ Higher education

Higher education in Flanders is based upon the '*Decreet van 4 april 2003 betreffende de herstructurering van het hoger onderwijs in Vlaanderen*'², also referred to as the *Structuurdecreet*. This decree covers the introduction of the bachelor's-master's degree structure, quality assurance and the accreditation system. Individual higher education institutions are now able to cooperate within 5 '*associaties*', or non-profit organizations made up of one university and one or more university colleges:

- Associatie Katholieke Universiteit Leuven;
- Associatie Universiteit & Hogescholen Antwerpen;
- Associatie Universiteit Gent;
- Universitaire Associatie Brussel;
- Associatie Universiteit-Hogescholen Limburg.

In 2004, the *Flexibiliseringsdecreet* (*Decreet van 30 april 2004 betreffende de flexibilisering van het hoger onderwijs in Vlaanderen en houdende dringende hoger onderwijsmaatregelen*) also came into force, in which modular education, the ECTS credit system, and the validation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL, in

² In Flanders, a *decreet* (decree) is a community law; a *wet* (law) concerns federal legislation.

Dutch *Elders Verworven Competenties/Kwalificaties* (EVC/EVK) are laid down. Under this legislation, all institutions are obliged to implement a RPL procedure.

In the same year, the '*Besluit van de Vlaamse regering betreffende de opmaak, de actualisering en het beheer van het Hoger Onderwijsregister*' (Decision by the Flemish government regarding the format, the update and administration of the Higher Education Register) also came into force. This register contains all recognised Flemish programmes and institutions, and is managed by the *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* (NVAO). The register must be updated every year by decree.

Only institutions recognised ('registered') by the Flemish government are entitled to offer accredited bachelor's and master's programmes in Flanders. These institutions are [listed](#) in the *Hogeronderwijsregister* (Higher Education Register).

The bachelor's-master's degree structure was introduced gradually in Flanders at the start of the academic year 2004/2005.

As of the introduction of the *Structuurdecreet* in 2004, the so called '*academiseringsproces*' started. This means that the former '*opleidingen van academisch niveau*' (academically oriented bachelor programmes), which were being offered at university colleges, will fall under the responsibility of universities in case they meet the minimum conditions when it comes to academic orientation.

University colleges (*hogescholen*) will only offer '*professioneel gerichte*' (professionally oriented) bachelor programmes with one exception: Both bachelors and masters in the field of art, either academically oriented or professionally oriented, will remain within the '*hogescholen*' and will be organised in a School of Arts.

Bachelor

The first stage in the bachelor's-master's degree structure is the *Bachelor's* programme, with 180 credits leading to a final degree of *bachelor*.

University colleges offer programmes in *hoger professioneel onderwijs* (higher professional education). These programmes are primarily geared to professional practice and lead to the professional oriented bachelor's degree.

Universities offer programmes in *academisch onderwijs* (academic education) that lead to the degree of a *Bachelor*. The primary objective of *academisch gerichte* bachelor's programmes is to prepare students for a master's programme.

Bachelor-na-bachelor programmes are advanced programmes that are accessible to those who already hold a bachelor's degree. Most programmes of this type have a study load of 60 credits (ECTS).

In terms of level, the *academisch gerichte Bachelor* and *Bachelor-na-Bachelor* diploma ([FQF level 6](#)/EQF level 6) are both comparable to a WO bachelor's degree.

In terms of level, the *professioneel gerichte Bachelor* and *Bachelor-na-Bachelor* diploma ([FQF level 6](#)/EQF level 6) are both comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree.

Master

The second stage in the bachelor-master's degree structure focuses on academic research and leads to a master's degree. Master's programmes consist of either 60 or 120 credits. Flanders offers academic oriented master's programmes only. Any graduate with an *academisch gerichte Bachelor* may go on to complete a master's programme. Although master's programmes always have an academic orientation, they may also have a professional focus. Master's programmes are rounded off with a final paper (*masterproef*), representing between 15 and 30 credits.

Master-na-master programmes are advanced programmes that can be taken after obtaining a master's degree. The duration is generally 1 year (60 ECTS).

In terms of level, the Master or a Master-na-master diploma ([FQF level 7](#)/EQF level 7) is comparable to a WO or HBO master's degree, depending on the duration and specialisation of the programme.

