

Education system

# Ghana

described and compared with  
the Dutch system

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

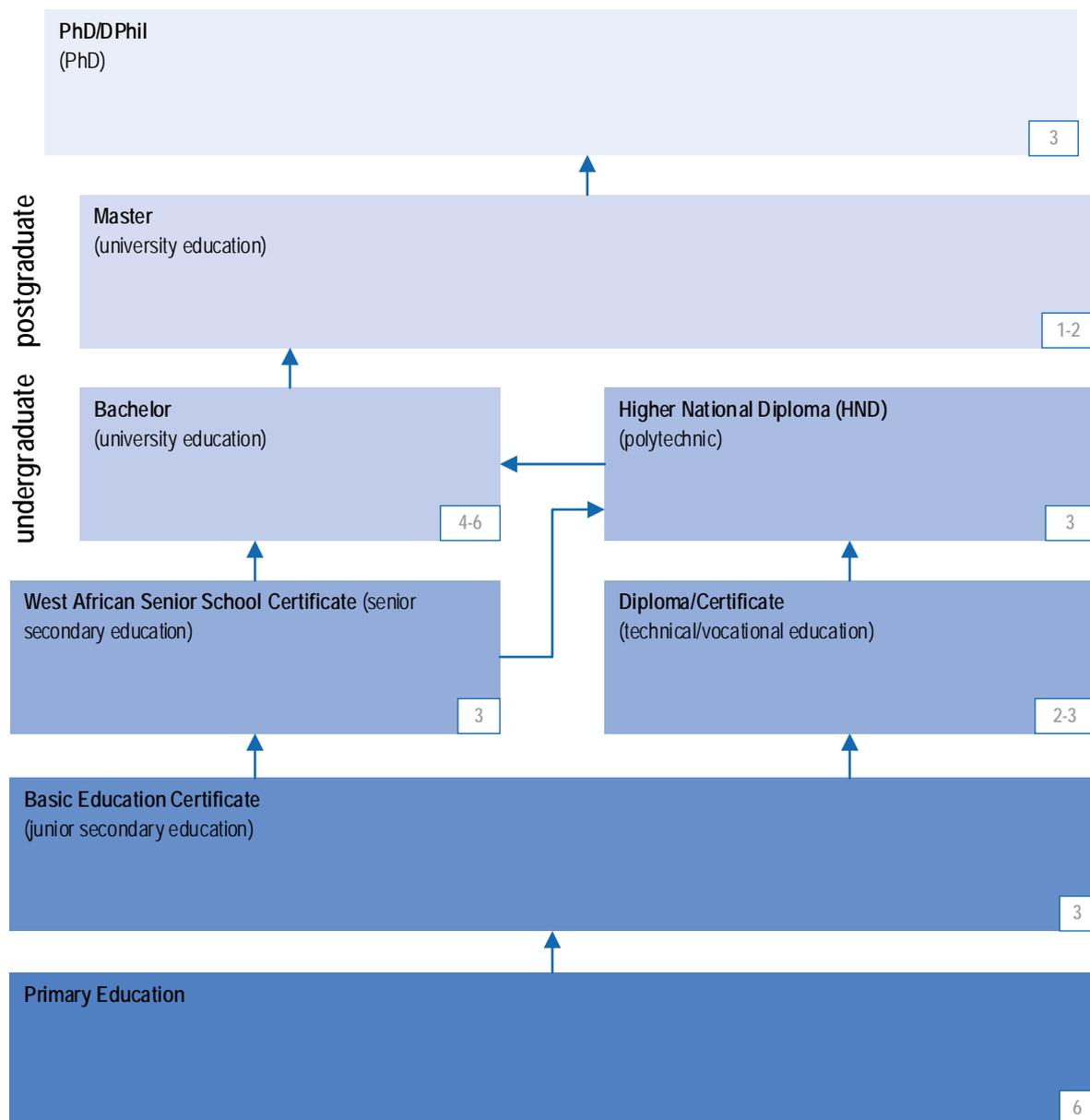
### Disclaimer

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.



With the exception of images and illustrations, the content of this publication is subject to the Creative Commons Name NonCommercial 3.0 Unported licence. Visit [www.nuffic.nl/en/home/copyright](http://www.nuffic.nl/en/home/copyright) for more information on the reuse of this publication.

