

The education system of

the Netherlands

This document provides information about the education system of the Netherlands. We explain the most common Dutch qualifications and the admission to Dutch higher education.

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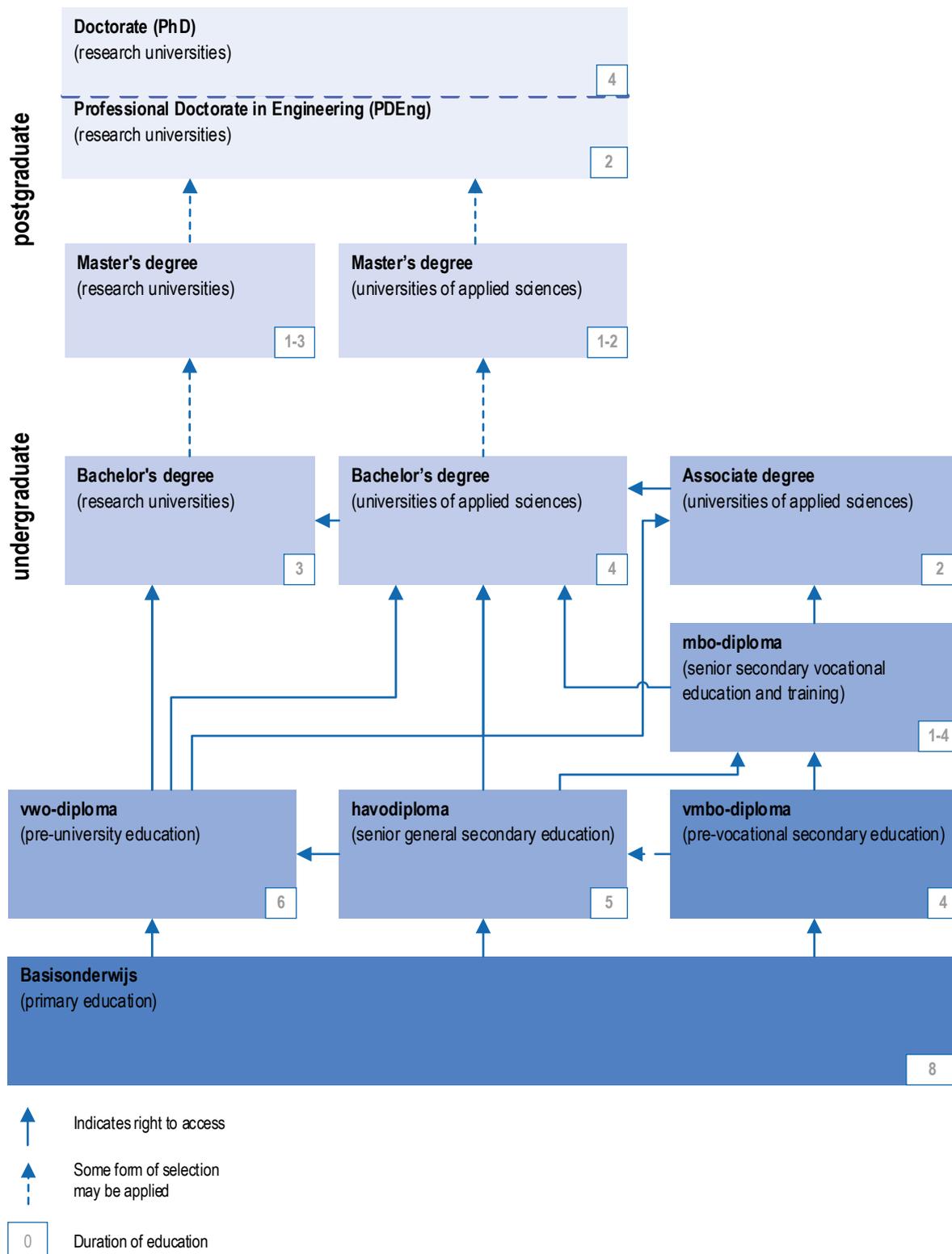
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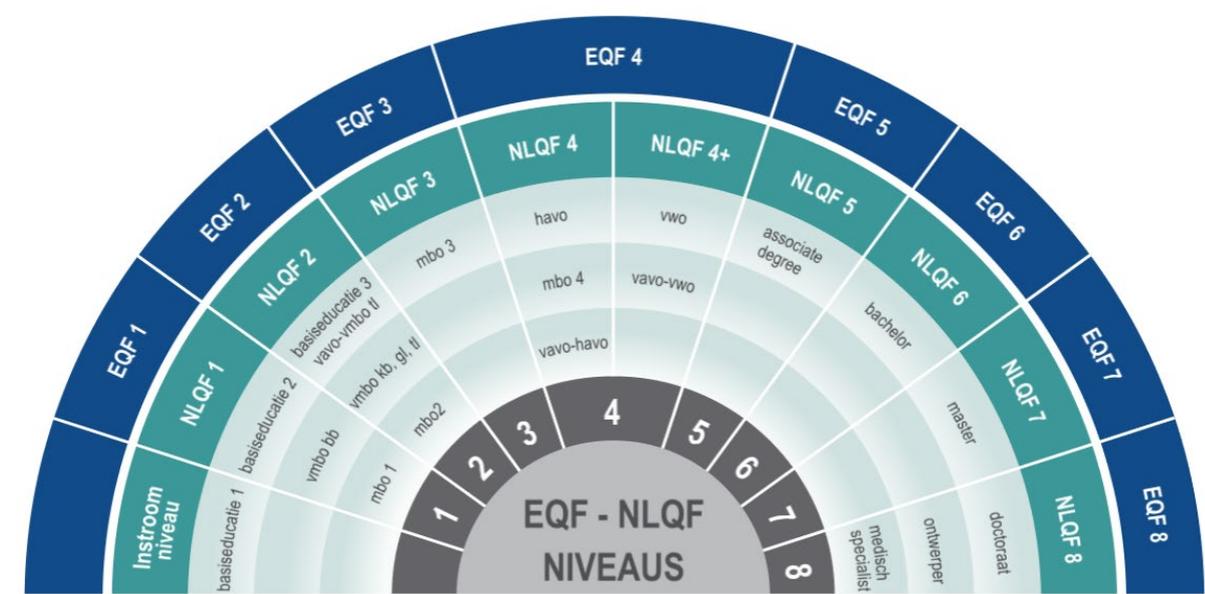
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Flow chart: the Dutch education system