PhD

A 'doctor' (abbreviated to *dr* in Dutch) or 'doctor of philosophy' (abbreviated to PhD) is awarded by a university after a public defence of the doctoral thesis. The nominal duration is 4 years.

■ Higher professional education (HBO5)

In addition to secondary education and (fulltime) higher education a level of higher professional education (HBO5) was implemented in September 2009. HBO5 is situated between secondary education and professional bachelor's degrees and has been named after the level of the Flemish Qualification Framework to which it corresponds.

There are 2 streams of HBO5:

- Adult education
- Higher professional education in nursing

After obtaining the diploma, in some fields of study it is possible to continue higher professional education and obtain a bachelor's degree through a short study programme.

Adult education

Higher professional education studies which can lead towards a *Diploma van Gegradueerde*. The duration of the programmes is indicated as *lestijden* (study hours) and differs per programme. They are offered at institutions for adult education (*Centra voor volwassenenonderwijs*). See the [overview](#) of centers on the website about Flemish education (in Dutch only).

Higher professional education in nursing

This is the former *vierde graad van het Beroeps Secundair Onderwijs* (BSO). The nursing stream of HBO5 is offered by 20 secondary schools as fulltime education. It can also be taken as a part-time course.

The programme is modular which means that several modules will have to be completed (during 6 semesters) before the degree is obtained. The start of the programme can either be September, 1st or February, 1st, depending on the school. The normal duration of the programme is 3 years. On completion of the programme the degree *Diploma van Gegradueerde* is obtained.

In terms of level, the *Diploma van Gegradueerde* (HBO5) in nursing ([FQF level 5/EQF level 5](#)) is comparable to an Associate Degree in the Netherlands.

■ Assessment systems

Secondary education

Different types of grading systems are used in secondary education, of which the scale 1-100 is most frequent. Other numerical scales are: 1-10, 1-20 or grades in percentages. Schools can make autonomous decisions regarding the classification. For Flemish legislation it only matters if a pupil has obtained the *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs*.

More information about grade conversion between Flanders and the Netherlands can be found on the [website](#) of Nuffic (in Dutch only).

Higher education

In higher education a grading scale of 1-20 is most frequent.

Grade	Meaning
18-20	Outstanding
16-18	Very good
14-16	Good
12-14	AmPLY sufficient
10-12	Satisfactory
1-9	Fail

At the end of the academic year, a classification is being awarded:

- *op voldoende wijze* (with satisfaction);
- *met onderscheiding* (distinction);
- *met grote onderscheiding* (great distinction);
- *met grootste onderscheiding* (greatest distinction).

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) was introduced in Flanders in all higher education institutions. All programmes are structured according to a system of 60 credits per academic year. A bachelor's programme requires 180 credits while a master's programme requires 60 or 120 credits. Veterinary science and medicine are exceptions, with 180 credits for the master's programme in veterinary science and 240 credits for the master's programme in medicine.

More information on the ECTS is available in the [ECTS Users' Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

■ Bologna process

Flanders signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999.

Flanders introduced the binary (professional bachelor's programmes and academic bachelor's programmes) bachelor's-master's degree structure for all the higher education programmes and its QA system by the Decree on Higher Education Reform of 4 April 2003. The bachelor's -master's degree structure for all the higher education programmes was implemented gradually from the academic year 2004/2005 onwards.

At the moment the introduction of subject descriptors is in process, linking each qualification in higher education to generic subject descriptors. The descriptors, which are being developed by the higher education institutions and their umbrella organisations, are comparable to the benchmark statements in the UK.

For more information please refer to the official European Higher Education Area [website](#).

■ Qualification frameworks

The Flemish National Framework of Qualifications (FQF) was launched in 2005 and incorporates a 8-level structure. The FQF has been referenced to the 3 EHEA qualification cycles of the Bologna Framework since February 2009 and to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) since June 2011.

For more information, see:

- the [website](#) of the *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie* (NVAO) with the [report](#) concerning the reference of the FQF to the QF-EHEA (*Report verification committee*);
- the [website](#) of the Flemish government with the [report](#) (in Dutch) concerning the reference of the FQF to the EQF.

