

The education system of

# Croatia

described and compared with  
the Dutch system

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

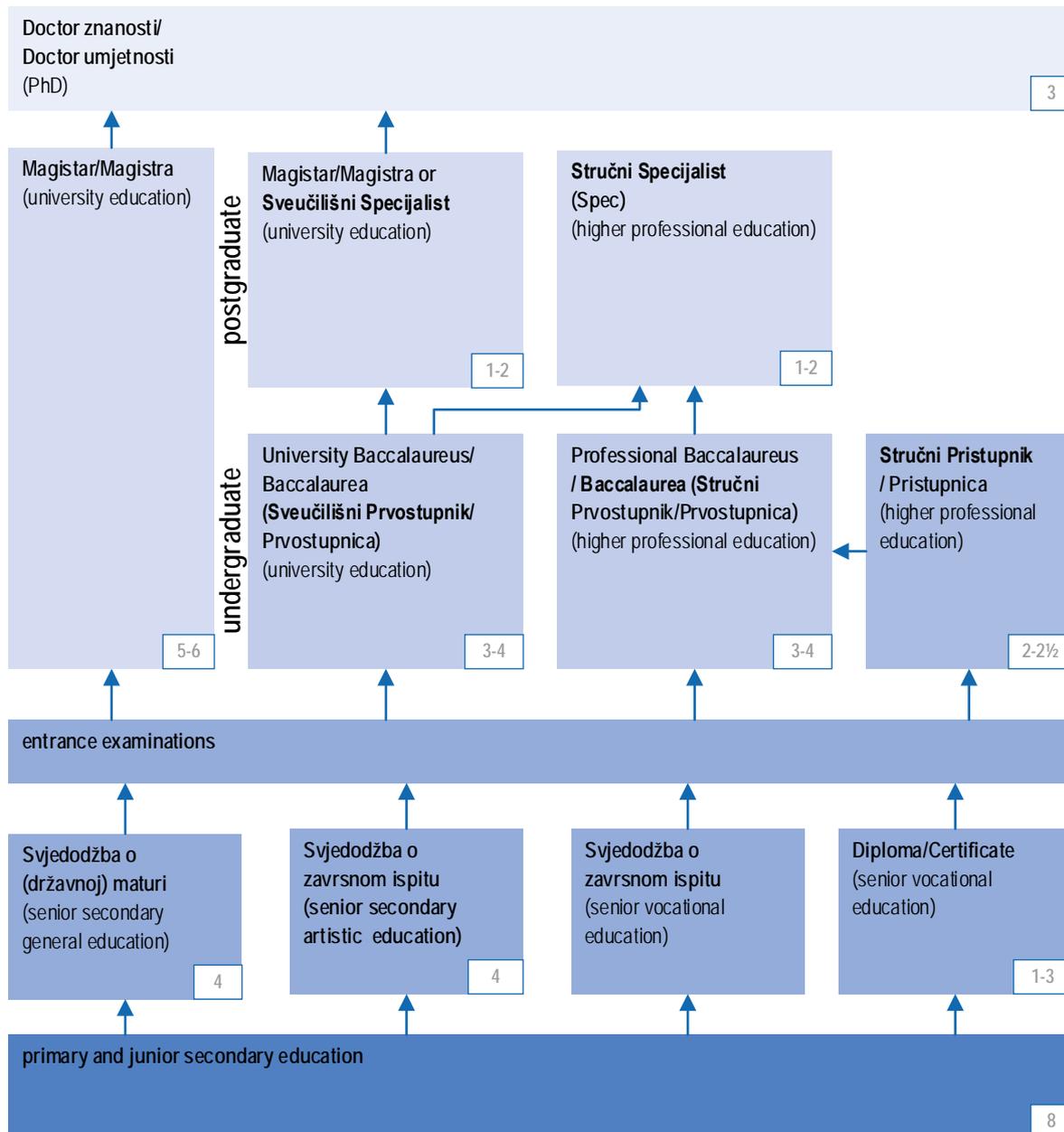
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## Education system Croatia



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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 NQF level		EQF level
<i>Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu</i> (secondary vocational education - 4 years)	HAVO diploma for the general education component	4	4
<i>Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi</i> (general education)	VWO diploma	4+	4
<i>Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu</i> (secondary arts education)	VWO diploma for the general education component	4+	4
<i>Stručni Pristupnik/Pristupnica</i> (professional short cycle degree)	2 years of HBO	5	5
Professional Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea ( <i>Stručni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica</i> )	HBO bachelor's degree	6	6
University Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea ( <i>Sveučilišni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica</i> )	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
<i>Magistar/Magistra</i> (1-2 years)	HBO or WO master's degree	7	7
<i>Magistar/Magistra</i> (5-6 years)	HBO or WO master's degree	7	7
<i>Sveučilišni Specijalist</i>	HBO or WO master's degree	7	7
<i>Stručni Specijalist</i>	HBO master's degree	7	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Netherlands 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](#).

