

Education system

Kazakhstan

described and compared with
the Dutch system

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

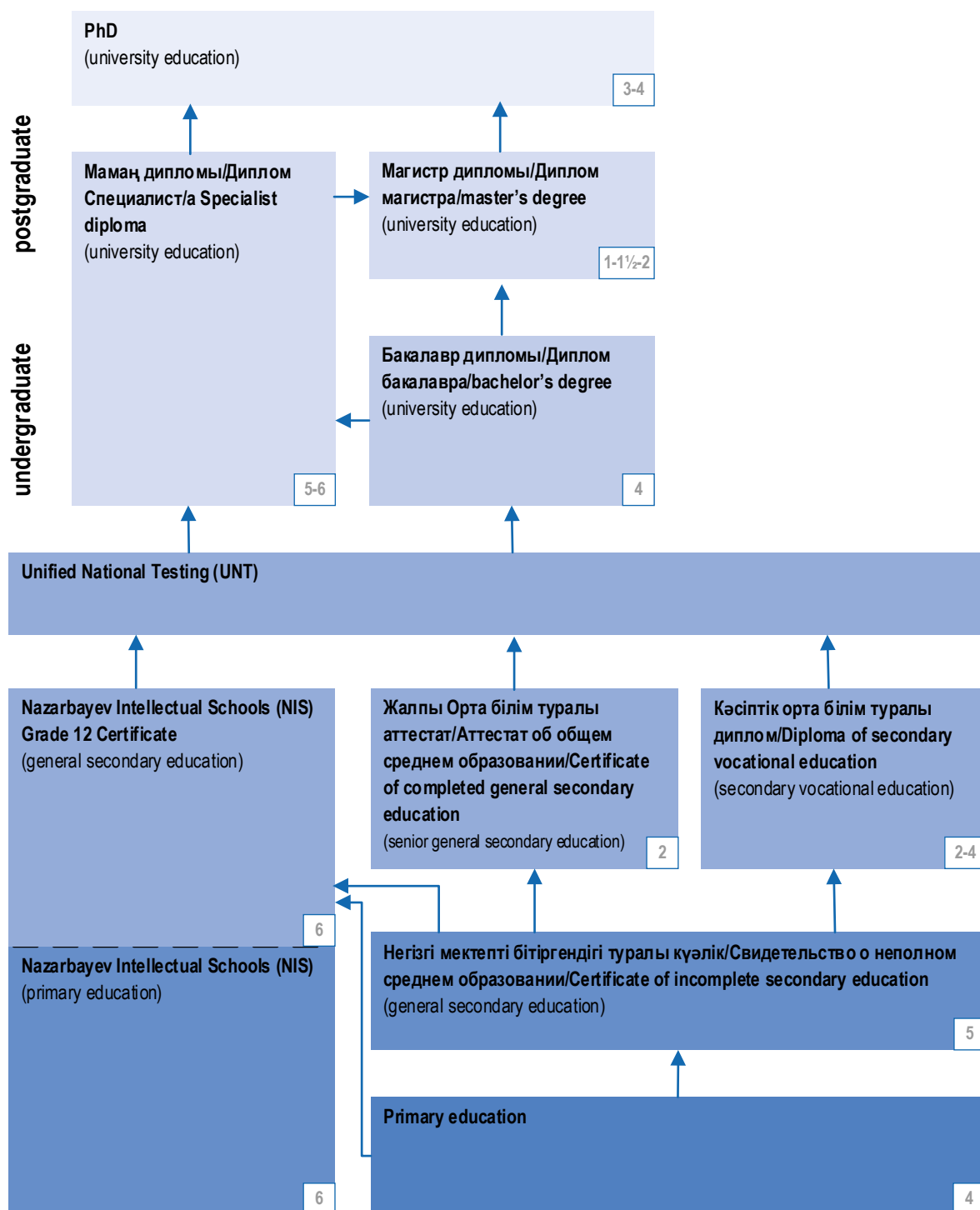
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Education system Kazakhstan



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 corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level	EQF level
Негізгі мектепті бітіргендігі туралы күәлік/Свидетельство о неполном среднем образовании/ Certificate of incomplete secondary education	3 years of general secondary education	4
Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/ Certificate of completed general secondary education	HAVO diploma	4
Кәсіптік орта білім туралы диплом/Диплом о профессиональном образовании Diploma of secondary vocational education	HAVO diploma for the general education part	4
Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Grade 12 certificate	VWO diploma	4+
Бакалавр дипломы/Диплом бакалавра/bachelor diploma	HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO	6
Мамаң дипломы/Диплом Специалист/Specialist diploma (5 years)	HBO master's degree or WO bachelor's degree	6
Мамаң дипломы//Диплом Специалист/Specialist diploma (6 years)	4 years of WO , HBO or WO master's degree	7
Магистр дипломы/Диплом магистра/master diploma	HBO or WO master's degree	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: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).
- [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 Kazakhstan is the largest country in central Asia. The country's Turkish name is *Kazakistan*, and in Kazakh it is called **Қазақстан/Qazaqstan.**

Form of government

Kazakhstan gained independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. While its president and his government party are very powerful, a constitutional amendment in force since 2009 states that the Parliament must always contain at least 3 parties.

