

Education system

Afghanistan

described and compared with
the Dutch system

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

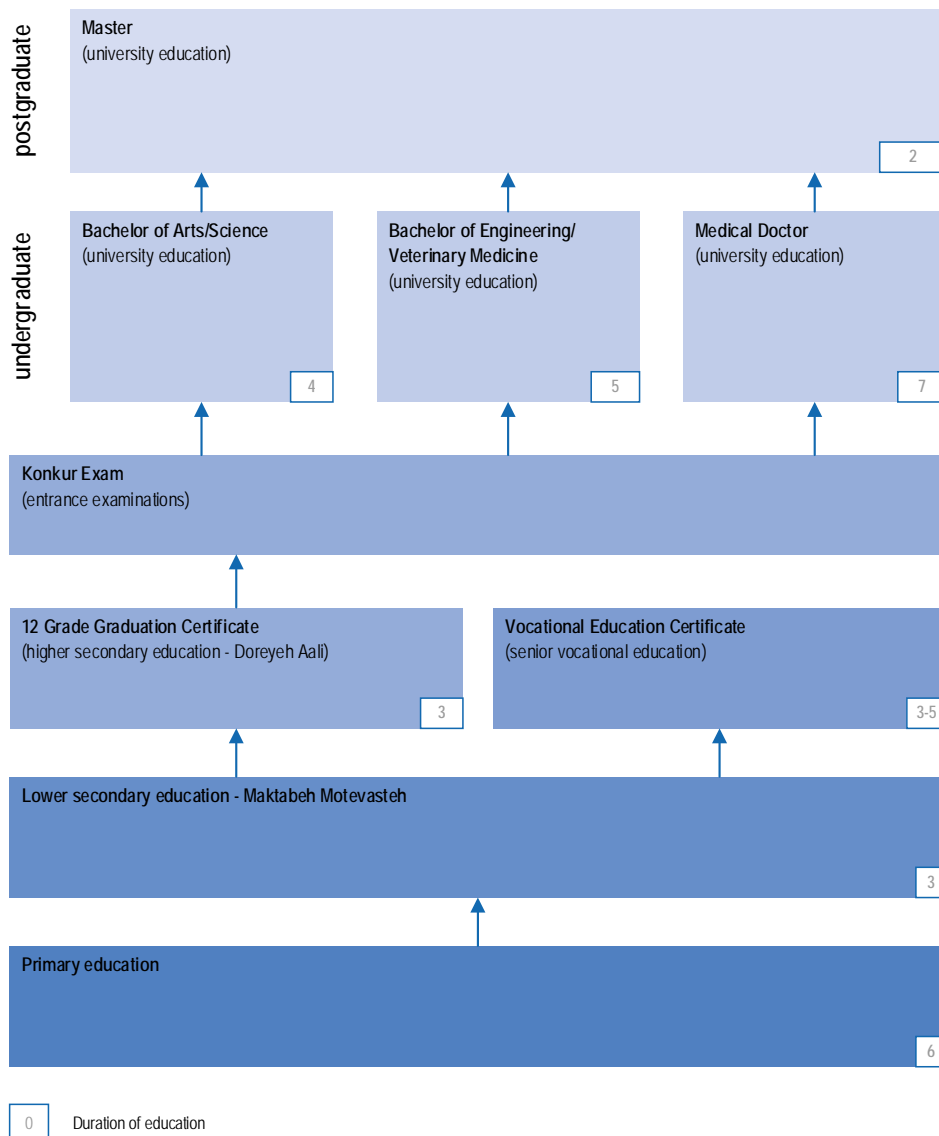
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system Afghanistan



■ 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 corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level		EQF level
Vocational Education Certificate	MBO diploma (qualification level 2, 3 or 4)	2-4	2-4
12 Grade Graduation Certificate	HAVO diploma	4	4
Bachelor of Arts/Science	HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO	6	6
Bachelor of Engineering/ Veterinary Medicine	WO bachelor's degree	6	6
Master's degree	1-year WO master's degree	7	7

NB

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

■ Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked sovereign state situated in south-west Asia.

Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces. The population of Afghanistan is estimated to comprise nearly 35 million inhabitants and is made up of various ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Pashtuns, who account for 42%, followed by the Tajiks (27%), the Hazaras (9%) and the Uzbeks (around 9%). More than 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan, of which Dari, which is related to Persian (also known as Farsi), and Pashtu are the main languages.

Over the past 30 years Afghanistan has endured various conflicts and wars with far-reaching consequences for education as a whole. In the period 1996-2011, for example, education for girls and women was prohibited. In 2001 Afghanistan began reconstruction efforts, placing a strong emphasis on education. The constitution, for instance, lays down that both formal and religious education will be provided free of charge through to the bachelor's level.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) share responsibility for the entire education system. The MoE is responsible for all the education provided after primary education, including religious education (*Madrasah*) and technical and secondary vocational training through to class 14. The MoHE is responsible for higher education and drafts legislation and sets out rules for the purpose of assuring the quality of the public universities. Due to the wars the accreditation process is still in its infancy. The MoHE recently initiated internal evaluations of the public universities. At present the MoHE has insufficient capacity available to monitor and assure the quality of the private universities.