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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

**Croatia, officially known as the Republic of Croatia (*Republika Hrvatska*), is a parliamentary democracy situated in Southeast Europe. The country borders Hungary and Slovenia to the north, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to the east and Montenegro to the south.**

Croatia declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991. Prior to 1991, Croatia shared the same federal education system as the other five republics within the former Yugoslavia. The country's population, estimated at 4.5 million in 2010, is comprised primarily of Croats. The remainder of the population consists of various minorities, including Serbians, Bosniaks, Hungarians, Slovenes, Czechs, Roma and Italians. Croatia declared its intention to join the European Union in 2004. The membership treaty was signed on 22 February 2013 and Croatia is a full member since July 2013.

The *Ministerstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa* (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports) is responsible for designing education strategy and policy. It determines what is taught and is responsible for relevant financial policy.

Croatian higher education is governed primarily by the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education, which entered into force in 2003. The Act introduced a binary higher education system, with higher professional education programmes offered by polytechnics and schools for higher professional education, on the one hand, and academic programmes offered by universities, on the other. Most of Croatia's higher education institutions are public institutions.

The official language of Croatia is Croatian – a Slavic language with roots in the central dialect of *Štokavian*, which also forms the basis of Bosnian, Slovenian and Montenegrin. Croatian is written using the Latin alphabet. Italian is also spoken in some sections of Istria and the Dalmatian coast.

The language of education is Croatian. However, under the influence of the Bologna Process, the number of higher education programmes being offered in English is growing slowly but surely.

Compulsory education starts at the age of 6 and lasts 8 years in total. Pre-school education (for children aged 3 to 6) is not compulsory.

The academic year runs from October to September.

## ■ Primary and secondary education

Croatian primary education is compulsory and free of charge for all children aged 6-14 who are permanent residents of the Republic of Croatia, regardless of nationality. Primary education is provided by *osnovska škola*, and distinguishes

between three different types of education: compulsory primary education taught at regular primary schools and special institutions for students with developmental disabilities, art education at regular and specialised music and dance schools, and primary education for adults taught at regular schools and specialised institutions.

Secondary education commences after 8 years of primary and junior secondary education and includes the following types of education:

- general secondary education taught at *gymnazija*;
- art education taught at *umjelnicka skola* (art schools);
- secondary vocational education taught at vocational or trade schools.

### **General secondary education**

General education programmes have a duration of 4 years (age category: 14-18). The curriculum is usually comparable to university preparatory education in the Netherlands, and distinguishes between a number of subject clusters, with general education subjects, linguistic subjects, classic subjects, academic subjects, and mathematics and IT subjects.

Admission to higher education is based on the completion of *gymnazijum* and results of the state examinations (*državna matura*). Introduced only recently, in 2009/2010, the *državne mature* are administered by the *Nacionalni centar za vansjko vrednovanje obrazovanja* (National Centre for External Evaluation of Education). Pupils complete exams in three requisite subjects: Croatian (levels A and B), mathematics (level A) and a foreign language (level A or B). Pupils who have completed secondary education in 2010 but have not taken the complete *Matura* meet the general admission requirements for higher education but must sit exams in mathematics to earn additional credits. A pass on the state exams results in the conferral of a *Svjedodžba o državnoj maturi* diploma, which provides access to higher education. The diploma certificate lists the results for each subject together with an average final rating, ranging from satisfactory (*dovoljan*) to excellent (*odličan*).

Prior to the introduction of the state exams, access to higher education was granted on the basis of the certificate *Svjedodžba o maturi*.

In terms of level, the *Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi* obtained from a *gymnazijum* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

Whether or not a pupil is admitted to the study programme of his/her choice is determined by the results on the *Matura* and final grade for each year. Each institution has its own admission criteria, which may also vary from one specialisation to another.

### Art education

Secondary education geared towards the arts is taught at *umjetnicka škola* and also has a duration of 4 years. Graduates are awarded a *Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu* and can sit the admission exams for higher education.

In terms of level, the *Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu* is comparable to a VWO diploma with vocational subjects.

### Secondary vocational education

Secondary vocational education is taught at *Strukovna Škola* and comprises programmes that train pupils for careers in management, education, care, technology, economics, socio-legal professions, administration and the arts. Vocational training begins at the age of 14 and builds on junior secondary education. The nominal duration of these programmes is between 1 and 4 years. Programmes with a duration of 1 to 2 years provide a basic vocational qualification. Vocational training programmes lasting 3 years prepare pupils to work in trade or industry. Four-year programmes provide a qualification for mid-level positions in the technology, economics or clerical sector.