## Education system Ghana



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 NLQF level	EQF level
Senior Secondary School Certificate (at least 6 subjects with a score of A to C)	HAVO diploma 4	4
West African Senior School Certificate (at least 6 subjects with a score of A1 to C6)	HAVO diploma 4	4
Higher National Diploma (HND)	2 years of HBO 5	5
Bachelor's degree (4 years)	HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO 6	6
Bachelor's degree (6 years)	4 years of WO 6	6
Master's degree (1 year)	HBO master's degree or WO bachelor's degree 7/6	7/6
Master's degree (2 years)	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 Republic of Ghana is located on the west coast of Africa, surrounded by the countries Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Togo, on the Gulf of Guinea. Accra has been Ghana's capital city since 1877. The country obtained independence from the United Kingdom on 6 March 1957.**

Ghana currently has a population of over 24,300,000, around half of whom live in urban areas. Ghana's official language is English. In addition to this language there are also many indigenous languages, of which the Akan languages Fante, Akuapim Twi and Asante Twi are the most common.

Ghana is a democratic republic. John Atta Mills has been both head of state and president of Ghana since 2009. The president and vice president are elected for a 4-year term. The country is split into ten administrative regions: Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, Volta, Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Greater Accra, Upper West and Upper East. These regions are in turn divided into 138 districts.

Political responsibility for education lies with the Ghanaian Ministry of Education. This ministry is in charge of a number of agencies, including the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana Library Board, the Bureau of Ghana Languages, the Ghana Book Development Council, the National Commission for UNESCO, the National Service Secretariat and the National Council for Tertiary Education and National Accreditation Board – both responsible for higher education. The Ghana Education Service is responsible for implementing policy in respect of primary and secondary (general and vocational) education, as formulated by the Ministry of Education. The Ghana Education Service also includes the Curriculum Research and Development Division, a body that is responsible for developing, implementing and assessing the national curriculum with respect to pre-university education.

The Ministry of Education is represented by ten regional offices and 138 district offices. These offices are responsible for local implementation of the national educational policy. They also govern schools and are in charge of supervision, budgeting and compiling data and analyses for each district. The West African Examinations Council, Ghana National Office is charged with holding national examinations in primary and secondary education. Technical and secondary vocational education is coordinated by the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The most important legislation, policy documents and reports in the field of education in Ghana are:

- Education Act, 1961
- Dzobo Report, 1973

- New Structure and Content of Education, 1974
- Education Commission Report on Basic and Secondary Education, 1987/88
- Education Reform Programme, 1987/88
- University Relationalization Committee Report, 1988
- Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Programme, 1996 (originating from the Constitution of 1992)
- Ghana Education Trust Fund – GET Fund Act 2000

Ghana's education system is characterized in principle by a binary structure, with universities on the one hand and polytechnics on the other hand. Since the reforms introduced in 1987, the education system has had a 6+3+3+4 structure. This means 6 years of primary education, followed by two 3-year stages of secondary education (junior secondary and senior secondary) and 4 years of higher education (bachelor's degree programmes). Master's degree programmes have a nominal duration of 1 or 2 years.

With more than 12,000 primary schools, 5,500 junior secondary schools, 700 senior secondary schools, 18 technical institutions, 21 nurse training colleges, 3 theological colleges, 20 university colleges, 6 tutorial colleges, 10 polytechnics, 6 public universities and 3 chartered private universities, the majority of Ghanaians have relatively easy access to education.

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15. The official language of instruction in Ghanaian education is English, except for in the first years of primary education when the most common indigenous language in each region is used as the language of instruction.

The academic year runs from August to May inclusive.

## ■ Primary and secondary education

Primary education and junior secondary education are freely accessible in Ghana. The basis for this is the 1996 Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Programme. The key aim of this policy plan was to ensure that every child of school age had access to high quality basic education by 2005.

Pre-school education, consisting of crèches (between the ages of 3 and 4) and nursery schools (between the ages of 4 and 6), has now been made compulsory in Ghana. According to the Ghana Education Service, there were over 15,000 nursery schools in Ghana in 2008, at which a total of more than 1,200,000 children were enrolled.

The main aim of pre-school education is to promote mental and physical health. Among other things, the curriculum focuses on language development, numbers, writing, drawing, music and dance.

### Primary education

In Ghana, children are obliged to attend school from the age of 6. This is also the age at which they start primary education. Primary education lasts for 6 years and consists of a 3-year lower primary phase and a 3-year upper primary phase. During primary education the curriculum places an emphasis on reading and writing, arithmetic and the development of problem-solving abilities. Pupils are taught subjects such as English and the regional indigenous language, arithmetic, biology, music, dance, handicrafts and citizenship education. No certificate is awarded upon completion. Pupils are usually 12 years old on completing primary education. The school year in primary education lasts 40 weeks.

### Secondary education

Secondary education in Ghana consists of a junior phase and a senior phase, each lasting 3 years. The junior secondary phase concludes the compulsory school-age years. Children are then usually 15 years old. During the junior secondary phase pupils are taught subjects such as English, mathematics, social studies and integrated science in addition to basic design and technology, religious and moral education, French and ICT. At the end of the junior phase pupils sit examinations to obtain the Basic Education Certificate. A school year in the junior secondary phase lasts 45 weeks.