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The Q(quality) A(assurance) system in Flanders was introduced by the Decree on Higher Education Reform of 4 April 2003.

This QA system in Flanders consists of 3 parts:

1. an internal assessment (self-evaluation by the HEI itself);
2. an external assessment (external quality assessment by the Council of Flemish University Colleges (*Vlaamse Hogescholen Raad – VLHORA*) and the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad – VLIR*);
3. accreditation by the NVAO.

The Council of Flemish University Colleges and the Flemish Interuniversity Council, acting as quality assurance authorities (QAA) are responsible for evaluating the learning outcomes and specifications of each study programme in alignment with the level descriptors of the qualification framework.

The NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders established by international treaty, is responsible for the accreditation of the higher education programmes based upon the outcomes of the external part of the QA procedure undertaken by the QAA mentioned above. Accreditation is a formal decision by the NVAO that a programme meets the predefined quality criteria. These criteria are laid down in NVAO's (initial) accreditation frameworks. Also, accreditation is a prerequisite for awarding bachelor's or master's degrees, for state funding and for grants for students.

A positive accreditation decision means that the programme is accredited. It will then be included in the Higher Education Register, which contains an easy online search tool. This registration means that the degree awarded by the programme is recognised by the national authority, i.e. Flanders. A positive accreditation decision by the NVAO is kept or listed in the Higher Education Register for 8 years.

If the accreditation decision is negative, the programme loses its accreditation status and is deleted from the Higher Education Register. It may no longer be offered in that case, though an opportunity is provided to submit an application for temporary recognition during a recovery period. Temporary recognition may have a validity of 1 to 3 years.

For more information please refer to:

- the [website](#) of the *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie* (NVAO);
- the [website](#) of Higher Education in Flanders.

■ International treaties

The Lisbon Convention was signed by the Flemish Community on the 7th of March 2005. From that year onwards the convention has been ratified by the communities:

- 15th of December 2006: Flanders
- 19th of July 2007: French speaking Community
- 10th of July 2008: Federal Government
- 25th of May 2009: German speaking Community
- 22th of July 2009: Federal State

Treaty concerning the accreditation of programmes

In 2003 the 'Treaty between the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Kingdom of the Netherlands concerning the accreditation of programmes within Flemish

and Dutch higher education' was established. The main goal of the treaty is the establishment of an accreditation organisation that will accredit both Flemish and Dutch higher education programmes. The treaty entered into force on the 1st of February 2005, followed by the establishment of the NVAO in the same year.

In an additional protocol dated the 16th of January 2013 some changes have been made to the treaty:

- The task of the NVAO is being extended to the realization of an institutional audit (*instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg*) (according to Dutch legislation) and an institutional review (*instellingsreview*) (according to Flemish legislation).
- Establishment of mutual recognition of Dutch and Flemish qualifications of bachelor and master programmes.
- The treaty is extended to the Caribbean Netherlands. This means that higher education of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is reviewed by the NVAO.

Benelux Decision

On 18 May 2015 the ministers of higher education of the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) have approved a decision for mutual automatic level recognition of bachelor's and master's degrees obtained in a Benelux country. This gives a diplomaholder legal certainty that his or her diploma will be recognised on either bachelor or master level. As a result of this Decision, evaluation of Belgian bachelor and master qualifications in terms of level and workload is not needed anymore.

■ **Diploma Supplement**

The Flemish Diploma Supplement was officially introduced for the universities in 1991 and for university colleges in 1994. It is automatically issued to graduates of all programmes by all universities and universities of applied sciences as part of the diploma. Both the degree and Diploma Supplement can also be issued in English on request.

More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the [website](#) of the European Commission.

■ **Composition of file**

- Secondary education: *Diploma van Secundair Onderwijs* with transcript.
- Tertiary education: higher education degree with Diploma Supplement.

■ List of higher education institutions

[Website](#) of Higher Education in Flanders which lists all the accredited programmes, registered institutions and other officially registered institutions that offer accredited higher education programmes.