National qualifications framework

The Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF) comprises 8 qualification levels and 1 [entry level](#).



Source: National Coordination Point [NLQF](#) (NCP NLQF).

The table below features the various Dutch diplomas on the left and the equivalent levels within the European and Dutch qualifications frameworks on the right.

Dutch qualifications	EQF level	NLQF level
Doctor	8	8
Master	7	7
Bachelor	6	6
Associate degree	5	5
VWO	4	4+
MBO 4 or HAVO	4	4
MBO 3	3	3
VMBO -kb, VMBO -gl, VMBO -tl or MBO 2	2	2
VMBO -bb or MBO 1	1	1

■ Introduction

The Netherlands is officially part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, an independent country which also comprises 3 other constituent countries: Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten made up part of the Netherlands Antilles until their dissolution in 2010. The Netherlands has since governed the other Netherlands Antilles islands as (special) municipalities: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

NB Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, also referred to as the BES islands, are described under the [education system for Curaçao](#).

Form of government

The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy with a king as its head of state and a government led by a prime minister. Parliament comprises the Senate, with a total of 75 members, and the House of Representatives with 150 members. The Netherlands is divided into 12 provinces. The responsibilities of the government and provinces are set out in the constitution.

European Union

As a Western European nation, the Netherlands has been a member of the EU since 1958. Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten and the Dutch municipalities in the Caribbean are not part of the EU.

Education

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* – OCW) is responsible for the education system and must comply with relevant national legislation in the form of:

- the Primary Education Act;
- the Secondary Education Act;
- the Act on Vocational Education and Training (WEB);
- the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (WHW);
- the Student Finance Act 2000 (WSF 2000).

The WSF was most recently amended in 2007, with the following major result: effective 1 September 2007, students working to obtain a higher education degree abroad may continue to receive their grants and loans under specific circumstances.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is largely responsible for education funding, sets general education policy and determines the broad frameworks in terms of admission requirements and the structure and objectives of the

education system. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy are also involved in substantive aspects of higher education. Institutions at all levels (primary, secondary and higher education) have been offered a greater degree of freedom to implement government policy as they see fit.

Education system

The Dutch education system is made up of:

- [primary education](#);
- [secondary education](#); and
- [higher education](#).

Higher education is based around a binary system, which distinguishes between:

- [research-oriented higher education](#) (WO); and
- [higher professional education](#) (HBO).

General features

- Compulsory education: age 5 to 16.
- Language of instruction: Dutch, although English is increasingly common (at all levels).
- School year: August to July (varies depending on the region).
- Academic year: 1 September to 31 August.

■ Primary and secondary education

Primary education

Dutch children receive primary education (*basisonderwijs*):

- between the ages of 4 and 12;
- it is compulsory from age 5.