The 4-year vocational programmes include both theory and practice-oriented subjects, usually combined with an internship. Graduates of the 4-year programmes are awarded a *Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu* and a vocational qualification, which provides access to the higher education admission exams and to the labour market. Specifically, graduates are qualified to enter professions in the technology and economics sectors.

In terms of level, the *Svjedodžba o završnom ispitu* from a 4-year vocational programme is comparable to a HAVO diploma for its general education component.

## ■ Admission to higher education

Many university programmes are subject to a limited intake since the intake of students is restricted by a quota set yearly by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

As from the 2010/2011 academic year, procedures for admission to higher education institutions have been brought together under the umbrella of the Central Application Office of the Agency for Science and Higher Education. Secondary school grades and a pass on the new state-level *matura* determine

the ranking of applicants. Higher education institutions are free to determine how heavily to weigh the state exam results in their assessment.

The general admission requirements to which all types of schools within the higher education system (both academic and professional) are subject is the *Svjedodžba o državnoj maturi* and an admissions exam. Admission exams are the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves; however, those that offer study programmes in the technical sciences also offer outstanding applicants direct admission as a way to attract more students. An institution can use the results from its admission exams to compare applicants from different secondary schools.

Admission to basic academic programmes requires the completion of 4 years of secondary education, whilst admission to a professional bachelor's programme requires at least 3 years of secondary education.

Applicants who do not have a secondary school diploma are also entitled to access to bachelor's programmes, in which case the higher education institution is free to determine how to rate competences obtained elsewhere (prior learning).

## ■ Higher education

In Croatia, higher education is taught at universities (*sveučilište*), polytechnics (*veleučilište*), independent institutions for higher professional education and accredited private institutions for higher professional education (*visoka škola*).

A number of reforms in higher education have resulted in a greater distinction between academic and professionally-oriented programmes. The new Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education (2003, amended in 2004) established a binary system with specialised programmes taught at polytechnics and higher professional education institutions on the one hand, and academic programmes taught exclusively at universities on the other.

Both types of institutions are allowed to offer professionally-oriented higher education programmes and to confer first and second-cycle (bachelor's and master's) degrees, but only universities have the right to offer programmes in the third cycle (PhD).

The Act on Academic and Professional Titles and Academic Degrees, effected in 2007, introduced the three-cycle system of higher education, with bachelor's, master's and PhD programmes. Also introduced at this time was the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which has since been implemented at all types of higher education institutions.

## ■ University education

Under the new higher education act passed in 2010, the Croatian system has been reformed in line with the Bologna Process. Reforms have included the introduction of a structure for the award of bachelor's and master's degrees and the obligation to use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Study programmes are now offered at three levels in conformity with the three Bologna cycles.

### **Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij (undergraduate university studies)**

Programmes leading to the degree of University *Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea* (*Sveučilišni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica*) have a duration of 3 to 4 years. The degree provides access to advanced programmes at the university or professional education level as well as to the labour market. The admission requirement is a *Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi*.

In terms of level, the *University Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea (Sveučilišni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica)* degree is comparable to a WO or HBO bachelor's degree in a similar specialisation, depending on the content and type of study.

### **Diplomski sveučilišni studij (graduate university studies)**

*Magistar* (master's) programmes are the next step after completing a *baccalaureus* programme and are geared towards building in-depth knowledge through academic research. The nominal duration is usually 1 to 2 years. Integrated (unitary) programmes are also offered, where the degree of *Magistar* is awarded without the completion of a separate initial *Baccalaureus* programme. In that case, the minimum admission requirement is a *Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi* and the nominal duration of the programme is 5 to 6 years.

Students who complete a master's programme in a technical specialisation are awarded the academic degree of *magistar inženjer/ magistrica inženjerka (mag. ing)*. Students who obtain a master's degree in medicine are awarded the degree of *doktor medicine*.

In terms of level, the *Magistar/Magistra* (master's) degree is comparable to a WO or HBO master's degree in a similar specialisation, depending on the content and type of study.

*Postgradu Poslijediplomski sveučilišni studij* or postgraduate university studies generally lead to the title of university specialist - *Sveučilišni Specijalist*. This

category of programmes has a nominal duration of 1 to 2 years.

In terms of level, the *Sveučilišni Specijalist* is comparable to a HBO or WO master's degree in a similar specialisation in the Netherlands, depending on the content and type of study.