■ Useful websites

- Flemish government [website](#) with links to other websites in English, including this [website](#) with extensive information on education in Flanders.
- Flemish government [website](#), including information (in Dutch) on the entrance examination for bachelor's programmes in medicine and dentistry.
- [List](#) with institutions for adult education in Flanders.
- [Website](#) of the *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie* (NVAO).
- [Website](#) of the ENIC and NARIC centre in Flanders (Belgium).
- [Website](#) of the ENIC/NARIC centre in the German speaking Community in Belgium.

■ French community

The French community (*Communauté française de Belgique* or *Communauté française Wallonie-Bruxelles*) comprises the region of Wallonia (*la Région Wallonne*) and the Brussels Region (*la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*) with legislative powers in the fields of culture, education, health and welfare.

Higher education is based on the *Décret définissant l'enseignement supérieur, favorisant son intégration à l'espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur et refinançant les universités* (also referred to as the *Décret Bologne*), which came into force on 31 March 2004. With some additional legislation, this decree forms the basis of the reform of the higher education system in the framework of the Bologna process.

Secondary education is based upon the *Arrêté de l'Exécutif du 31/08/1992 exécutant le décret du 29/7/92 portant organisation de l'enseignement secondaire de plein exercice*.

Education is compulsory for children aged 6-18. The language of instruction is French.

The academic year runs from early September until late June.

■ Primary and secondary education

General secondary education lasts 6 years, following 6 years of primary education. Vocational secondary education can be completed in 6 or 7 years. There are four tracks in secondary education known as *les enseignements*:

- *l'enseignement général*;
- *l'enseignement technique*;
- *l'enseignement artistique*;
- *l'enseignement professionnel*.

These tracks are subdivided into further specialisations called *subdivision(s)*. Additionally a further distinction is made between a track preparing pupils for further study in higher education known as *transition*, and a qualifying track leading directly to the labour market, known as *qualification*. These tracks are linked to the 4 *enseignements*: *transition* to *l'enseignement général*, *qualification* to *l'enseignement professionnel* and both tracks to *l'enseignement technique* and *artistique*.

The present system of general secondary education has 3 cycles of 2 years. At the end of the second cycle (i.e. after 4 years of secondary school), pupils are awarded the *Certificat d'Enseignement du Deuxième degré*. At the end of the

third and final cycle, the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur* is awarded.

In terms of level, the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement général* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

In terms of level, the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement artistique/technique* is comparable to a VWO diploma or a HAVO diploma with vocational subjects (in the case of general and vocational subjects).

In terms of level, the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur, enseignement professionnel* is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 4.³

³ The evaluation of the level of qualification (MBO 4) can differ when the diploma is being evaluated for other purposes than admission to higher education in the Netherlands, e.g. for the labour market.

■ Admission to higher education

Admission to higher education is based upon the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur*.

Admission is also possible after passing a state entrance examination before a state committee of the French Community (the *jury de la Communauté française*); successful candidates obtain the *Diplôme d'Aptitude à Accéder à l'Enseignement Supérieur*.

■ Higher education

Higher education is offered in 2 sectors: *enseignement universitaire* (university education) and *enseignement supérieur hors universités* (non-university higher education). The language of instruction is French.

The new French community legislation distinguishes 4 different types of (subsidized) higher education institutions with the legal power to award nationally recognised degrees:

- the *institutions universitaires* (Université or Facultés universitaires);
- the *Haute Ecoles*;
- the *Ecoles supérieures des Arts*;
- the *Etablissement d'enseignement de promotion sociale pour les titres correspondants au plein exercice*.

When the *Décret Bologna* came into force in 2004, the system of higher education was reformed into 3 cycles:

- an initial cycle leading to the *Grade de Bachelier*;
- a second cycle leading to the degree of *Master*;
- a third cycle leading to the PhD degree (the *doctorat*). The PhD can only be obtained in university (*enseignement académique*) education.

■ University education

University education (*enseignement universitaire*) is offered at 7 university institutions in the French community. They are divided administratively into 3 *Académies*⁴:

- *l'Académie Louvain* (UCL-FUNDP-FUSL-FUCAM);
- *l'Académie Universitaire Wallonie-Bruxelles* (ULB-UMONS);
- *l'Académie Universitaire Wallonie-Europe* (ULG,-Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech (*Faculté Universitaire des Sciences Agronomiques de Gembloux*)).

For further information please see the [List of higher education institutions](#).