Education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 14. Children usually start school from the age of 6 to 8. The number of children going to school has risen sharply since 2001. In 2002, 2.3 million children attended school. In 2010 around seven million children were registered at more than 10,000 schools. Generally speaking, however, less than a quarter of the pupils complete the first 9 years of education while less than 10 per cent pursue education until class 12. In addition to mainstream schools Afghanistan also has religious and informal schools which mainly provide education in rural areas.

The language of instruction is Dari. In the southern provinces, however, Pashtu is the language of instruction. A few master's degree programmes are taught in English.

The academic year consists of 2 semesters, and runs from March to January.

■ Primary and secondary education

In Afghanistan's recent history primary and secondary education have undergone frequent changes. Following a reform in 1975 the primary and secondary education system was transformed from a 6+3+3 system into an 8+4 system, consisting of 8 years of primary education and 4 years of secondary education. The 6+3+3 system was re-introduced only in 1990.

Owing to the country's unstable situation, Afghanistan was governed by various parties, particularly in the early nineties. In the period 1996-2001 education was made available to boys only. The curriculum largely consisted of religious subjects. Only in 2001 was priority again given to education. Afghanistan currently features a 6+3+3 system.

Primary education

Primary education lasts 6 years, from classes 1 through 6 and is intended for pupils aged 6 to 12. In the first 3 years of primary education the curriculum comprises subjects such as art, theology, Dari or Pashtu (depending on the region), mathematics, calligraphy and physics. Other subjects, such as sciences, geography and history, are added to the curriculum at a later stage. The curriculum is consistent across the country; however, the teachers may adapt it to the local context of the province or region. Community-based education is provided in the less safe regions, such as the southern provinces. Education of this type is often provided in mosques by an imam and the emphasis lies primarily on religious subjects.

Pupils complete their primary education with an examination which grants them admission to lower secondary education (*Maktabeh Motevasteh*).

Secondary education

Lower secondary education (also referred to as the first cycle) has a duration of 3 years, from classes 7 to 9 for pupils aged 12-14. The curriculum for lower secondary education comprises subjects such as mathematics, sciences, biology, physics, chemistry and foreign languages (English, German, French and Russian). Lower secondary education is provided in preparation for higher secondary education (*Doreyeh Aali*). Lower secondary education also provides admission to technical and secondary vocational education.

Pupils complete their lower secondary education with an examination that grants admission to higher secondary education. Pupils pursuing senior secondary education can choose theoretical subjects in preparation for university education.

Higher secondary education consists of 3 years of senior secondary education, from classes 10 to 12 for pupils aged 14-17. In senior secondary education, pupils can choose theoretical subjects, such as history, mathematics or Islamic studies, or vocationally oriented subjects, such as agriculture, education, art and culture and economics. Both variants conclude with a national examination, on successful completion of which pupils are awarded a *12 Grade Graduation Certificate*, formerly *Baccalaureate Certificate*.

In terms of level, the *12 Grade Graduation Certificate* is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

Vocational secondary education

After successfully completing lower secondary education pupils can gain admission to technical and secondary vocational education. Students can choose a shortened technical programme with a nominal duration of 3 years or a longer programme with a nominal duration of 5 years. The 5-year technical programme is also regarded as class 14. Upon completion of class 14, pupils are awarded the *Vocational Education Certificate*.

In terms of level, *the Vocational Education Certificate* is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 2, 3 or 4, depending on the duration of the programme and specialisation.

■ Admission to higher education

In order to gain admission to higher education, students are required to sit a national examination after having obtained the *12 Grade Graduation Certificate*. If they pass the examination, students can gain admission to a specialisation within a degree programme, depending on their grades and own interests. The entrance examination is organised once each year. If students fail the examination, they are required to sit the examination a year later. The entrance examination is not an admission requirement for the private universities.

■ Higher education

In Afghanistan higher education is provided by public and private higher education institutions. Afghanistan currently has 19 public and more than 75 private higher education institutions. The latter were only recently established. As a result of the tremendous growth seen in private higher education institutions, the MoHE is currently pursuing a policy halting the establishment of private universities.

The foremost and oldest universities, Kabul University, Kabul Medical University and Polytechnic, are all situated in the capital Kabul.

The higher education curriculum is drawn up by the MoHE. The universities, both public and private, have some autonomy in contributing to the curriculum.