During senior secondary education, pupils are taught English, mathematics, social studies and integrated science. In addition to these subjects they can choose from a number of electives. These electives are followed in the specializations of agriculture, business, technology and trade, as well as general education (arts or sciences). Senior secondary education is concluded with examinations for the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE), which has since 2007 replaced the Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSSCE). These examinations are held by the West African Examinations Council, Ghana National Office. To obtain the West African Senior School Certificate pupils take exams in four compulsory subjects, namely English, mathematics, social studies and integrated science. In addition, they must sit examinations in three or four electives (in the specializations listed above). Pupils are usually 18 years old on completing senior secondary education. A school year in this phase lasts 40 weeks.

In terms of level, the *Senior Secondary School Certificate* for which the candidate achieved a satisfactory result (at least six subjects with a score of A to C) is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

In terms of level, the *West African Senior School Certificate* for which the candidate achieved a satisfactory result (at least six subjects with a score of A1 to C6) is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

An educational reform in 2007 extended the nominal duration of senior secondary education by 1 year, creating a 4-year senior phase. This reform was reversed by the new government in 2009, however, and the nominal duration has now returned to 3 years. The short-lived reform has not affected the evaluation of the Senior Secondary School Certificate.

As well as the transition to senior secondary education, junior secondary pupils also have the option to continue studying within secondary vocational education. In Ghana, secondary vocational education is offered at technical and vocational training institutes. These institutes offer study programmes in various technical and vocational fields, for instance programmes for pupils who want to become carpenters, electricians or tailors. These programmes usually conclude after 2 or 3 years with traditional examinations that lead to various diplomas or certificates.

## ■ Admission to higher education

At the end of their secondary education, pupils sit examinations for the West African Senior School Certificate. In order to be admitted to undergraduate programmes at Ghanaian universities, candidates must in principle have obtained a pass (grade A to E) – grade A to D for SSSCE – in at least six subjects (three compulsory subjects and three electives) for the West African Senior School Certificate with a maximum aggregate score of 24, or grade A1 to C6 in at least three core and three elective subjects with an aggregate not exceeding 36. Depending on the chosen field of study, additional requirements may be imposed with regard to the electives for which the candidate must have passed the examinations. In order to be admitted to programmes at polytechnics, candidates must formally meet the same requirements.

However, practice has shown that pupils obtaining a lower score in the West African Senior School Certificate are admitted to polytechnics and the better performing pupils are admitted to programmes at universities.

## ■ Higher education

In principle, Ghana's education system is characterized by a clear binary structure, with universities on the one hand and professionally-oriented

polytechnics on the other hand. Higher education is provided in Ghana by polytechnics and universities, university colleges, theological colleges and tutorial colleges. The country currently has three recognized theological colleges, twenty university colleges, six tutorial colleges, ten polytechnics and nine universities, the majority of which are public institutions.

Universities are entitled to confer their own degrees. University colleges are private institutions, affiliated to recognized degree-awarding universities which confer their degrees upon graduates of the university colleges. Polytechnics primarily provide higher professional education programmes and tutorial colleges prepare students for the examinations held by recognized professional organizations. All higher education institutions and their programmes are accredited by the National Accreditation Board. See under [Quality assurance and accreditation](#).

## ■ University education

University education in Ghana consists of three cycles, namely bachelor's degree programmes, master's degree programmes and PhD programmes.

### **Bachelor's degree programmes**

In order to be admitted to bachelor's degree programmes, candidates must in principle hold a West African Senior School Certificate with six passes and a maximum aggregate score of 24. Depending on the chosen specialization, bachelor's programmes have a nominal duration of 2 to 4 years (depending on whether it is a top-up or direct entry degree). Most bachelor's programmes last 4 years, however programmes in the specializations medicine and surgery or dental surgery have a nominal duration of 6 years.

Each year of a bachelor's programme is assigned a level: the first year is level 100, the second year level 200, the third year level 300 and the fourth year level 400. Bachelor's degree programmes in Ghana generally involve a very large degree of specialization. Programmes usually focus on one major subject, although it is possible to choose a second (related) specialization. Not all bachelor's degree programmes conclude with a final paper. In principle, a bachelor's degree grants Ghanaian students access to master's degree programmes. In practice, however, students must hold a bachelor's degree with at least second class honours in order to be admitted to master's degree programmes.

In terms of level, a *bachelor's degree* following a nominal 4-year programme is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of university education (WO), depending on the specialization.

In terms of level, a *bachelor's degree* following a nominal 6-year programme is comparable to 4 years of university education (WO).