⁴ See also the Flemish associations

Bachelier

A *Bachelier* is awarded after 3 years (180 ECTS) and is organized as a foundation programme in a certain field. The academic degree of *Bachelier* is a *grade de transition* (transition cycle). This means that it allows students to continue on to the second cycle– the *Master*.

In terms of level, the *Grade de Bachelier* ([NQF level 6](#)) is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree.

Master

A *Master* is awarded after completion of the second cycle, taking either 1 year (60 ECTS), 2 years (120 ECTS), 3 years (180 ECTS for veterinary doctor) or 4 years (240 credits for medical doctors). In the 2-year *Master* programme (120 ECTS) there are 3 different types of specialisations:

- professional specialisations (*la finalité spécialisée*);
- teacher training programme (*la finalité didactique*);
- special track preparing for academic research (*la finalité approfondie*).

This latter specialisation is only possible within a prescribed number of programmes, named in Section 31 of the Act.

In terms of level, the *Master* ([NQF level 7](#)) is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the specialisation and type of study programme.

Master de spécialisation

After obtaining a *Master*, students can continue for a second master's degree of at least 1 year (60 ECTS). If the institution is authorized to award a *Master de spécialisation*, this will always be a recognised academic degree. Many post-academic master's programmes are supplementary specialist programmes or medical specialisations organised by the institution, and are therefore not recognised as national academic degrees. The recognised *Master de spécialisation* degrees are included in *annex IV* of the Act.

In terms of level, the *Master de spécialisation* ([NQF level 7](#)) is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the specialisation and type of study programme.

PhD

Third-cycle programmes lead to the award of the degree of *Docteur*. Academic research and preparation for a doctoral thesis take place at the *écoles doctorales* (research schools), generally within one of the *académies*. In these schools preparatory training is completed in 1 year (60 ECTS), leading to a *certificat de formation à la recherche*. The minimum duration of a doctorate has been set at 180 ECTS, including the 1-year (preparatory) programme mentioned above. In the Netherlands, the degree of *Docteur* is comparable to a *doctor* (Dr) degree; the *certificat de formation à la recherche* is comparable to 1 year as an AIO more or less.

■ Non-university higher education

There are 2 types of programmes in the non-university sector (*L'enseignement supérieur non universitaire/ enseignement supérieur hors universités*):

- enseignement supérieur de type court;
- enseignement supérieur de type long.

Enseignement supérieur de type court

The programmes *de type court* leads to the qualification of (*Grade de*) *Bachelier professionnalisant (type court)*. They are offered at *Hautes Ecoles* and at *Ecoles Supérieures des Arts*. The programmes have a duration of 3 years (180 ECTS), or 4 years (240 ECTS) for midwifery, with a vocational orientation. After successful completion of the *Bachelier professionnalisant (type court)* it is possible at some *Hautes Ecoles* to continue on to a 1 year specialisation year. This will lead to a *Bachelier de spécialisation*.

In terms of level, the *Bachelier professionnalisant (type court)* and *Bachelier de spécialisation* ([NQF level 6](#)) are both comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree.

Enseignement supérieur de type long

The so called *de type long* (long term) programmes are provided at *Hautes Ecoles* and, in the field of the fine arts, the *Ecoles Supérieures des Arts*. Courses last 5 years, are divided in 2 cycles (180+60/120=240/300 ECTS) and offer a general scientific as well as specific education ensuring the transition towards the second cycle. The first cycle (*premier cycle de transition*) lasts 3 years and leads to the diploma of (*Grade de*) *Bachelier (type long)*. The second cycle (*deuxième cycle professionnalisant*) takes 1 to 2 years depending on the specialisation, and leads to a *Master*.

In terms of level, the *Bachelier (type long)* ([NOF level 6](#)) is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree.

■ Assessment systems

Different types of grading systems are used in secondary education, of which the scale 1-100 is most frequent. Other grading scales are: 1-10, 1-20 or grades in percentages. Schools can make autonomous decisions regarding the classification. For Walloon legislation, it only matters if a pupil has obtained the *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur*.

In higher education a grading scale of 1-20 is most frequent.

