

The education system of

# 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.

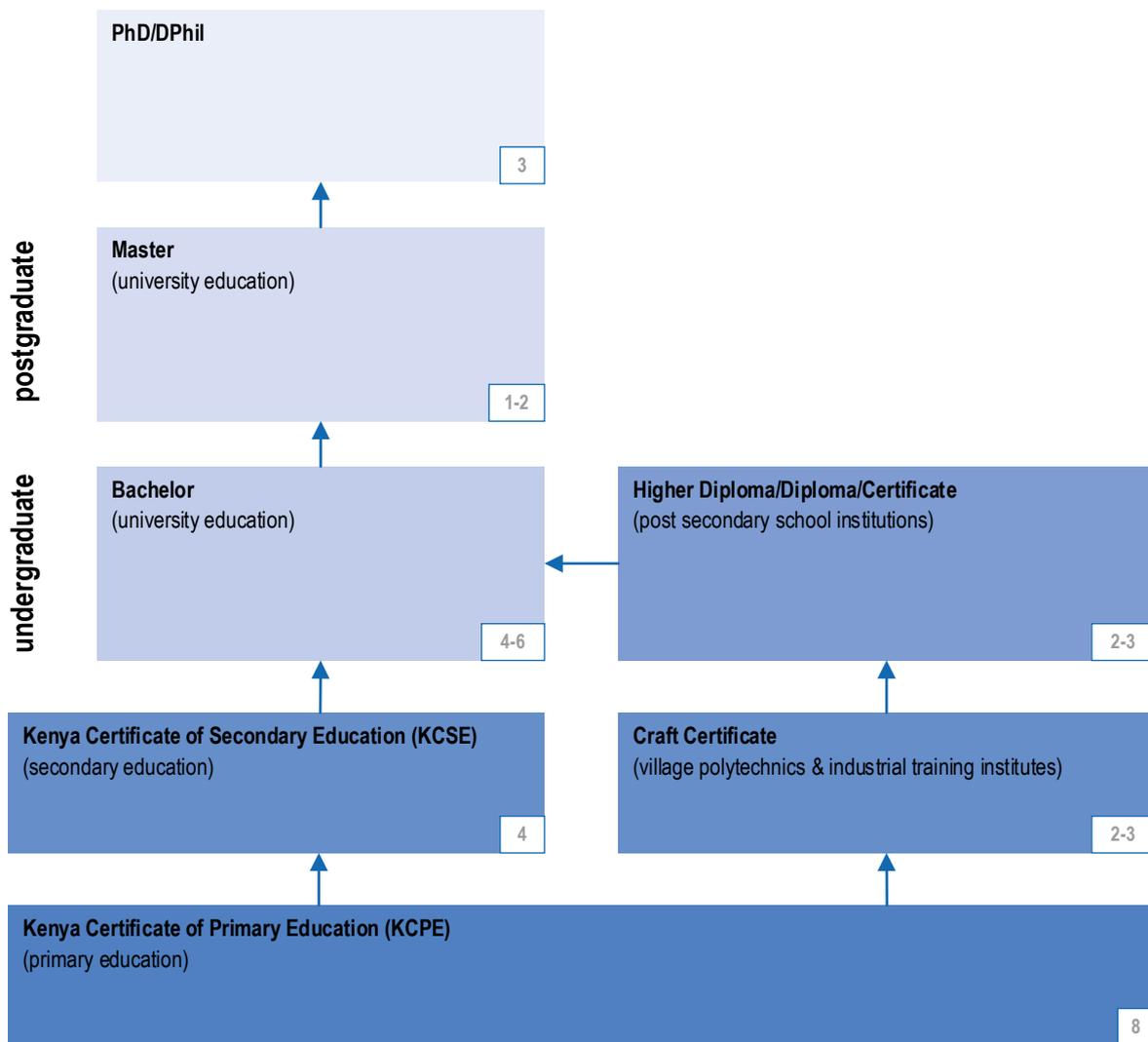
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Flow chart: education system Kenya



0 Duration of education

## Overview of diploma evaluations

To which Dutch diplomas can you compare Kenyan diplomas? We give an overview of diplomas that Dutch higher education institutions receive regularly when Kenyan students register for a degree programme.

Diplomas	Dutch equivalent and NLQF 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 at level 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

Please note:

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Dutch qualification framework. [EQF](#) = European qualification 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 Kenya lies on the east coast of Africa. Since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1963, Kenya has been a parliamentary democracy.**

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. 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.

### **Primary education**

The first phase of the 8-4-4 educational system is primary education. Primary education is free and compulsory in Kenya.

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**

Secondary education is also free, but not compulsory. Most pupils are 14 years old when they start secondary education. Secondary education ordinarily takes 4 years.

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.

The curriculum is made up of subjects divided into 5 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 6 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 6 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 the Dutch VMBO study programmes. The level of each diploma will need to be assessed individually and will depend on the duration and specialisation 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 at level 2, 3 or 4, depending on the duration and specialisation 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 specialisation.

## Admission to higher education

Admission to higher education at Kenya's public universities is managed by the [Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service \(KUCCPS\)](#).

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, similar to the Dutch system. Kenyan higher education consists of:

- [university education](#); and
- [higher professional education](#).

### Types of higher education institutions

In Kenya universities are 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 categorised 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>

In addition to the universities, 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 degree programmes;
- master's degree programmes; and
- doctoral degree programmes.

Universities also offer programmes leading to 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 4-year programme is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO, depending on the content and specialisation.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* following a 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 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 specialisation 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 framework

Kenya is in the process of establishing a National Qualification Framework (NQF). The discussions are held at both national and at the level of the East African Community.

## ■ Accreditation and quality assurance

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: [Approved Programmes Offered – Universities in Kenya \(December 2020\)](#).

## ■ Checking documents

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

All higher education diplomas obtained must be submitted together with transcripts and attached lists of marks.

## ■ List of higher education institutions

The Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) offers an [overview of recognised institutions](#).

## ■ Useful links

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

## ■ Glossary

- **Duration:** the official length of the full-time programme (not part-time) without study delay.
- **Lisbon Recognition Convention:** we evaluate qualifications according to the principles of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#). You can find a practical implementation of these standards in the European [EAR manual](#).
- **Postgraduate programme:** a programme after completion of a programme in the 1st cycle of higher education, such as a bachelor's degree programme.
- **Undergraduate programme:** a programme in the 1st cycle of higher education, such as a bachelor's degree programme.