Language

Kazakhstan has a large Russian minority equal to roughly 25% of the population. The official language is Kazakh, a Turkic language spoken by around 60% of inhabitants. However, the main language is Russian, which is spoken by over 80% of the population. Russian also remains an important language in education.

Education

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Қазақстан Республикасы Білім және ғылым министрлігінің) is responsible for education at national level. The ministry also monitors private and regional education institutions. Regional education authorities are monitored by the ministry.

There are 17 *oblasty* (provinces) in Kazakhstan, which are further divided into districts. Each *oblast* and district has its own local branch of the Ministry of Education. These departments function as a regional executive board: they are responsible for the content and funding of national education policy at regional level. Their duties include, among others, setting up, organising and managing education institutions.

Reforms

Since 2005, Kazakhstan has been implementing major reforms in all types of education, from pre-school, primary and secondary education to vocational and higher education. These reforms are scheduled for completion in 2020. More information is available on the [government's website](#) under 'Official documents' at [Strategies and programs](#) (scroll to 'The State program of education development in the Republic of Kazakhstan').

General features

- Compulsory education: age 7 to 18. Starting in 2020: 6 to 18.
- Language of instruction: Kazakh or Russian, depending on the region/school. Kazakh, Russian and sometimes English at [NIS](#) and international schools.
- Academic year: from September to July.

■ Primary and secondary education

Primary education

Children start school at the age of 6 or 7. Primary education lasts 4 years. The curriculum is broad, and in principle is determined by the state. Schools do have some freedom in what material they offer, however there are compulsory subjects such as mathematics, computer science, Russian and Kazakh.

Secondary education

General secondary education is divided into 2 stages:

- Stage 1 (lower secondary): 5 years.
- Stage 2 (upper secondary): 2 years.

Stage 2 is offered as:

- [senior general secondary education](#) (2 years); or
- [general and vocational secondary education](#) (2-4 years).

The government is currently working on extending general secondary education by 1 year, which would lengthen the combined primary and secondary school programme from 11 to 12 years. Although this extension should be in force from 2020 in Kazakhstan, by far the most schools still offer an 11-year curriculum. Currently only a small number of 'experimental' schools offer a 12-year curriculum. The 12th year will be added to the start of the programme (i.e. grade 0). After this additional year, students will complete the 11 'original' grades. Compulsory age of education will shift from 7 to 6.

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS)

The [Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools \(NIS\)](#) are a relatively new phenomenon. Kazakhstan currently has 20 of these schools: there is at least 1 per region, and 2 in Almaty, Astana and Shymkent. Admission is extremely competitive. These schools offer a 12-year curriculum to around 15,000 students, amounting to a national total of over 2 million.

NIS students receive a full scholarship from the government. Most NIS schools start from around grade 7, with the additional 12th year at the end. Most students are therefore usually aged 18 when they sit their final exams. More information is available on [the website of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools \(NIS\)](#).

Senior general secondary education

Stage 1 of secondary education starts after 4 years of primary education, and lasts 5 years.

- Duration: 5 years.
- Content: fixed curriculum and final exam.

- Diploma: Негізгі мектепті бітіргендігі туралы күәлік/Свидетельство о неполном среднем образовании/Certificate of incomplete secondary education.

In terms of level, the Негізгі мектепті бітіргендігі туралы күәлік/
Свидетельство о неполном среднем образовании/
Certificate of incomplete secondary education is comparable to
approximately 3 years of general secondary education.

Stage 2 of general secondary education:

- Duration: 2 years.
- Content: broad curriculum including at least 13 subjects; the final exam consists of 4-5 subjects, 2-3 of which are compulsory (mathematics and Russian/Kazakh) and 2-3 electives.
- Diploma: Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/Certificate of completed general secondary education.

In terms of level, the Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/Certificate of completed general secondary education is comparable to a [HAVO](#) diploma.

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS)

- Duration: 12 or 6 years, depending on when students start (grade 1 or 7).
- Content: trilingual education, with a focus on the sciences. Students in the final 2 grades (11 and 12) follow a system related to the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), including at least 3 subjects at Advanced level and 2-3 at Standard level. Students at NIS schools complete centralised exams.
- Diploma: Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Grade 12 certificate, in collaboration with CIE.

The certificate states the subject levels and marks. The results are not official CIE results and can therefore not be verified in the same database, since NIS wishes to remain independent. The examinations are CIE-certified, however, and these students are generally exempted from 1 year of higher education in Kazakhstan.

