

Education system

Malaysia

described and compared with
the Dutch system

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

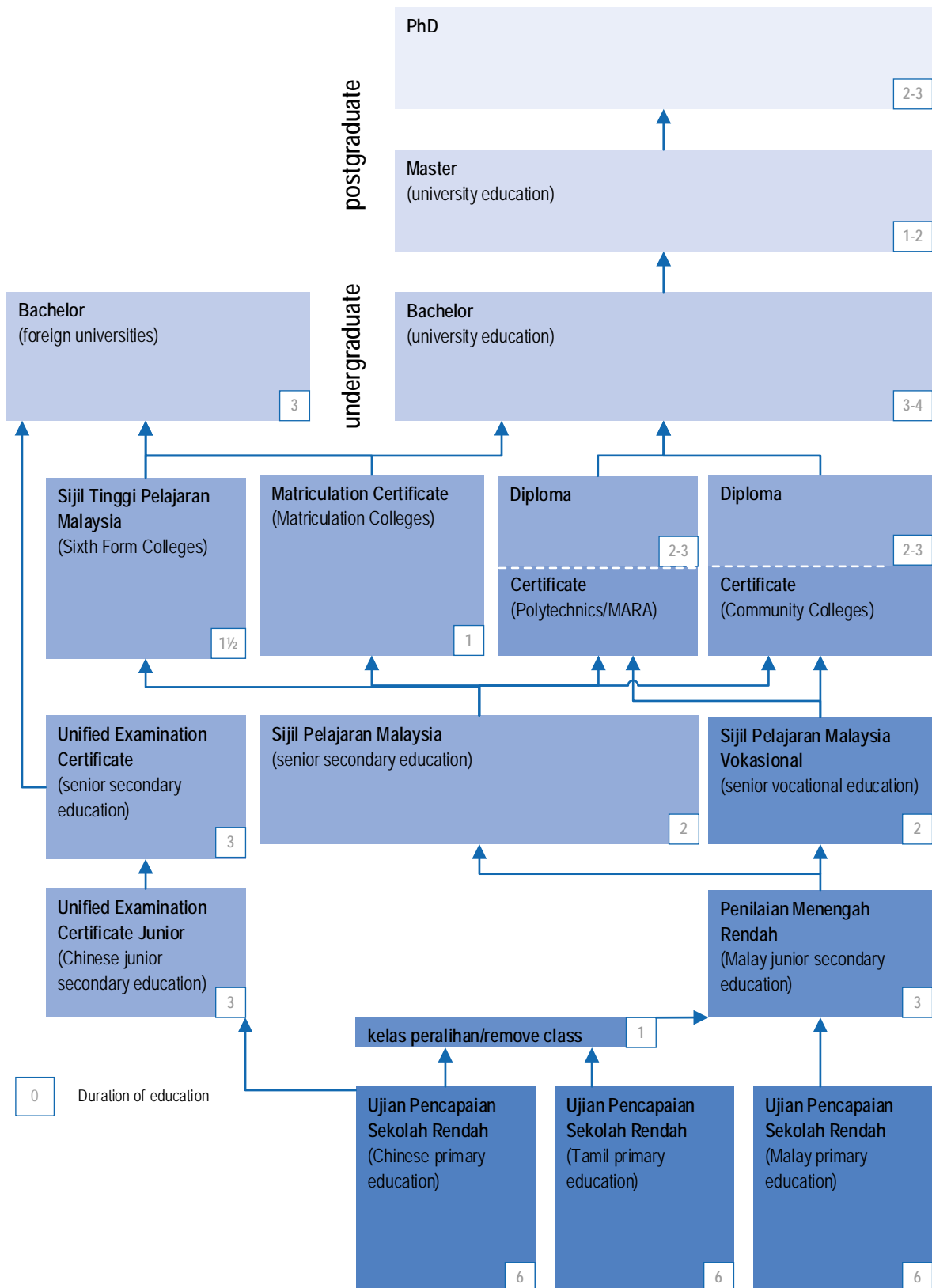
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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Education system Malaysia



Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national qualification framework. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification and MQF level		Dutch equivalent and NLQF level		EQF level
<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional</i>		MBO diploma (qualification level 1 or 2)	1/2	1/2
Diploma (community college)	4	MBO diploma (qualification level 3 or 4)	3/4	3/4
<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>		HAVO diploma*	4	4
<i>Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia/Matriculation Certificate</i>		VWO diploma	4+	4
Unified Examination Certificate with an average score of less than 75%		at least a HAVO diploma	4	4
Unified Examination Certificate with an average score of 75% or higher		VWO diploma	4+	4
Polytechnic/MARA Certificate	3	2 years of HBO*	5	5
Polytechnic/MARA Diploma	4	3 years of HBO*	5	5
Bachelor	6	HBO or WO bachelor's degree	6	6
Master	7	HBO or WO master's degree	7	7

* The evaluation of these qualifications is under revision.

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- MQF = Malaysian Qualifications Framework. 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.

Education system Malaysia

- 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

Malaysia is made up of 2 separate regions: the peninsula on the Asian continent, and Sabah and Sarawak, located on the island of Borneo. Malaysia has 13 states and 3 federal territories, the latter being the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya. The country has 3 major population groups, i.e. the Malaysians, the Chinese and the Indian. The national religion is Islam.

The mixed profile of the population is also reflected in the education system, evinced by both primary and secondary schools that provide instruction in Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Depending on the higher education institute, tertiary education is provided in English or Malay.

Malaysia aims to become a regional centre for education. This has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of public higher-education institutions through the establishment of new polytechnics, universities and university colleges. The private education sector has also seen an increase in the number of private universities and other institutions.

Primary and secondary education fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for higher education.

Since 2003, the 6 years of primary education have been compulsory in Malaysia.

The school year begins in January and ends in November. The academic year starts in September.

■ Primary and secondary education

Pre-school education is intended for children aged 4-6. Although it is not part of formal education, the government aims to have as many pupils as possible attend at least 1 year of pre-school education.

Primary education lasts 6 years, and is intended for pupils aged 7-12. Malaysia has 3 kinds of primary schools: National Schools, National Type Chinese Schools and National Type Tamil Schools. English is a compulsory subject. At the end of primary school, pupils take the Primary School Achievement Test/*Ujian Prestasi Sekolah Rendah* (PSAT/UPSR).

General secondary education lasts 7 years and is divided into 2 stages: junior + senior secondary and pre-university. Junior secondary education lasts 3 years, at the end of which pupils take the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (junior secondary

school test). National Type Chinese/Tamil School pupils attend an additional year at a 'remove class' before entering Malaysian medium junior secondary school.

In the 2 years of senior secondary education pupils choose one of 12 subject clusters, all of which include the core subjects Malay, English, mathematics, physics, history and geography. In addition to these, there are a number of electives. The minimum number of subjects that can be taken is 8. At the end of senior secondary school, pupils take the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) Open Certification Examination (Malaysian Certificate of Education).

In terms of level, the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

Following successful completion of the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*, pupils can take another 2 years of (pre-university) secondary education at a Sixth Form College (1.5 years) or a Matriculation College (1 year). After completion of these programmes, pupils are awarded the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* - STPM (Malaysian Higher School Certificate) or the Matriculation Certificate respectively. The STPM is issued in June.

In terms of level, the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM)/*Matriculation Certificate* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

After the SPM, some pupils continue to a private institution to follow a study programme with which they can obtain a foreign secondary school diploma. Examples include the Canadian Ontario Secondary School Diploma and the British General Certificate of Education. The level with which one obtains these non-Malaysian diplomas depends on the curriculum followed.

Chinese secondary education has a different system. After 6 years of education, pupils take an examination and obtain the Unified Examination Certificate. Although the curriculum complies with government regulations for secondary education, it is not regarded as part of the national education system. These pupils often continue their studies at a foreign university or at a private university in Malaysia.

In terms of level, the Unified Examination Certificate with an average score of less than 75% is comparable to at least a HAVO diploma.

In terms of level, the Unified Examination Certificate with an average score of 75% or higher is comparable to a VWO diploma.

Secondary technical and vocational education

After 3 years of general secondary education, pupils can also opt for the technical/vocational stream at secondary schools for vocational education (*Sekolah Menengah Vokasional*).