### PhD

It usually takes 3 years to pursue a doctorate. After defending his/her doctoral thesis, the candidate is awarded the degree of *doktor znanosti* (Doctor of Science) or *doktor umjetnosti* (Doctor of Arts). This degree is comparable to a doctorate degree in the Netherlands.

## ■ Higher professional education

In Croatia, higher education with a professional focus is taught at polytechnics (*veleučilište*) and higher professional education institutions (*visoka škola*). These institutions are dedicated exclusively to higher professional education programmes, which are offered at two levels:

- *Preddiplomski stručni studij* (undergraduate professional studies)
- *Diplomski stručni studij* (graduate professional studies)

*Preddiplomski stručni studij* (undergraduate professional studies):

### **Stručni Pristupnik/Pristupnica (professional short-cycle degree)**

Programmes leading to a professional short-cycle degree, or *Stručni Pristupnik/Pristupnica*, have a duration of 2 to 2½ years. The degree provides access to the labour market as well as to a *professional baccalaureus* programme. The admission requirement is a *Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi*.

In terms of level, the *Stručni Pristupnik/Pristupnica* degree is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO) or an Associate Degree in a similar specialisation.

### **Stručni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica (professional Baccalaureus/ Baccalaurea)**

Programmes leading to the degree of Professional *Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea* (*Stručni Prvostupnik/Prvostupnica*) have a duration of 3 to 4 years. This degree provides access to advanced programmes with a professional orientation and to the labour market. The admission requirement is a *Svjedodžba o (državnoj) maturi* or degree of *stručni pristupnik*.

In terms of level, the *Professional Baccalaureus/Stručni Prvostupnik* degree is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree in a similar specialisation.

Diplomski stručni studij (graduate professional studies):

### **Stručni Specijalist (Professional Specijalist)**

Programmes leading to the degree of Professional *Specijalist (Stručni Specijalist)* are open to students who have completed a professional *baccalaureus* programme. The nominal duration is usually 1 to 2 years.

In terms of level, the *Professional Specijalist/Stručni Specijalist* degree is comparable to an HBO master's degree in a similar specialisation.

## ■ Assessment systems

Croatia has a single assessment system for all institutions at the secondary and higher education levels.

Numerical grade	Description	Meaning
5	<i>Odličan</i>	Excellent
4	<i>Vrlo Dobar</i>	Very good
3	<i>Dobar</i>	Good
2	<i>Dovoljan</i>	Satisfactory
1	<i>Nedovoljan</i>	Unsatisfactory

All higher education institutions use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). An academic year is made up of 60 credits and each semester of 30 credits. More information on ECTS is available in the [ECTS User's Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

## ■ Bologna process

The bachelor's-master's degree structure has been implemented in nearly all study programmes in Croatia. The country has also adopted legislation for the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The majority of higher education institutions and programmes now apply the ECTS. The award of

ECTS credits is based on the number of contact hours or on a combination of these and the study load.

For more information about the implementation of the Bologna process in Croatia and the current situation, please see the [website](#) of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

## ■ Qualification Framework

Croatia has in principle adopted the system of the European Qualifications Framework. A detailed description of individual diplomas has not yet been realised.

## ■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is responsible for national quality assurance within Croatian higher education. Acting as an independent body, the Agency monitors the quality of programmes at both public and private higher education institutions. It submits its evaluations and recommendations for quality improvements to the National Council for Higher Education of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, which subsequently compiles a definitive report for the minister, with recommendations as regards awarding or withholding accreditation.

Applications for the accreditation of programmes must be submitted to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports by the higher education institution at which the programme is offered. The [website](#) of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports provides an overview of accredited programmes.

## ■ International treaties

Croatia signed the Lisbon Convention in 1997 and ratified it in 2002.

## ■ Diploma Supplement

The large majority of higher education programmes automatically issue graduates with a Diploma Supplement free of charge in the language of instruction and/or multiple languages. Croatia uses the European model of the Diploma Supplement.

## ■ Composition of file

A complete file for secondary education consists of a diploma and a grade list. The result of each examination subject is stated on the diploma certificate, together with an average final grade ranging from satisfactory to excellent. The

stamp of the school that issued the diploma is always provided at the bottom centre of the certificate.

A complete file for higher education consists of a diploma, transcript and diploma supplement.

## ■ List of higher education institutions

[Website](#) of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, with an overview of all higher education institutions (in Croatian).

## ■ Useful links

- [Website](#) of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, which is the body responsible for quality assurance in higher education and also serves as the Croatian ENIC/NARIC (*Nacionalni ENIC/NARIC ured*).
- [Website](#) of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.
- [Website](#) of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, with an overview of accredited higher education programmes.
- [Website](#) 'Studying in Croatia' with information (in English) about the Croatian higher education system.