■ University and higher professional education

Universities generally only offer bachelor's and master's degree programmes. Afghanistan has scarcely been able to develop master's programmes due to the various wars. Under the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, Afghanistan had planned to establish a range of master's degree programmes within a few years. Master's degree programmes are currently offered in teaching and engineering. In the past year several private universities also launched master's degree programmes. These were primarily established in collaboration with international universities from various countries, such as Sweden, Germany, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Bachelor

A general introduction to the programme is given in the first year. In the following years, the courses are tailored to a specific field. Only a few programmes, depending on the specialisation, incorporate work placements. In the majority of programmes, writing a thesis does not form a component of the curriculum.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree, students may transfer to the master's degree programme or enter the labour market. There is no standard designation for bachelor's diplomas. Depending on the era and regime, the term used on the document is Diploma or Certificate. In recent years the designation used is *Bachelor of Arts/Science*.

The bachelor's degree programmes usually have a nominal duration of 4 years, or 8 semesters.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor of Arts/Science* is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of university education (WO), depending on the specialisation.

With a nominal duration of 5 years or more the *Bachelor of Engineering* and the *Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine* are among the programmes that form an exception to the above.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor of Engineering/Veterinary Medicine* is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree.

The degree programme in medicine currently has a nominal duration of 7 years, including one preparatory year and a 1-year work placement at the end of the study programme. Students obtaining good *konkur* results do not need to pursue the preparatory year. This means that the duration of the programme will be shorter for some students. Upon completion of the programme, students are awarded the degree of Medical Doctor (MD).

Master

At present a limited number of master's programmes are offered in Afghanistan. Master's programmes have a nominal duration of 2 years and are mainly offered at private higher education institutions. The study programmes commenced as recently as 2013.

In terms of level, the *Master's degree* is comparable to a 1-year WO master's degree.

PhD

Afghanistan does not offer any PhD programmes. However, plans are currently being developed to create PhD programmes within a few years.

■ Assessment systems

In the Afghan education system one grading scale is used for both secondary and higher education. Grades range from 0 to 100. A grade below 40 for a specific subject is deemed unsatisfactory.

Secondary and higher education

In numbers	Letter grade	Description	Definition
100-86	A	<i>Alaa</i>	Excellent
85-79	B	<i>Aali</i>	Very good
78-70	C	<i>Khoob</i>	Good
65-40	D	-	Satisfactory
< 40	Fail	-	Unsatisfactory

Some private higher education institutions use the ECTS system. However, it is not yet recognised as the official grading system by the MoHE.

■ Qualification frameworks

In 2008 the government of Afghanistan initiated the Committee on Education and Skills Policy (CESP) to lead the development of the Afghan National Qualifications Authority (ANQA) and the Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework (ANQF). The provisional ANQF is now in the last stage of approval. The qualification framework will consist of 8 levels.

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The MoE and MoHE share responsibility for the entire education system, with the MoE assigned responsibility for all the education following primary education, including religious education (*Madrasah*) and technical and secondary vocational education up to class 14.

The Academic Affairs Commission of the MoHE is responsible for higher education and drafts legislation and sets out rules for assuring the quality of both public and private universities. Due to the wars accreditation is still in the process of being developed. The MoHE recently initiated internal evaluations of the public universities. At present the MoHE has insufficient capacity available to monitor and assure the quality of the private universities. The Afghan government, however, has established clear criteria for the establishment of new private universities. The institution is required to provide a high-quality curriculum, a list of lecturers and an infrastructure. It is common knowledge that a number of private universities provide a higher standard of education than the public universities.

■ International treaties

Afghanistan has concluded various treaties with UNESCO in recent years. For instance, in 2013 the Ministry of Education signed a contract with UNESCO to improve primary and secondary education. The country has also concluded various treaties with multinational organisations, such as UNDP, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the European Commission to raise the standard of both secondary and higher education.

■ Composition of file

The *12 Grade Graduation Certificate*, which is issued after 12 years of education, must be submitted for secondary education. The diploma is always issued by the MoE in three languages - English, Dari and Pashtu. A list of marks for classes 10, 11 and 12 is issued together with the diploma. The list of marks on the backside of the

diploma is written entirely in English and does not contain a passport photograph or state the student's name. It only states the student's date and place of birth and the name of the school. In order to gain admission to higher education in Afghanistan students are first required to complete the *konkur* examination. However, as this examination is not an admission requirement for higher education in the Netherlands, students are therefore not required to submit the results of the *konkur* examination.

A diploma and a transcript must always be submitted for higher education. No temporary certificates are issued in Afghanistan. The diplomas, including Bachelor's diplomas, are issued by the MoHE. The university itself remains the awarding body.

Due to the prolonged war, Afghan refugees in particular may not be able to produce a complete file. Nuffic will consider these cases on an individual basis.

■ Overview of higher education institutions

- [Website](#) of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) with an [overview](#) of universities (in Dari).

■ Useful links

- Website of the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) in [English](#), [Dari](#) and [Pashtu](#).
- [Website](#) of the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE).