

Education system

Kenya

described and compared with
the Dutch system

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

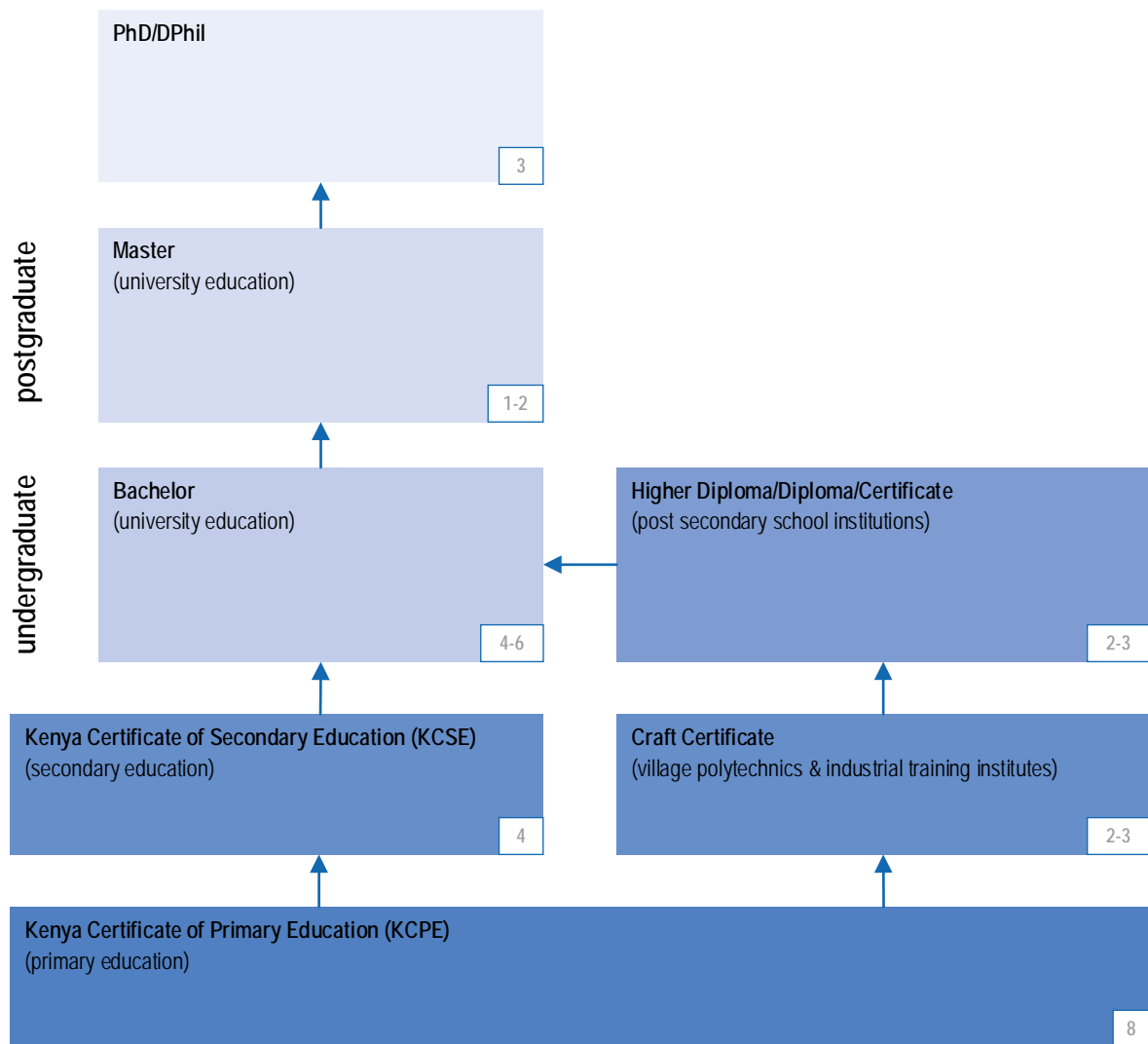
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system Kenya



0 Duration of education

Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications applicable to admission to higher education. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

| Degree or qualification | Dutch equivalent and NLOF level | | EQF level |
|--|--|-----|-----------|
| Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (fewer than 6 subjects with A, B or C) | VMBO-T diploma | 2 | 2 |
| Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (at least 6 subjects with A, B or C) | HAVO diploma | 4 | 4 |
| Certificates/diplomas (technical training institutes and institutes of technology) | MBO diploma (qualification levels 2, 3 or 4) | 2-4 | 2-4 |
| Bachelor's degree (4 years) | HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO | 6 | 6 |
| Bachelor's degree (5 years) | WO bachelor's degree | 6 | 6 |
| Bachelor's degree (6 years) | 4 years of WO | 6 | 6 |
| Master's degree 1-2 years | HBO or WO master's degree | 7 | 7 |

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLOF = Dutch qualification framework EQF = European qualification framework.
- The EQF/[NLOF 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.

■ Introduction

The Republic of Kenya lies on the east coast of Africa. Since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1963, Kenya has been a parliamentary democracy and a presidential republic with a multi-party system.