Pupils who have completed the 2-year programme can take an examination to obtain the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional – SPMV* (Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education).

In terms of level, the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional* (SPMV) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 1 or 2, depending on the specialisation.

■ Admission to higher education

The *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* and Matriculation Certificate grant access to bachelor's programmes at public higher education institutions. Prospective students are assigned places by the *Unit Pusat Universiti*, the Central University Unit. A quota system is in place which ensures that a significant percentage of students come from the Malaysian ethnic group (Bumiputra).

The Unified Examination Certificate generally grants access to private higher education institutions and foreign university programmes.

■ Higher education

Programmes at universities and university colleges lead to bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and PhDs.

Polytechnics and community colleges both offer technical and professional programmes leading to a Diploma or a Certificate.

■ University education

The entrance requirement for universities and university colleges is generally the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* or the Matriculation Certificate.

Bachelor's programmes have a nominal duration of 3 to 4 years. The nominal duration for programmes in medicine and dentistry is 5 years.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* (MQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study.

A master's degree is awarded after 1 or 2 years of study following the completion of a bachelor's programme. There are 3 pathways to a master's degree: by conducting research, by completing coursework, or a combination of these two.

In terms of level, the *master's degree* (MQF level 7) is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the type of study.

A PhD (MQF level 8) requires at least 2 or 3 additional years of study in general, but can require as many as 7 years for certain specialisations.

In addition to degree programmes, some universities also offer non-degree Diploma programmes. The entry requirement of these programmes is the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). The study duration of diploma programmes offered by public universities is typically 3 years.

■ Higher professional education

In Malaysia, all education after the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) falls under post-secondary education. One type of post-secondary education is the general programme leading to the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM), already mentioned. In a very different category are the post-secondary vocational programmes leading to a Diploma or Certificate.

The educational institutions listed here offer programmes leading to a non-degree Diploma or a Certificate. A Diploma programme takes at least 2 years and must include a minimum of 90 credits. A Diploma grants entry to further study leading to an Advanced Diploma or a Bachelor's degree.

In some cases, it may facilitate exemptions up to 30% or 1 year of a bachelor's programme. Certificate programmes typically have a study load of 60 credits or more.

Polytechnics

Since 2009 polytechnics are supervised by the Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE). Polytechnic programmes lead to a Certificate or a Diploma. An overview of polytechnics can be found on the [website](#) of the DPE.

MARA Advanced Skills Training Institutes

MARA is an acronym for *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (The Council of Trust for the Indigenous People). MARA institutes such as MARA Business Institute and MARA Infotech Academy offer programmes leading to the national Certificate and Diploma qualifications. These programmes take respectively 2 and 3 years to complete. The entrance requirement is the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional* (SPMV).

In terms of level, the *Polytechnic Certificate/MARA Certificate* (MQF level 3) is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO).

In terms of level, the *Polytechnic Diploma/MARA Diploma* (MQF level 4) is comparable to 3 years of higher professional education (HBO).

The University of Technology MARA comprises several campuses. Up to 1999 this institute was known as the MARA Institute of Technology. The main campus offers programmes of different levels including Ph.D. programmes. The other 12 campuses only offer bachelor's programmes and nondegree programmes.

An overview of MARA institutes is listed on the MARA [website](#).

Community Colleges

Since September 2009 community colleges are supervised by the Department of Community College Education (DCCE). Community colleges are a relatively new phenomenon with the first students receiving their Diploma in 2003. However, Diploma programmes are not offered by community colleges anymore. Certificate programmes are still offered by these institutes.

The *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional* and the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* give access to community colleges. Students are admitted with lower marks than those

required for entry into the polytechnics. Hence the level of education of a *Diploma* offered by a polytechnic will be higher than one offered by a community college even though this difference is not reflected in the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF).

In terms of level, the *Diploma* from a community college (MQF level 4) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 3 or 4, depending on the specialisation.

■ Assessment systems

Secondary Education: SPM/SPMW

Numerical grade	Letter grade	Description
1	A+	distinction (<i>cemerlang</i>)
2	A	
3	B+	credit (<i>kepujian</i>)
4	B	
5	C+	
6	C	
7	D	pass (<i>lulus</i>)
8	E	
9	G	fail (<i>gagal</i>)

Pre-university education (senior secondary education): STPM

The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) has been in use since 2004, and before that a letter system. A pass grade requires at least a C(2). D-C grades are 'principal passes', which indicates a lower level. F means 'fail'.

CGPA	Letter grade
4.00	A
3.67	A-
3.33	B+
3.00	B
2.67	B-
2.33	C+
2.00	C
1.67	C-
1.33	D+
1.00	D
0.00	F

Bachelor's degrees

There is some variation in assessment among the various disciplines. Most universities use a 4-point scale together with a CGPA; others use percentages. The list of marks generally provides an explanation of the system used.

■ Qualification frameworks

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency is responsible for the Malaysian Qualifications Framework. The MQF has 8 levels, which includes levels in higher education (academic, vocational and technical sectors) but not in pre-university education (STPM/Matriculation Certificate).

Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) 2nd Edition

MQF Level	Minimum Graduating Credit	Academic Sector	TVET Sector
8	No credit rating	PhD by Research	
	80	Doctoral Degree by Mixed Mode & Coursework	
7	No credit rating	Master's by Research	
	40	Master's by Mixed Mode & Coursework	
	30	Postgraduate Diploma	
	20	Postgraduate Certificate	
6	120	Bachelor's degree	
	66*	Graduate Diploma	
	36*	Graduate Certificate	
5	40	Advanced Diploma	5
4	90	Diploma	4
3	60	Certificate	3
2	30	Certificate	2
1	15	Certificate	1

* Inclusive of 6 credits from general studies subjects.

Bron: [Malaysian Qualifications Framework](#), 2nd edition (2017)

■ Quality assurance and accreditation

In the 1990's the responsibility of accreditation in public and private higher education sector was divided between the *Lembaga Akreditasi Nasional* (National Accreditation Board) and the Ministry of Education's Quality Assurance Division. These 2 accrediting organisations were merged to form the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in 2007. The MQA is responsible for accreditation of programme's at bachelor's level and lower (Diploma and Certificate level). Master's programmes offered by private higher education institutes also fall within the accreditation scope of MQA.

Accreditation by the MQA also applies to higher (professional) education offered by foreign educational institutes or by Malaysian educational institutes in cooperation with a foreign partner. Once accredited, these programmes are also listed in the Malaysian Qualifications Register.

An [overview](#) of accredited programmes can be found in the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR).

The MQR does not only list the accreditation status of programmes, but also the duration, MQF level, and the required amount of credits. The MQR also specifies the year of accreditation and, if applicable, the year it was revoked or expired. Programmes accredited under the *MQA Act 2007* do not have a limited accreditation duration; however, the accreditation can be revoked. The accreditation status of programmes accredited under the *Lembaga Akreditasi Negara Act 1996* is valid for 5 years.

■ International treaties

Malaysia has numerous international education agreements. These include many agreements with Australia, as well as with countries such as China, Japan and Indonesia. Within Europe Malaysia has agreements with the United Kingdom, France and Germany (among others).

■ Composition of file

Secondary school certificates generally consist of one page and are issued by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate. They consist of an overview of the subjects in which exams have been taken, and the results obtained. The result slip is generally issued first, to be followed by the certificate a few months later.

Upon completion of a programme at a higher education institution a certificate is awarded, indicating the degree awarded. Lists of marks from the semesters taken are also issued.

■ Overview of Higher Education Institutions

[Website](#) of the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) with an overview of recognised 'Public/Government institutions' and 'Private institutions'.

■ Useful websites

- [Website](#) of the Malaysian Ministry of Education.
- [Website](#) of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education.
- [Website](#) of the Malaysian Examination Council with information on the STPM examination (including syllabi) and the results of the examination obtained during the current year.
- [Website](#) of the *United Chinese Schools Committee's Association of Malaysia*.
- [Website](#) of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. A schematic representation of the Malaysian qualification levels can be found on this website.
- [Website](#) of the *Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA)* with an overview of MARA institutes (excluding higher education).
- [Website](#) of the Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE) with an overview of polytechnics (see '*Polyteknik Malaysia*').