In terms of level, the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS)
Grade 12 certificate is comparable to a [VWO](#) diploma.

General and vocational secondary education

Students take general and vocational education at colleges, vocational lyceums, technical schools and vocational training schools.

- Duration: 2-4 years, depending on the student's prior education. For students with a Негізгі мектепті бітіргендігі туралы күәлік/Свидетельство о неполном среднем образовании/Certificate of incomplete secondary education, the duration is 4 years. For students with a Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/Certificate of completed secondary education, the programme takes 2 years.
- Content: fixed curriculum for both the general and vocational components.
- Diploma: Кәсіптік орта білім туралы диплом/Diploma of secondary vocational education.

In terms of level, a Кәсіптік орта білім туралы диплом/
Diploma of secondary vocational education is comparable to a
[HAVO](#) diploma for the general education part.

■ Higher education

Higher education is provided at research universities, universities of applied sciences, academies, conservatories and institutes. These institutions provide both professional and academic programmes.

A distinction is drawn between state-run and private institutions based on funding. Kazakhstan has around 130 higher education institutions, 70 of which are privately run.

The Ministry of Education organises and monitors the performance of public, state-run and private institutions. Private universities are considered to be on equal footing with public state-run and other universities.

■ Admission to higher education

Until 2004, students were admitted to higher education based on their Certificate of completed general secondary education (*Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании*) and entrance examinations were set and administered individually by institutions.

Since 2004, there has been compulsory Unified National Testing, or UNT. This national test serves as both:

- a final examination document;
- a higher education entrance examination.

Students sit the UNT for 5 subjects: Kazakh, Russian (depending on the language of instruction), mathematics, history of Kazakhstan, and an elective.

■ University and higher professional education

Kazakhstan does not have a binary system: there are no separate institutions for higher professional education as in the Netherlands. Kazakh universities offer both academic or research-oriented programmes and higher professional programmes.

It is also often unclear from the programme or diploma name whether the qualification is academic or professional in nature. Consult the programme's diploma supplement or transcript to ascertain the programme type.

Bachelor's, master's and PhD programmes were introduced in Kazakhstan in 1995. The *Specialist* programmes have continued to exist alongside these programmes.

There are therefore 4 programme types in Kazakhstan:

- [Bachelor's](#)
- [Specialist](#)
- [Master's](#)
- [PhD](#)

Bachelor: *Bakalavr* (Бакалавр)

- Duration: 4 years.
- Content: fixed curriculum of compulsory and some elective subjects; programmes do not always include a thesis.
- Admission requirement: а Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/Certificate of completed general secondary education, a Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Grade 12 Certificate, or a Кәсіптік орта білім туралы диплом/Diploma of Secondary Vocational Education plus the UNT.
- Diploma: *Бакалавр дипломы/Диплом бакалавра/bachelor's degree*. Along with the diploma, students are issued with a list of marks or diploma supplement that lists all subjects and examinations.

In terms of level, а *Бакалавр дипломы/Диплом бакалавра/bachelor's degree* is comparable to an [HBO](#) bachelor's degree or 2 years of [WO](#), depending on the programme.

***Specialist* (Специалист)**

- Duration: 5-6 years.
- Content: usually a set curriculum; may include a thesis.
- Admission requirement: а Жалпы Орта білім туралы аттестат/Аттестат об общем среднем образовании/Certificate of completed general secondary education, or a Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Grade 12 certificate, or a Кәсіптік орта білім туралы диплом/Diploma of secondary vocational education plus the UNT, or *Бакалавр дипломы/Диплом бакалавра/bachelor's degree*.
- Diploma: *Мамаң дипломы/Диплом Специалист/a Specialist diploma*.

The *Specialist* diploma confers a professional qualification. Students can obtain it in certain specialisations, such as medicine, engineering or military studies. The diploma will state the specialisation, and include a list of marks with the results achieved. Important note: although *Specialist* programmes generally take 1 year less to complete than a bachelor's or master's degree, the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education puts this qualification at EQF level 7, just like the *Magistr* diploma.

In terms of level, a 5-year Мамаң дипломы/Диплом Специалист/*Specialist diploma* is comparable to an [HBO](#) master's degree or a [WO](#) bachelor's degree, depending on the programme.

In terms of level, a 6-year Мамаң дипломы/Диплом Специалист/*Specialist diploma* is comparable to 4 years of academic education ([WO](#)) or an [HBO/WO](#) master's degree, depending on the type and content of the programme.

Master's: Magistr (Магистр)

- Duration: 1, 1½ or 2 years.
- Content: fixed curriculum of compulsory and some elective subjects; programmes always include a thesis (including a defence) and a national exam.
- Admission requirement: а Бакалавр дипломы/Диплом бакалавра/bachelor's degree or а Мамаң дипломы/Диплом Специалист/*Specialist diploma*.
- Diploma: Магистр дипломы/Диплом магистра/master's degree.