The government's powers are divided into the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Executive is headed by the president, who is democratically elected for a 5-year term. The current president is Uhuru Kenyatta. The president is assisted in his work by a vice-president and a cabinet. Legislative powers lie with the National Assembly. The National Assembly, together with the president, constitutes the parliament. Currently Kenya has a Coalition Government which has shared powers between the president and the Prime minister.

Political responsibility for the education system lays with two ministries namely Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. The Ministries' remit includes the distribution of learning materials and the implementation of educational policies. The Ministries are responsible for various educational sectors, such as Early Childhood Development and Pre-Primary Education, Primary Education, Special Needs Education, Secondary Education and Teacher Education and University Education.

Kenya's two official languages are English and Kiswahili. The language of education is English. All primary education is compulsory.

Kenya's school year runs from January to December. There are holidays of 3 to 4 weeks in April and August for both primary and secondary education. The longest holiday takes place during December/January. The academic year for universities runs from September to June.

■ Primary and secondary education

In 1985 the 7-4-2-3 system was replaced with the current 8-4-4 educational system, based on the American educational system. This system consists of 8 years of primary school, 4 years of secondary school and 4 years of higher education. The curriculum focuses on mathematics, English and various vocational subjects. That includes a broad range of subjects aimed both at pupils who will complete only their primary education and then enter the labour market, and those pupils who plan to continue on to higher education.

Children also attend 1 or 2 years of pre-primary school before starting primary school. This is usually between the ages of 3 and 6.

Primary education

The first phase of the 8-4-4 educational system is primary education. Primary education is free and compulsory in Kenya. Secondary education is also free, but not compulsory.

Primary education lasts 8 years in Kenya (standards 1 to 8). Pupils are usually 6 years old when they start school, and 14 when they complete their primary education. The curriculum is made up of languages, mathematics, history, geography, science, crafts and religious studies. Primary education has been free and compulsory in Kenya since 2003. At the end of their eighth year, pupils take exams for the award of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Exams are held in five subjects: Kiswahili, English, mathematics, science and agriculture, and social studies.

General secondary education

Most pupils are 14 years old when they start secondary education. Kenya has more than 3,500 secondary schools, with some 700,000 pupils. Less than 50 per cent of primary school pupils continue on to secondary education. Secondary education in Kenya is focused both on those pupils who plan to enter the labour market afterwards and those who plan to continue on to higher education. Secondary education ordinarily takes 4 years.

The curriculum is made up of subjects divided into five groups:

Group 1: English, mathematics and Kiswahili;

Group 2: biology, physics, chemistry, physical education and biological sciences;

Group 3: history and government, geography, Christianity, Islam, social studies and ethics, and Hindu Islamic Education;

Group 4: home science, art and design, agriculture, woodwork, metalwork, construction, power mechanics, electricity, drawing and design, and aviation technology;

Group 5: French, German, Arabic, music, commerce, economics, typing and office practice.

The subjects in group 1 are compulsory for all pupils. They must also choose at least two subjects from group 2, and can choose freely from the other groups. The subjects offered will depend on individual schools and what they can offer in terms of learning resources and teachers. At the end of the fourth year, pupils take exams for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). These national exams are administered by the National Examinations Council.

In terms of level, the *Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education* (KCSE) with an A, B or C in at least six subjects is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

In terms of level, the *Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE)* with an A, B or C in fewer than six subjects is comparable to a *VMBO-T (theoretische leerweg)* diploma.

Vocational secondary education

Following completion of primary education and the award of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), pupils have the option of following a vocationally oriented study programme as part of the artisan and trade programmes at youth polytechnics. These programmes lead to a variety of diplomas and certificates, among which a Craft Certificate.

The level of these vocationally oriented artisan and trade study programmes is comparable to *VMBO* study programmes. The level of each diploma will need to be assessed individually and will depend on the duration and specialization of the programme.

Postsecondary education

Post-secondary technical study programmes are delivered by various technical training institutes and institutes of technology. The admission requirement is generally a KCSE with a C- average. The study programmes offered by technical training institutes and institutes of technology vary in duration. Post-secondary study programmes also lead to a variety of certificates and diplomas.

In terms of level, the *certificates and diplomas obtained at technical training institutes and institutes of technology* are comparable to an *MBO diploma* (qualification levels 2, 3 or 4), depending on the duration and specialization of the programme.

Certain institutes can also deliver the national apprenticeship programme, which is comparable to the 'old' Dutch apprenticeship system and the current learning track in vocational education (*BBL* or *beroepsbegeleidende leerweg*). The level of each study programme must be assessed individually and will depend on its duration and specialization.

Admission to higher education

Admission to higher education at Kenya's public universities is managed by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB). The JAB is an umbrella body for admissions, with representatives from all public universities as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Commission for University Education

(CUE). To be accepted onto a bachelor's programme, students are required to have achieved the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) with a C+ average. Admission to programmes leading to certificates and diplomas at polytechnics requires a D+ or C- average, respectively.

■ Higher education

Higher education in Kenya has a binary structure, with universities being either public or private. There are a total of seven public universities; these are independent and subsidised by the government.