Primary education lasts 8 years (groups 1-8) and is offered at primary schools and special needs primary schools. These forms of education are jointly referred to as [primary education](#). There are both public and special primary schools; the latter are based around a specific belief and/or didactic principle (e.g. Dalton Plan and Montessori schools). A total of 19 primary schools also offer [bilingual education](#) (*vroegvreemdetalenonderwijs*, VVTO).

Pupils subsequently transfer to secondary education institutions at various levels, depending on their results. Pupils in group 8, the final year of primary education, choose a secondary education pathway. This choice will generally be based on the school type recommendation.

Secondary education

There are 2 basic pathways:

- general education ([VMBO-T](#), and HAVO or VWO);
- pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO-bb/kb/gl).

Secondary education (*voortgezet onderwijs*), which was referred to as *middelbaar onderwijs* prior to introduction of the so-called Mammoth Act in 1968, is intended for children aged 12 through 16, 17 or 18. Education is compulsory for pupils aged 5 to 16. Young people between the ages of 16–18 are subject to basic qualification requirement, i.e. they must attend school until they have obtained a diploma (basic qualification) or reached the age of 18.

General secondary education (HAVO/VWO)

Pupils can choose between 2 types of education:

- senior general secondary education (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, HAVO);
- pre-university education (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, VWO).

There are various types of VWO schools:

- *gymnasium*
- *atheneum*
- VWO+
- *technasium*

Pupils at a *gymnasium* follow all regular *atheneum* subjects supplemented with Greek and Latin. VWO+ (VWO plus) consists of *atheneum* subjects supplemented with Latin. VWO and HAVO pupils can opt for a *technasium*. This is a type of school that emphasises research & design and focuses on the development of sciences-related skills.

Some schools also offer [bilingual education](#) (*tweetalig onderwijs*, TTO). At these schools, HAVO and VWO pupils are taught part of the curriculum in a second language. Although this will generally be English, German and French are logically more common in the border regions with Germany and Belgium respectively. At least 50% of all lower-year classes are taught in the second language.

Senior general secondary education (HAVO)

- Duration: 5 years (3 initial lower-level years + 2 upper years).
- Content: broad range of subjects during the initial years, followed by a subject cluster (*profiel*) for more in-depth specialisation.
- Diploma: HAVO diploma, following a national examination in at least 7 subjects.

Pre-university education (VWO)

- Duration: 6 years (3 initial lower-level years + 3 upper years).
- Content: broad range of subjects during the initial years, followed by a subject cluster (*profiel*) for more in-depth specialisation.
- Diploma: VWO diploma, following a national examination in at least 8 subjects.

The lower-level years offer a broad range of subjects that are basically accessible to all pupils with a HAVO or VWO recommendation. All pupils must also take part in orientation programmes aimed at finding a suitable future study and profession. After 1 or 2 years of transition class, pupils will be issued a recommendation for HAVO or VWO.

Subject cluster

By the end of year 3, pupils must choose 1 of the 4 available subject clusters in preparation for the various higher education tracks:

- culture and society
- economics and society
- nature and health
- nature and technology

The upper years (second phase) offer education within the framework of these clusters. This comprises both a general component that is the same for all pupils, and an elective component.

In terms of level, the HAVO diploma is comparable to level 4 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF level 4/EQF level 4). See also the [description of NLQF levels](#).

In terms of level, the VWO diploma is comparable to level 4+ within the Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF level 4+/EQF level 4). See also the [description of NLQF levels](#).

Pre-vocational secondary education

[Pre-vocational secondary education](#) (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, VMBO) came to replace VBO (preparatory vocational education) and MAVO (junior general secondary education) in 1999. Like general secondary education, the first years of this type of (mainly) vocationally-oriented education offer a broad range of subjects.

By the end of year 2, pupils choose 1 of the following 4 learning pathways:

- basic vocational programme (VMBO-bb/VMBO-basis);
- advanced vocational programme (VMBO-kb/VMBO-kader);
- combined programme (VMBO-gl);
- theoretical programme (VMBO-tl, more commonly referred to as VMBO-T).

Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO):

- Duration: 4 years (2 initial lower-level years + 2 upper years).
 - Content: broad range of subjects during the initial years, after which students opt for a programme for more in-depth specialisation.
- Diploma: VMBO diploma following a national examination in 6 subjects.

A **VMBO-T diploma** (theoretical programme) grants admission to HAVO and to the vocational and middle-management programmes at senior secondary vocational education and training (VET) level. In some cases pupils who have obtained a diploma from the combined programme (VMBO-gl) can also transfer to HAVO and receive exemptions from the first 2 years.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is currently working on legislation that will make it possible to give these pupils (with a VMBO-T or VMBO-gl diploma) the right to transfer to HAVO. Until then, schools determine their own admission policy.