The *Magistr* programme builds on the level of a completed *Bakalavr* programme, but can also be taken after a *Specialist* degree. By and large, *Magistr* programmes are research-oriented and specialised.

In terms of level, а Магистр дипломы/Диплом магистра/master's degree is comparable to an [HBO](#) or [WO](#) master's degree, depending on the programme.

PhD

- Duration: 3-4 years.
- Content: theoretical coursework, teaching duties and writing and defending a dissertation.
- Admission requirement: *Magistr* degree.
- Diploma: PhD/Doctorate diploma.

■ Assessment systems

Primary and secondary education

Primary and secondary schools use a 5-1 assessment scale.

	Description	Meaning
5	Айыппұл/отлично	excellent
4	Жақсы/хорошо	good
3	Қанағаттанарлық/удовлетворительно	satisfactory
2	Қанағаттанарлықсыз/неудовлетворительно	unsatisfactory
1	Толық қанағаттанарлықсыз/совершенно неудовлетворительно	completely unsatisfactory

Higher education

Higher education institutions use a variety of assessment scales. In addition to the (Soviet) assessment scale of 5-1, in 2005 the accredited universities introduced a scale consisting of numbers and letters.

Letter	Meaning	Percentage	ECTS- assessment
A (A+)	Айыппұл/отлично / excellent	95-100	A
A-		90-94	
B+		85-89	
B	Жақсы/хорошо/good	80-84	B
B-		75-79	
C+		70-74	C
C		65-69	
C-	Қанағаттанарлық/удовлетворительно/ satisfactory	60-64	D
D+		55-59	
D		50-54	E
F	Қанағаттанарлықсыз/Неудовлетворительн/ unsatisfactory	0-49	FX, F

Most universities use the Kazakh credit-transfer system, which is interchangeable with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

1 Kazakh credit point is equivalent to a 45-hour study load, which includes the hours of private study that students are expected to complete. Based on these figures, ECTS credits are rounded to the nearest whole number following conversion by a factor of approximately 1.8. Kazakhstan is currently in the process of transferring fully to the ECTS.

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

■ Qualification frameworks

A national qualification system was implemented in 2012: the National Qualifications Framework, or NQF. The NQF covers all levels of education, which match those in the European Qualification Framework (EQF):

- Secondary education = EQF level 3.
- Upper-level technical and vocational education (TVET) = EQF level 4.
- Applied bachelor's programmes = EQF level 5.
- Academic bachelor's programmes = EQF level 6.
- Master's programmes = EQF level 7.
- PhD programmes = EQF level 8.

■ Accreditation and quality assurance

There are 2 umbrella organisations responsible for quality assurance and accreditation in Kazakhstan:

- the [Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating \(IAAR\)](#);
- the [Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education \(IQAA\)](#).

Both bodies are involved in:

- the implementation and organisation of technical procedures for the accreditation of both education institutions and their study programmes;
- developing accreditation criteria;
- university rankings according to the European Standards & Guidelines of the [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education \(ENQA\)](#).

■ Bologna process

Kazakhstan signed the Bologna declaration in 2010 and has been a full member ever since.

For more information see: [Bologna Process/European higher education area](#).

■ International treaties

Kazakhstan signed the Lisbon Convention in 1997 and ratified it in 1998. The country also has 148 international treaties with 47 countries and organisations in the field of educational cooperation.

■ Diploma supplement

Some universities issue a diploma supplement, however most issue their 'own' trilingual list of marks with information in Kazakh, Russian and English. These lists provide an overview of completed exams, marks and ECTS credits obtained.

More information about the Diploma Supplement (DS) is available on the [Europass website](#).

■ Composition of file

All secondary school files from Kazakhstan must include:

- a (certified) copy of the diploma or transcript;
- a certified translation of both documents (unless the institution has provided its own English translation).

Graduates of higher education programmes receive 2 documents:

- the diploma and degree conferred;
- a diploma supplement or transcript.

Names on diplomas

Diplomas generally state the student's first name, their father's name and the student's surname. The father's name will not be in the student's passport.

■ Overview of higher education institutions

- Overview of recognised Kazakh higher education institutions on the [website of the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education \(IQAA\)](#).
- Overview of accreditation for each degree programme of these higher education institutions on the [website of the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education \(IQAA\)](#).

■ Useful links

- [Ministry of Education and Science](#) (Republic of Kazakhstan).
- [ENIC-NARIC of Kazakhstan](#).
- [Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education \(IQAA\)](#), provides a lot of information about accreditation, Bologna process, relevant education legislation, etc.
- [Website of the President](#) (of the Republic of Kazakhstan), with information about the educational reforms.
- [Study Kazakhstan](#) offers information about studying in Kazakhstan.