The education system of the Philippines described and compared with the Dutch system
This document contains information on the education system of the Philippines. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from the Philippines 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.

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Background

- **Country**: The Philippines; the official name of this archipelago is the Republic of the Philippines, or Republika ng Pilipinas in Filipino.
- **History**: The archipelago was a Spanish colony for over 300 years, after which it was a colony of the USA for nearly 50 years. The influence of both cultures can still be seen in the education system of the Philippines, with Spanish names, diplomas in English and educational institutions with a Catholic ethos.
- **Responsible for education**: The Department of Education (DepEd) is responsible for the provision of primary, secondary and non-formal education. DepEd provides the overarching framework for education policy within the context of local accountability and transparency.
- **International treaties**: The Philippines has concluded cultural and educational treaties with a number of countries, and is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- **Compulsory education**: Ages 5-18.
- **Language of instruction**: Filipino and English, plus local languages in primary and secondary education.
- **School year**: June-March.
- **Academic year**: usually June to April.
Flow chart: education system of the Philippines

- **Primary School** (primary education)
- **Junior High School Diploma** (secondary education)
- **Senior High School Diploma** (secondary education)

Undergraduate:
- **Associate** (post-secondary education)
- **Bachelor** (higher education)
- **Master** (higher education)

Postgraduate:
- **Doctor of Medicine/Juris Doctor** (higher education)
- **PhD** (higher education)

Duration of education:

0 Primary School
4 Junior High School Diploma
6 Senior High School Diploma
4-5 Bachelor
2 Master
2 Doctor of Medicine/Juris Doctor
4 PhD
## Evaluation chart

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign degree or qualification</th>
<th>Dutch equivalent and NLQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School Diploma (from 2017)</td>
<td>VMBO-T diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma (until 2017) (katibayan/katunayan)</td>
<td>VMBO-T diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>MBO diploma (qualification level 3 or 4)</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>2 years of HBO</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (obtained at a centre of excellence)</td>
<td>HBO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Veterinary/Dental Science</td>
<td>2 years of WO</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Medicine</td>
<td>WO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juris Doctor</td>
<td>WO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 system 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.
Primary and secondary education

Primary and secondary education in the Philippines underwent significant changes as a result of the introduction of the K to 12 Program (K to 12) but, prior to 2016, included pupils from the ages of 6 to 16. Pupils are now required to attend school from the ages of 5 (Kindergarten) to 18.

Primary education

Primary education originally included children aged 6-12 years old but, since the K to 12 reforms, it comprises 2 phases:
- Kindergarten, Grade 1-Grade 3 (ages 5-8);
- Grade 4-Grade 6 (ages 9-12).

‘K to 12 Basic Education Program’

The ‘K to 12 Basic Education Program’ (K to 12) was introduced into primary and secondary education in phases from 2011. The ‘K’ in K to 12 stands for kindergarten and the ‘12’ stands for 12 years of education (Grades 1-12).

K to 12 has 3 levels:
- Kindergarten (1 year).
- Elementary education: Grade 1-6 (6 years).
- Secondary education: Junior High School (JHS): Grades 7-10 (4 years) & Senior High School (SHS): Grades 11-12 (2 years).

There are publicly funded schools and privately funded schools. The names for secondary schools include ‘high school’, ‘lyceum’ and ‘academy’; in general, however, the term ‘high school’ is used. Some higher education institutions have a senior high school department (see also Reforms in the chapter Higher education).

Secondary education

Before the introduction of K to 12, high school lasted 4 years. This old system is now called junior high school. The 2 additional years of the new senior high school are designed to enable students to develop specific knowledge and skills. Students in 2018 were the first to receive the new Grade 12/Senior High School Diploma. Please contact Nuffic for an evaluation of this new diploma.

Junior high school

Lower secondary education (Grades 7-10) is called junior high school (JHS).
- Duration: 4 years.
- Content: Mother Tongue, Filipino, English, Mathematics, Science, Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies), Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (Esp, Personnel Education), Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health, Edukasyong Pantahanan
at Pangkabuhayan (EPP, Home and Life Education), Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE).

- Diploma: Junior High School Diploma.

In terms of level, a Junior High School Diploma obtained from 2017 onwards is comparable to a VMBO-T diploma in the Netherlands.

**Senior high school**

Upper secondary school (senior high school) students choose a track. There are 3 tracks:

- Academic
- Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL)
- Sports and Arts

Each track has different strands. Students from all tracks follow the core curriculum. In addition, they choose electives and subjects that belong to their strand.

For example, the academic track has 5 strands:

- Accountancy, Business, Management (ABM)
- Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM)
- General Academic Strand
- Pre-Baccalaureate Maritime

**Secondary education – prior to the ‘K to 12 Program’**

Secondary education was for students aged 12-16.

- Duration: 4 years.
- Content: largely the same subjects as the current junior high school.


In terms of level, a High School Diploma (katibayan/katunayan) obtained before 2017 is comparable to a VMBO-T diploma in the Netherlands.

Note: Since 2017, this diploma is also known as a Junior High School Diploma.
Secondary vocational education

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the responsibility of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). There are 4 different TESDA TVET programmes:

- School based programmes: the programme runs for a maximum of 3 years and is followed at schools governed by TESDA.
- Center based programmes: offered by TESDA training centres.
- Community based programmes: for people who are unable to undertake training as part of the regular education system.
- Enterprise based programmes: the training is provided in collaboration with businesses, with students being employed by or doing an internship within the business.

Admission

For admission to secondary vocational education, one of the following qualifications is required:

- the old High School Diploma (issued up to 2017);
- the current Junior High School Diploma.

Some higher education institutions also offer secondary vocational education. These courses must also be approved by TESDA.
**Admission to higher education**

From 2018 onwards, students wishing to be admitted to higher education require the new Senior High School Diploma. Prior to that, the old High School Diploma was required. There are no national entrance examinations, however many higher education institutions have their own entrance exams. Standard additional requirements apply to some programmes.

Admission to some bachelor’s programmes requires a (recognised) bachelor’s degree in a relevant specialisation. This applies, for example, to bachelor’s programmes in medicine and law (*Juris Doctor*).

**Higher education**

Higher education in the Philippines is unitary. This means that higher education institutions (universities, colleges, academies, institutes and schools) offer both professional and academic education.

**Public and private institutions**

There are some 2,300 higher education institutions in the Philippines:

- around 30% of the institutions are public, set up by the Government (State Universities and Colleges – SUCs) or by local authorities (Local Universities and Colleges – LUCs);
- around 70% of the institutions are private, and include both religious (private sectarian) and secular institutions (private non sectarian).

All of these institutions fall under the supervision of the Commission of Higher Education (CHED). For a number of programmes, the CHED defines the curriculum, the number of credits and which modules must be followed.

**Special order number**

Private higher education institutions must ask permission from CHED to allow students to graduate. They receive a special order (SO) number for this. This number is recorded on the diploma or academic transcript, together with the date of issue. The SO number only relates to the group of students in respect of whom the institution requested the number.

**Exemption from SO number**

CHED regards some private institutions as autonomous or deregulated. These institutions are exempt from some administrative obligations, such as requesting an SO number. In such cases, the exemption will be stated on the academic transcript and/or diploma. The ‘autonomous’ and ‘deregulated’ statuses are only valid for a limited period, varying from 1 to 5 years.
Public higher education institutions do not need to request an SO number. All public institutions state this exemption on the academic transcript and/or diploma.

Reforms
The K to 12 reform also has consequences for higher education. Before the reform, some of the general subjects that are now followed in senior high school were offered as part of the general education curriculum (GED) of the bachelor’s programme. The number of GED credits has been reduced to a minimum of 36 units. Students follow these subjects in English or Filipino.

University and higher professional education
Filipino higher education is divided into 3 phases:
- Bachelor
- Master
- PhD

There are also Associate programmes.

Associate degree
There are a relatively small number of study programmes that lead to an Associate degree.
- Duration: 2 years.
- Content: vocational; common subjects include hotel and restaurant management and technology and IT.
  - Diploma: Associate degree.

In terms of level, an Associate degree is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 3 or 4 in the Netherlands, depending on the specialisation.

Associate programmes do not automatically fall under the responsibility of CHED. Some are approved by TESDA.

Bachelor’s degree
The bachelor’s degree programmes vary according to the subject of the degree.
- Duration: usually 4 years, sometimes 5 years (for technical subjects), approximately 150 to 210 units.
- Admission requirements: from 2018 onwards, a Senior High School Diploma plus, where appropriate, an entrance examination; up to 2018, a High School Diploma plus, where appropriate, an entrance examination.
Content: general subjects (general education), sport (physical education) and the national service training programme together account for (around) half of the curriculum; usually no dissertation, rather practical education and/or an internship.

Diploma: Bachelor’s degree.

In terms of level, a Bachelor’s degree is comparable to 2 years of higher professional education in the Netherlands.

Bachelor’s degrees for veterinary science and dentistry are structured differently.

- Duration: 6 years, approximately 250 units.
- Admission requirements: from 2018 onwards, a Senior High School Diploma plus additional requirements; up to 2018, a High School Diploma plus additional requirements.
- Content: First 2 years, a preparatory curriculum (including general subjects), followed by lectures and practical education related to the main subject.

Diploma: Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or Doctor of Dental Medicine.

In terms of level, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine/Doctor of Dental Medicine diploma is comparable to 2 years of university education (WO) in the Netherlands.

Centre of excellence

There are higher education institutions that have been designated by CHED as a centre of excellence for a specific programme. This status is only valid for a limited period, after which it can be renewed or withdrawn. CHED does not grant this status automatically to other programmes offered by these institutions.

In terms of level, a Bachelor’s degree obtained at a centre of excellence is comparable to an HBO bachelor’s degree in the Netherlands.

Doctor of Medicine and Juris Doctor

There are a number of programmes that require students to have been awarded a bachelor’s degree, for example:

- medicine (Doctor of Medicine, MD)
- law (Juris Doctor, JD).

Additional entrance requirements apply to both programmes.
Education system Philippines

Medicine:
- Duration: 4 years.
- Admission requirements: a pass in the National Medical Admission Test (NMAT) and application for a Certificate of Eligibility for Admission to a Medical Course (CEMed) from CHED.
- Content: theoretical education and, during the final year, clinical education.
  - Diploma: Doctor of Medicine.

In terms of level, the Doctor of Medicine diploma is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree in medicine in the Netherlands.

Law:
- Duration: 4 years, a minimum of 132 units.
- Admission requirements: entrance examination for law.
- Content: practical education (such as the practice court module), a thesis is not required.
  - Diploma: Juris Doctor, a professional degree.

In terms of level, the Juris Doctor diploma is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree in law in the Netherlands.

Master's degree
- Duration: 2 years, at least 30 units.
- Content: lectures and, to conclude, a thesis or non-thesis; in the latter case, the student will take more modules.
- Admission requirements: a bachelor's degree.
  - Diploma: master’s degree; the level of this degree varies according to the programme. Consequently, it is not comparable to 1 level in Dutch education. Please contact Nuffic for an evaluation.

PhD
- Admission requirements: a master’s degree.
- Study load: the number of units required is set by CHED.
- Content: a varied curriculum with or without a dissertation.
  - Diploma: PhD.
Assessment systems

Secondary education
In secondary education, schools use an assessment system from 0% to 100%, where 75% is a pass (passing grade). Results of 65% or below are listed as 65% on the list of grades.

Higher education
In higher education there is no fixed assessment system. Education institutions provide information about their own assessment systems on the academic transcript.

See below for a sample assessment system used by the University of the Philippines (UP):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>In words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inc</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few examples of abbreviations that feature regularly on academic transcripts:
- NC no credit
- NG no grade
- INC incomplete mark
Qualification frameworks

The Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) is the national qualifications framework of the Philippines. The PQF National Coordinating Committee (PQF-NCC) supervises the development and implementation of the PQF.

This diagram shows the 8 levels of the PQF:

![Qualification frameworks diagram](source)

Source: ‘What is PQF?’ [PQF website]

The Philippines are also involved in the development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF).

Accreditation and quality assurance

Accreditation by the government
Accreditation within Filipino higher education is by external (private) accreditation bodies only. Although, as a result, no government body is responsible for accreditation, private educational institutions must request permission from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for every programme.

Initially, the institution will be granted an initial permit for 2 years, followed by an extension of 1 year. During the extension period, the programme must meet
CHED’s minimum requirements to be eligible for recognition by the government, known as Government Recognition (GR).

Although accreditation is not compulsory, CHED does make use of the accreditation results, which therefore offers benefits to educational institutions. A level 2 accreditation status, for example, means that prior permission from CHED is no longer required to allow students to graduate from the accredited programme. As a result, the requirement to apply for a special order number (SO number) will lapse.

Accreditation by private organisations
The following 3 private accreditation organisations fall under the overarching Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP):
- Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities, abbreviated as PAASCU;
- Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation, abbreviated as PACUCOA;
- Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities-Accrediting Council, Inc., abbreviated as ACSCU-ACI.

Quality assurance
The Policies, Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) document lays down guidelines for every programme (for example for the curriculum). CHED publishes these documents as CHED Memorandum Orders (CMOs). CHED’s website also contains sample curricula for a small number of bachelor’s programmes.

Checking documents

Secondary education
A complete file for secondary education must include the diploma and the complete list of grades. The list of grades, Permanent Record (DepEd Form 137-A), must have been issued by the Department of Education (DepEd).

Higher education
For higher education, the diploma and the official transcript are required. Preferably, this is an official transcript that has been sent directly by the higher education institution.

Authenticity
An Authentication Certificate may be requested for higher education documents. This will be issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs at the diploma holder’s request. Where appropriate, you can request a Certification Authentication and Verification (CAV) from the institution or directly from CHED (higher education) or DepEd (secondary education).
Credential evaluation
Nuffic evaluates qualifications according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). A practical implementation of these standards can be found in the European EAR manual.

Overview of higher education institutions
The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has a ‘List of Authorized Undergraduate Programs’. Click on the name of the region where the institution is located first, for a list of authorised institutions in that region. Note: Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs, public institutions set up by local authorities) do not feature on these lists.

Useful links
- Department of Education (DepEd) including information about public schools and the ‘K to 12’ reform.
- Commission on Higher Education (CHED) with an archive of memoranda (with decisions on higher education ranging from administrative obligations to changes in curricula).
- Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) and Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUOA) including information about accredited programmes per educational institution.
- Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) including information about senior secondary vocational education and approved TVET courses.

Glossary
- Duration: the official length of the full-time programme (not part-time) without study delay.
- Graduate programme: a higher education programme after completion of a bachelor’s degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: graduate.
- Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC): The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, was drafted in 1997 by the Council of Europe and Unesco to facilitate and promote fair recognition among Parties of the Convention. Read more on the website of the Council of Europe.
- Undergraduate programme: a programme for a bachelor’s degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: undergraduate.