Degree granting institutions in Kenya can be categorized as:

| Type of institution | Number |
|---|-----------|
| Public universities | 7 |
| Public University Constituent Colleges | 24 |
| Public University Campuses | 3 |
| Chartered Private Universities | 14 |
| Chartered Private University Colleges | 5 |
| Universities with Letter of Interim Authority (LIA) | 11 |
| Registered Private Universities | 2 |
| Total | 66 |

Apart from public universities which are established through Acts of Parliament, private universities are established through the process of accreditation by CUE. The CUE [website](#) has an overview of all of these universities and affiliates.

There are national polytechnics which offer higher professional education. They offer study programmes leading to a certificate, diploma and higher national diploma. Two polytechnics have been elevated to university status and have been offering degree programmes related to their diplomas. The diploma qualifications obtained from these polytechnics have been used for admission into related degree programmes in universities.

■ University education

University education in Kenya consists of three levels: bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programmes. Universities also offer Diplomas and Certificates.

Bachelor's degree

Bachelor's degree programmes usually consist of major and minor subjects. Depending on the discipline chosen, a bachelor's programme can take 4 to 6 years. Bachelor's programmes often end with a research project. Arts, basic science, commerce, law and Bachelor of Education programmes usually take 4 years. Engineering, architecture, veterinary science and medicine programmes take 5 and 6 years respectively. Bachelor's programmes can lead to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree, but there are also degrees which specifically name the discipline, such as the Bachelor of Business Management. As well as preparing students for employment, bachelor's degrees in Kenya offer access to master's programmes.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* following a nominally 4-year programme is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO, depending on the content and specialization.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* following a nominally 5-year programme in *architecture or veterinary science* is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* following a nominally 6-year programme is comparable to 4 years of WO.

Master's degree

Master's degree programmes in Kenya usually take 1 or 2 years. The first year mainly consists of lectures, with the second year spent doing research. In principle, master's programmes conclude with a final paper. In most cases, admission to a master's programme requires a minimum of an upper second class bachelor's degree. Applicants with a bachelor's qualification below upper second class may be required to do a postgraduate diploma in the related field before being admitted into the master's programme. Most master's programmes confer a Master of Science or Master of Arts degree. But there are also degrees which include the name of the discipline, such as the Master of Environmental Studies. In principle, master's degrees in Kenya enable students to pursue a doctorate.

In terms of level, the *master's degree* is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the specialization and duration of the programme.

PhD

A doctorate is awarded following a period of at least 3 years of research conducted during the doctoral programme. The titles awarded following successful completion of the doctoral programme are PhD and DPhil. A master's degree is mandatory in order to pursue a Doctorate degree.

Higher professional education

Higher professional education is offered by the national polytechnics. These polytechnics do not offer programmes that confer a bachelor's or master's degree; instead, they confer a certificate, diploma or higher diploma. Depending on the diploma achieved, one can then move on to enrol in a university's bachelor's programme.

Assessment systems

Secondary education – Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education

| Letter grade | Numerical grade | Description |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| A | 12 | Distinction |
| A- | 11 | Very Good |
| B+ | 10 | Credit |
| B | 9 | Good |
| B- | 8 | |
| C+ | 7 | Average |
| C | 6 | |
| C- | 5 | |
| D+ | 4 | Fair |
| D | 3 | |
| D- | 2 | |
| E | 1 | Poor |

Higher education – Bachelor’s degrees

| Numerical grade | Letter grade | Description | Classification |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 70-100 | A | Excellent | First Class Honours |
| 60-69 | B | Good | Second Class Honours (Upper Division) |
| 50-59 | C | Satisfactory | Second Class Honours (Lower Division) |
| 40-49 | D | Pass | Pass |
| 0-39 | E | Fail | Fail |

Master’s and doctorate degrees

These are graded as ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ with corresponding letter grades.

■ Qualification frameworks

Kenya is in the process of establishing a National Qualification Framework (NQF), a process which is being spearheaded by CUE. The discussions are held at both national and at the level of the East African Community, a regional intergovernmental organization.

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

Kenya’s higher education sector has no official ranking system. The accreditation of programmes offered within higher education is overseen by the Commission for University Education (CUE). One of the CUE’s core responsibilities is to monitor the quality of the education offered at both public and private institutions. A list of accredited programmes in Kenya can be downloaded from the CUE [website](#).

■ Composition of file

The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) certificate is required for secondary education.

For tertiary education, all higher education diplomas obtained must be submitted together with transcripts and attached lists of marks.

■ List of higher education institutions

[Website](#) of the Commission for University Education (CUE) with a list of recognized universities and accredited programmes.

■ Useful links

- [Website](#) of the Commission for University Education (CUE) with a list of recognized universities and accredited programmes.
- [Website](#) of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with information on primary education, secondary education, adult education and higher information.
- [Website](#) of the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS, successor of the Joint Admissions Board), the umbrella body for admission to higher education in Kenya.
- [Website](#) of the Kenya National Examinations Council, the examining body for the KCSE.