Grade	Meaning
18-20	Outstanding
16-18	Very good
14-16	Good
12-14	Amplly sufficient
10-12	Satisfactory
1-9	Fail

At the end of the academic year, a classification is being awarded:

- *avec satisfaction*
- *avec distinction*
- *avec grande distinction*
- *avec la plus grande distinction*

The degree classification of *avec distinction* is required for admission to a PhD. Standards of the classifications are set by the institutions themselves.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) was introduced in Flanders in all higher education institutions. All programmes are structured according to a system of 60 credits per academic year. A bachelor's programme requires 180 credits while a master's programme requires 60 or 120 credits. Veterinary science and medicine are exceptions, with 180 credits for the master's programme in veterinary science and 240 credits for the master's programme in medicine.

More information on ECTS is available in the [ECTS Users' Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

■ Bologna process

Higher education reforms took place with the 2004 Higher Education Act, and a 3 cycle system was introduced:

- a first cycle leading to a (interim or final) *Grade de Bachelier*;
- a second cycle leading to the Master;
- a third cycle leading to a PhD degree (the doctorat). The latter is only offered in university (*enseignement académique*) education.

■ Qualification frameworks

The Qualification Framework in the French-speaking community of Belgium will distinguish 8 qualification levels, but has not yet been finalized. At this moment only the 3 upper levels have been determined.

More information about the development of the Qualification Framework is published in a Cedefop [report](#) report (Cedefop, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training).

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The French-speaking community has no national register for higher education. Recognised institutions and programmes are enumerated (in general terms) in the national laws.

Quality assurance in education (including higher education) is the responsibility of the national education inspectorate. The inspectorate, *Agence pour l'Évaluation de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur en Communauté Française de Belgique* (AEQES), was established by law in 2002.

Strictly speaking, there is no system of accreditation of the institutions of higher education in the French Community. However, an "ex ante" accreditation system can be mentioned, to the extent that only those HEIs which satisfy the criteria defined by the laws can be recognised and subsidised by the French Community. The recognised HEIs can only organise studies in the fields for which they received an authorization. Only recognised HEIs can award recognised degrees, which have academic as well as legal effects (for example, access to regulated professions).

For a list of accredited HEI's please refer to:

- the [website](#) of the government;
- the [website](#) of the *Wallonie-Bruxelles Campus* (WBCampus).

■ International treaties

On the 19th of July 2007 the French Community ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. On the 22nd of July 2009, the federal state ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention which is therefore now in force in all the Belgian Communities.

Benelux Decision

On 18 May 2015 the ministers of higher education of the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) have approved a decision for mutual automatic level recognition of bachelor's and master's degrees obtained in a Benelux country. This gives a diplomaholder legal certainty that his or her diploma will be recognised on either bachelor or master level. As a result of this Decision, evaluation of Belgian bachelor and master qualifications in terms of level and workload is not needed anymore.

■ Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement was officially introduced for the universities in 1991 and for university colleges in 1994 and is automatically issued to graduates of all programmes by all universities and university colleges as part of the diploma. If required both the degree and Diploma Supplement can also be issued in English.

More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the [website](#) of the European Commission.

■ Composition of file

- Secondary education: *Certificat d'Enseignement Secondaire Supérieur* with transcript.
- Tertiary education: diploma with transcript and Diploma Supplement.

■ List of higher education institutions

[Website](#) of the *Administration générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique*, including a list of institutions of higher education.

l' Académie Louvain:

UCL: *Université Catholique de Louvain*

FUNDP: *Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix*

FUSL: *Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis*

FUCAM: *Facultés Universitaires Catholiques de Mons*

l'Académie Universitaire Wallonie-Bruxelles:

ULB : *Université Libre de Bruxelles*

UMONS: *Université de Mons*

l'Académie Universitaire Wallonie-Europe:

ULG : *Université de Liège Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech (Faculté Universitaire des Sciences Agronomiques de Gembloux)*

- See also the [document](#) with Government Act of 9 July 1996: overview of *Hautes écoles*.
- See also the [document](#) with Act of 17 May 1999 (art. 24) : overview of *Ecoles supérieures des arts*.

■ **Useful links**

- [Website](#) of the ENIC/NARIC centre of the French speaking Community.
- [Website](#) of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles with information regarding the types of higher education institutes.