### **Master's degree programmes**

The nominal duration of master's degree programmes is 1 or 2 years. To gain entry to a master's degree programme, students must hold a bachelor's degree. In most cases, these study programmes continue the specialization of the bachelor's degree obtained previously. Broadly speaking, two types of master's degree programmes are the most common. During the nominal 1-year master's degree programmes, students follow theoretical subjects. The programme then concludes with a final paper, usually based on a literature study. The other main type of master's programme in Ghana is the nominal 2-year research master's degree: the Master of Philosophy programmes. During these programmes students spend 1 year studying theoretical subjects. They then carry out independent research and conclude the programme with a final paper. In principle, both types of master's degrees enable students to pursue a doctorate.

In terms of level, a *master's degree* following a nominal 1-year programme is comparable to an HBO master's degree or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the specialization.

In terms of level, a *master's degree* following a nominal 2-year programme is comparable to a WO master's degree.

### **PhD**

A doctorate is conferred after a period of at least 3 years of research in the context of the doctoral programme. Students must hold a master's degree in order to pursue a doctorate. The titles that are awarded following successful completion of the doctoral programme are PhD and DPhil.

## **Higher professional education**

Higher education programmes with a professional focus are primarily provided in Ghana by polytechnics. Although formally the same requirements apply for admission to undergraduate programmes as for admission to universities, namely a West African Senior School Certificate with six passes and a maximum aggregate score of 24, practice has shown that pupils with lower results are still admitted to programmes at polytechnics.

Originally, polytechnics were not higher education institutions, but vocational training institutes. Following an educational reform in 1993 (the Polytechnic Law), polytechnics also started to provide higher education. In addition to higher education programmes with a professional focus, some polytechnics also still offer secondary vocational training programmes. There are now also polytechnics that offer bachelor's degree programmes in addition to programmes that lead to the Higher National Diploma. Until recently, this was still exclusive to universities.

### **Higher National Diploma (HND)**

The most common programmes offered at polytechnics lead to the Higher National Diploma (HND). Polytechnics offer nominal 3-year HND programmes in the specializations of applied sciences, technology and business administration. The programmes are highly vocational. The HND is a centrally certified qualification conferred by the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX).

NABPTEX is a legally appointed examining body that is also responsible for creating the HND curriculum. In principle, students who hold an HND can enrol in the third year of bachelor's degree programmes at universities, provided that the HND was obtained in a relevant specialization. When enrolling students on their bachelor's degree programmes, Ghanaian research universities take into account the lower initial level of HND study programmes. The lower initial level of HND programmes compared to that of HBO bachelor's degree programmes is also taken into account in the evaluation of the HND.

In terms of level, the *Higher National Diploma (HND)* is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO).

## ■ Assessment systems

Senior secondary education uses an assessment system consisting of the letters A to F and the numbers 1 to 6.

SSSC letter/grade interpretation		WASSCE letter/grade interpretation		Description	Meaning
A	1	A1	1	Excellent	Excellent
B	2	B2	2	Very good	Very good
C	3	B3	3	Good	Good
D	4	C4	4	Credit	Above average
		C5	5	Credit	Above average
		C6	6	Credit	Above average
E		D7		Pass	Satisfactory
		E8		Pass	Satisfactory
F		F9		Fail	Fail

Assessment systems can even differ between bachelor's and master's degree programmes. The University of Ghana uses for bachelor's degree programmes:

In numbers	Letter grade	In percentages	Description	Meaning
4	A	70 – 100	Excellent	Excellent
3.75	A-	65 – 69	Very Good	Very good
3.5	B+	60 – 64	Good	Good
3	B	55 – 59	Above average	Above average
2.5	B-	50 – 54	Pass	Satisfactory
2	C+	45 – 49	Pass	Satisfactory
1.5	C	40 – 44	Pass	Satisfactory
1	D	30 – 39	Fail	Unsatisfactory
0	F	0 – 29	Fail	Unsatisfactory
0	X	-	Fail	Unsatisfactory
-	Z	-	Disqualification	Disqualified
-	I	-	Incomplete	Incomplete
-	Y	-	Continuing	Continuing

## ■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) falls under the Ministry of Education and is responsible for accreditation and quality assurance in higher education in Ghana. The NAB was set up by the government in 1993 and since then, its responsibilities have included the accreditation of all public and private higher education institutions and their curricula. In addition, the NAB publishes an annual list of accredited institutions and advises the Minister of Education on the status of higher education institutions.

If you wish to check if a higher education institution is recognized, please visit the NAB [website](#).

## ■ Composition of file

The West Africa Senior School Certificate or Senior Secondary School Certificate is required for secondary education.

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

## ■ Overview of higher education institutions

[Overview](#) of accredited higher education institutions and their programmes

## ■ Useful links

- The Ghanaian government's official [website](#), which provides information about the Ministry of Education.
- [Website](#) of the National Accreditation Board (NAB) featuring a list of accredited higher education institutions and their programmes.
- [Website](#) of the West African Examinations Council, Ghana National Office (WAEC Ghana).