The basic vocational and advanced vocational programme do not grant admission to HAVO, they do serve as an effective preparation for VET. Depending on their chosen learning pathway, pupils may enter the MBO system at various levels.

Some VMBO schools also offer [bilingual education](#) (TTO). At these schools, 30% of all lower-year VMBO subjects are taught in English, German or French.

More information about the content of the VMBO can be found on the [website of the Dutch Government](#).

In terms of level, the VMBO diploma basic vocational programme (VMBO-BB) is comparable to level 1 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 1](#)/EQF level 1).

In terms of level, a VMBO diploma advanced vocational programme (VMBO-KB), combined programme (VMBO-GL) or theoretical programme (VMBO-T/VMBO-TL) is comparable to level 2 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 2](#)/EQF level 2).

Vocational education and training

Senior secondary vocational education and training, or VET (MBO in Dutch) prepares pupils for the professional practice or further study. This type of education follows on from VMBO; its duration will depend on the chosen qualification.

Qualification levels

MBO comprises 4 different levels:

- qualification level 1 lasts 1 year and leads to a Certificate Senior Secondary Vocational Education, qualification level 1 (MBO 1);
- qualification level 2 lasts 2 years and leads to Certificate Senior Secondary Vocational Education, qualification level 2 (MBO 2);
- a qualification level 3 lasts 3 years and leads to a Certificate Senior Secondary Vocational Education, qualification level 3 (MBO 3);
- qualification level 4 includes a management training programme with a duration of 3 or 4 years. Certificate Senior Secondary Vocational Education, qualification level 4 (MBO 4). This certificate grants access to higher professional education;
- qualification level 4 includes a specialist programme with a duration of 1 year, and is open to students who have completed a vocational or management programme. The diploma grants access to higher professional education.

Learning pathway

MBO students can choose between 2 learning pathways:

- the school-based pathway (BOL), whereby students spend at least 20% and no more than 60% of their study programme working in the professional practice;
- the work-based pathway (BBL), whereby students spend at least 60% of their study programme working in the professional practice.

The professional practice makes up a key aspect of both pathways.

Institutions offering VET:

- regional training centres (ROCs);
- agricultural training centres (AOCs);
- vocational schools.

In terms of level, the MBO diploma is comparable to level 1-4 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level](#) 1-4/EQF level 1-4), depending on the duration and specialisation.

Further information on MBO diplomas can be found on the [SBB website](#), (SBB is the Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and Labour Market).

■ Admission to higher education

Students require one of the following secondary education diplomas in order to be admitted to higher education:

- MBO diploma (qualification level 4);
- HAVO diploma;
- VWO diploma .

Requirements will vary depending on the relevant type of higher education.

Research-oriented higher education

Admission to research-oriented higher education (WO) will require a VWO diploma or HBO first-year certificate (*propedeuse*). In some cases, additional requirements – e.g. a specific profile – may apply.

Higher professional education

Admission to higher professional education (HBO) will require a HAVO or VWO diploma. Some HBO programmes also apply additional profile requirements. Students with a VWO diploma may be admitted to an intensive 3-year programme (see: Section 7.9a WHW).

Admission to HBO is also possible on the basis of an MBO diploma (qualification level 4) or a management training or specialist programme. Here too, HBO programmes may apply additional requirements. *Associate degree* programmes apply the same admission requirements as equivalent HBO programmes.

Special requirements

Some study programmes, such as art programmes, also require specific skills determined by the institution itself. In addition, some study programmes apply an enrolment quota: the number of first-year students to be admitted is subject to a maximum limit.

This is mostly seen at popular study programmes with a limited number of places, such as medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, journalism and physiotherapy. Institutions may select students for these programmes on the basis of their average final examination marks, motivation, personality and previous school performance.

■ Higher education

Dutch higher education is based around a binary system that distinguishes between research-oriented higher education (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*) and higher professional education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*). This distinction remained in place after the introduction of the bachelor's-master's degree structure in 2002.

Research universities mainly provide academic or research-oriented higher education, while universities of applied sciences mainly offer higher professional education. These 2 types of education each have their own admission requirements, duration and official titles.

Types of institutions

There are 3 types of universities of applied sciences and research universities in the Netherlands:

1. **Government-funded institutions** (13 research universities, the Open University and 36 universities of applied sciences) are financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and are entitled to issue legally recognised degrees. These institutions offer study programmes for the statutory tuition fee.
2. **Approved institutions**, such as Nyenrode Business Universiteit, do not receive funding from the Dutch government but may also issue legally recognised bachelor's and master's degrees. These institutions are not bound by statutory tuition fees, and are free to determine their own tuition fees.
3. **Private institutions**, such as international universities, are not bound by Dutch government regulations. However, these institutions may apply for accreditation by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders ([NVAO](#)), subject to specific conditions.

Universities

Research-oriented higher education is provided at 14 Dutch research universities in the Netherlands, including the Open University, although these institutions also collaborate with universities of applied sciences.

Most research universities offer study programmes in various areas of specialisation, such as economics, law, medicine, language & culture, and natural sciences and management. One research university specialises in agriculture and the environment, while 3 universities offer largely technological programmes. University colleges also provide research-oriented higher education and are generally part of a research university. These colleges offer English-language education and are mainly focused on undergraduate liberal arts programmes.

Universities of applied sciences

Higher professional education (HBO) is mainly provided by universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*). HBO consists of 7 sectors:

- economics
- healthcare
- agriculture
- education
- social and community work
- art
- technology

Students can enrol in various study programmes in each of these sectors at universities of applied sciences throughout the Netherlands. Some universities of applied sciences specialise in a particular domain, such as arts, agriculture or teacher training.

Finally, the Netherlands has various Institutes for International Education (IE institutes) with a relatively small student population. Most of these IE *institutes* are part of a Dutch university. They offer a broad range of study programmes in specific fields of study, and generally lead to a master's degree or PhD. Further information can be found on the Platform for International Education [website](#).

Binding recommendations (BSA)

Students will receive a binding recommendation on continuation of studies (*bindend studieadvies*, BSA) at the end of their first year of study. This means that students will have to gain a certain minimum of ECTS during their first year in order to be allowed to proceed to the second year. Most HBO and academic programmes apply a minimum of 30 or 45 ECTS. A small number of programmes apply a minimum of 60 ECTS. If a student fails to meet this standard, in most cases his or her enrolment will be automatically terminated. These students are then generally barred from enrolling in the same study programme for several years.

Students are issued a first-year certificate when they have obtained 60 ECTS. Students enrolled in a programme where the binding recommendation is set at 45 ECTS per year do not necessarily have to obtain this certificate within the first year.

English-language education

English is also becoming an increasingly common language in the higher education sector. The Minister is seeking to amend the Higher Education Act so that programmes can use English as a language of instruction provided this offers genuine added value. Nuffic is also committed to educational quality and the continuation of Dutch-language education. See [our website](#) for more information (in Dutch) about our position in this area.

The current range of English-language programmes is featured on the [Study in Holland](#) website.

■ Research-oriented higher education (WO)

Research-oriented higher education offers education programmes with the following key aim: 'independent scientific research or the professional application of scientific knowledge' (see Section 1.1.c of the [Higher Education and Research Act](#)).

Academic study programmes are divided into 3 consecutive stages:

- a 3-year bachelor's degree programme;
- a 1, 2 or 3-year master's degree programme, depending on the specialisation;
- doctoral research, generally lasting a total of 4 years.

Bachelor's

This is the first stage of research-oriented higher education.

- A VWO diploma or HBO first-year certificate (*propedeuse*).
 - Duration: 3 years (180 ECTS).
 - Content: generally a first-year phase leading to a first-year certificate; mainly (theoretical) education in 1 area of specialisation or a *major/minor* structure; often followed by a short thesis in the 3rd year.
- Diploma: one of the following bachelor's degrees: *Bachelor of Arts* (BA), *Bachelor of Science* (BSc), *Bachelor of Laws* (LLB).

In terms of level, a bachelor's degree (WO) is comparable to level 6 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 6](#)/EQF level 6).

Students who have completed a bachelor's degree programme may enrol in a master's degree programme. However, they will not be automatically admitted to any specific master's programme. Admission may be subject to selection criteria. As a result, it is important for students to make a conscious decision when choosing a master's programme.

Master's

The first stage of research-oriented higher education.

- Admission: a bachelor's degree – with additional requirements in some cases – has been compulsory since 2010/2011.
- Duration: 1 year (60 ECTS; most specialisations), 2 years (120 ECTS; technical and natural sciences specialisations), 3 years (180 ECTS; medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and dentistry).
- Content: specific specialisation and training in research methods; generally includes a compulsory thesis.

- Diploma: one of the following master's degrees: *Master of Arts (MA)*/*Master of Science (MSc)*/*Master of Laws (LLM)*. These titles have been in use since introduction of the bachelor's-master's degree structure in 2002.

Traditional titles

Under specific conditions, graduates who have obtained a master's degree in research-oriented higher education are still entitled to use one of the traditional Dutch titles. In the case of most specialisations, this concerns the title of *doctorandus (drs.)*. However, the title of *ingenieur (ir.)* may be used by graduates of technical specialisations or study programmes in the area of agriculture and the natural environment, while the title of *meester (mr.)* may be used by law programme graduates.

In terms of level, a master's degree (WO) is comparable to level 7 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 7](#)/EQF level 7).

PhD

This comprises the third stage of research-oriented higher education.

- Admission: a master's degree (HBO/WO), with additional requirements in specific cases.
 - Duration: generally 4 years (often without ECTS).
 - Content: conducting independent research, possibly in combination with training, and the writing of a dissertation under the supervision of 1 or more PhD supervisors.
- Diploma: the degree of *doctor (dr.)* following public defence of the dissertation.

The 3 universities of technology also offer alternative PhD programmes.

- Duration: 2 years.
 - Content: a technological design programme including a personal design assignment.
- Diploma: the title of *Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng)*.

In terms of level, the degree of doctor is comparable to level 8 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 8](#)/EQF level 8).

In terms of level, a Professional Doctorate in Engineering is comparable to level 8 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 8](#)/EQF level 8).

■ Higher professional education (HBO)

Higher professional education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO) is a more practically-oriented form of higher education with the following main purpose: 'the transfer of theoretical knowledge and development skills in close alignment with the professional practice' (see Section 1.1.d of the [Higher Education and Research Act](#)).

Universities of applied sciences offer both bachelor's degree programmes and *associate degree* programmes. However, since the introduction of the bachelor's-master's degree structure, universities of applied sciences have also been allowed to offer master's programmes. These study programmes are legally recognised once they have been accredited by the NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (see also [Quality assurance and accreditation](#)).

Post HBO

Some universities of applied sciences still offer postgraduate continuing professional education (HBO) programmes. However, most of these advanced study programmes were converted into master's degree programmes following the introduction of the bachelor's-master's degree structure. Examples include the first level teacher-training programmes in general subjects, and programmes in the fields of art education and architecture.

Bachelor's and master's degree

Higher professional education is organised in 2 stages:

1. a 4-year bachelor's degree programme;
2. a 1 or 2-year master's degree programme, depending on the specialisation.

A master's degree at HBO level can offer admission to a PhD programme, the third stage of higher education.

Bachelor's degree programmes

The bachelor's degree programme comprises the first stage of higher professional education.

- Duration: 4 years (240 ECTS). Students with a VWO diploma are eligible to enroll in one of the intensive programmes that an increasing number of universities of applied sciences are offering. These programmes can be completed in 3 years (180 credits).
- Content: a first-year phase, generally a compulsory work placement of around 9 months in the 3rd year and a thesis or final project during the 4th year.
- Admission: HAVO diploma or MBO diploma (qualification level 4).
- Diploma: generally a *Bachelor of Arts* (BA) or *Bachelor of Science* (BSc) degree, although programmes in the fields of law, business administration, social work, music and education lead to an LLB/BBA/BSW/BM or Bed degree.

In terms of level, a bachelor's degree (HBO) is comparable to level 6 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 6](#)/EQF level 6).

Traditional titles

Graduates of higher professional education bachelor's programmes are still entitled to use one of the traditional Dutch titles - *baccalaureus (bc.)* or *ingenieur (ing.)* - under certain conditions, depending on their specialisation.

Master's degree programmes

The master's degree programme comprises the second higher professional education stage.

- Admission: generally a bachelor's degree.
- Duration: generally 1 year (60 ECTS), although several specialisations - such as music programmes - have a duration of 2 years (120 ECTS).
- Content: students acquire more in-depth knowledge of a specific profession; this culminates in a thesis or final project, with an emphasis on applied research.
- Diploma: generally a *Master of Arts* or *Master of Science (MA/MSc)* degree, although programmes in the fields of law, business administration, social work, music and education lead to an LLM/MBA/MSW/MM or MEd degree.

In terms of level, a master's degree (HBO) is comparable to level 7 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 7](#)/EQF level 7).

Associate degree programme (AD programme)

The *Associate Degree (AD)* was legally introduced as part of the HBO programme structure in 2007. The associate degree programme has been offered independently since 2018. The programme is mainly designed to prepare students for the labour market in a shorter space of time.

- Admission: HAVO diploma or MBO diploma (qualification level 4).
- Duration: 2 years (120 ECTS).
- Content: often more practically oriented than HBO bachelor's programmes. Graduates will have obtained a level somewhere between MBO-4 and HBO bachelor's.
- Diploma: *Associate Degree (AD)*.

In terms of level, an Associate Degree is comparable to level 5 within the Dutch Qualifications Framework ([NLQF level 5](#)/EQF level 5).

Students who have obtained an *Associate Degree* may then opt to seek employment or take the associated HBO bachelor's programme. In many cases, they will be able to complete this bachelor's programme in a relatively short space of time (2 years).

■ Assessment systems

A 10-point system is used in both secondary and higher education, with 6 being the minimum pass mark. Grades 1 through 3 are almost never issued.

Grades	Description
10	Excellent
9	Very good
8	Good
7	Very satisfactory
6	Satisfactory
5	Almost satisfactory
4	Unsatisfactory
3	Very unsatisfactory
2	Poor
1	Very poor

Dutch higher education institutions apply the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS):

- 1 credit = 28 hours of study
- 60 credits = 1 year of study
- 1 academic year = 42 weeks

For more information about the ECTS, consult the English-language [ECTS Users' Guide](#) published by the European Commission.

■ Qualification frameworks

Qualification frameworks offer an overview of the various diplomas and degrees available within the higher education system. They describe the learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) for each of these qualifications. This facilitates the qualification accreditation process, allowing students and job seekers to transition more rapidly to suitable study programmes and jobs.

The Netherlands applies 2 qualification frameworks:

- the **Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF)**, describing educational qualifications at 8 levels;
- the **Dutch Higher Education Qualifications Framework**, describing higher education in 3 stages.

Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF)

The NLQF is based on the overarching European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The overarching EQF specifies the specific knowledge, skills, degree of independence and responsibility associated with each of the 8 levels, rather than individual qualifications.

As a part of the effort to develop a **national** framework of qualifications (in the Netherlands: NLQF), each specific qualification is classified under 1 of 8 levels. Students may attain these qualifications at regular secondary, higher, professional or adult education institutions, or outside of the regular education system.

Once an individual country has classified its qualifications under a national framework, the European Commission will then assess this framework and allow for it to be linked to the overarching EQF. This **referencing process** is an important step that allows for comparison between the qualification levels of different countries.

The **NLQF** has been officially linked to the EQF since 2012, at which point the Netherlands also introduced a National Coordination Point (NCP) charged with classifying qualifications under the NLQF system. The National Coordination Point assesses the NLQF level (according to a set procedure), especially for diplomas that have been obtained outside mainstream education. The NLQF's official English name is Dutch Qualifications Framework.

Further information on the NLQF can be found on the [NCP NLQF website](#). This includes an [overview](#) of interfaces between the NLQF and EQF.

Dutch Higher Education Qualifications Framework

The Dutch Higher Education Qualifications Framework is based on the Overarching Frameworks for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area ([QF-EHEA](#)), developed as a part of the Bologna process. This overarching framework describes qualifications attained during the 3 higher education stages in the following terms:

- learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences);
- the number of ECTS (with the exception of the 3rd stage).

The NVAO is responsible for monitoring and updating [the Dutch Higher Education Qualifications Framework](#), which consists of 3 stages:

- bachelor's
- master's
- PhD

These 3 stages correspond with EQF levels 6, 7 and 8.

In May 2018, the Ministers of Education of the [EHEA countries](#) decided that short-cycle qualifications (such as the associate degree) would be added to the QF-EHEA framework.

■ Accreditation and quality assurance

In the Netherlands, the accreditation of study programmes falls under the responsibility of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). The NVAO is a member of both the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

NVAO duties

The organisation's main task consists of monitoring higher education quality in the Netherlands and Flanders. It does so on the basis of tasks described in the WHW and commonly accepted international accreditation practices. As regards higher education, the NVAO's duties include:

- monitoring the quality of existing study programmes;
- assessing the quality of new study programmes.

Accreditation procedure

Although higher education institutions are not under obligation to provide accreditations, student grants and loans and recognised degrees are exclusively issued to students enrolled at an accredited study programme. The university of applied sciences or research university itself will appoint a visitation committee (VBI) charged with assessing the quality of the study programme. This committee is then obliged to bring in independent experts. The VBI will base its assessment on the NVAO criteria for study programme assessment and accreditation. The NVAO will then issue a ruling on the programme's accreditation based on the VBI report. This accreditation will be valid for a period of 6 years.

Accreditation system

In 2011, the Netherlands introduced an accreditation system under which higher education institutions can request an institutional quality assurance audit from the NVAO. This audit serves to determine the institution's capacity so as to assess its ability to safeguard the quality of its various programmes. Although study programmes that receive a positive assessment will still require accreditation, the procedure will take less time and be less extensive. For an overview of accredited bachelor's and master's programmes, see the [NVAO website](#).

Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (DUO)

In addition to the NVAO website, you may also consult the [Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes](#) (CROHO) to determine whether a particular study programme is accredited. This [register](#) provides an overview of all

accredited programmes offered by government-funded and approved higher education institutions.

If a bachelor's or master's degree programme is not featured in CROHO, its quality is not ensured by the Dutch quality assurance system. However, it may be safeguarded by a foreign accreditation organisation.

Code of Conduct for International Students

As of 2006, the Netherlands has also had another instrument at its disposal in order to ensure the quality of Dutch higher education internationalisation: *the Code of Conduct*. Any institution that signs this code must abide by the good practices for international students described therein. This applies to:

- recruitment and admission;
- information services;
- the range of available programmes.

A national committee monitors compliance with the Code of Conduct and maintains an [overview](#) of all universities of applied sciences and research universities that have signed it.

■ **Bologna process**

The bachelor's-master's degree structure was successfully implemented into the Dutch higher system in September of 2003. Higher education has since been structured around 3 stages, although the distinction between WO and HBO education still exists. The Dutch higher education system also implemented the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System* (ECTS) system. Further information on the implementation of the bachelor's-master's degree structure in the Netherlands can be found on the [EHEA website](#).

Quality through accreditation

Upon introducing the bachelor's-master's degree structure, the Dutch government became aware of the need to guarantee educational quality through an accreditation system. This resulted in adoption of the Accreditation Act in 2002. Following establishment of the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO), the first accreditations were issued in 2003.

The accreditation of Dutch and Flemish education was merged in 2005, when the NAO became the [Accreditation Organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders](#) (NVAO). This organisation is responsible for the accreditation of all higher education study programmes. In the Netherlands, accreditation by the NVAO is equivalent to government accreditation (see: [Quality assurance and accreditation](#)).

■ International treaties

The Netherlands signed the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#) in 2002 and ratified it in 2008. The Netherlands has also signed various multilateral agreements, mainly at European level, on the recognition of study programmes and qualifications.

The Netherlands has signed bilateral agreements on the recognition of higher education qualifications with various countries including Germany and Austria.

■ Checking documents

Secondary education

Secondary education diplomas comprise:

- a certificate;
- an overview of subjects;
- a list of marks.

Higher education

Higher education diplomas include:

- a certificate conferring the relevant degree and/or title;
- a list of marks stating the examination results;
- a separate overview of subjects, in some cases.

Diploma Supplement

The introduction of the Diploma Supplement (DS) was enshrined in Dutch law in 2005. Almost all students now receive the European version of the Diploma Supplement along with their final diploma. More information about the Diploma Supplement is available on the [Europass website](#).

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 higher education institutions

- The [VSNU](#) has an [overview](#) of all research universities in the Netherlands.
- The [Vereniging Hogescholen](#) offers an [overview](#) of all universities of applied sciences (hogescholen).

Useful links

- [Nuffic](#), the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education, is also the Dutch [Enic-Naric](#).
- The Dutch [Ministry of Education, Culture and Science](#) (OCW).
- The [VSNU](#), the umbrella association of research universities in the Netherlands.
- The [Vereniging Hogescholen](#), the umbrella association of universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands.
- The [KNAW](#), Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*).
- The [NWO](#), Dutch organisation for scientific research (*Nederlandse organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*).
- The NVAO, Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*), has a website in [Dutch](#) and [English](#), including an overview of accredited degree programs and [information](#) about the Dutch qualifications framework for higher education.
- The [NLQF](#), National Coordination Point for the Dutch qualifications framework.
- [DUO](#), the Education Executive Agency (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*) maintains the [CROHO-register](#) (Central Register of Higher Education Study Programs, *Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs*).
- The National Higher Education Code of Conduct Committee, [Landelijke Commissie Gedragscode Hoger Onderwijs](#) provides an [overview of institutions](#) which have signed the Code of Conduct.
- Nuffic's [Study in Holland website](#) offers detailed information about studying in the Netherlands.
- [PIE online](#), the Platform for International Education (PIE), provides information about the Institutes for International Education.
- [SBB](#), the Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market, evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level.

Glossary

- **Bologna process:** The process that started after 29 European Ministers of Education signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, with which they agreed, among other things, to create a European Area for Higher Education (EHEA): “An open space that allows students, graduates, and higher education staff to benefit from unhampered mobility and equitable access to high quality higher education”. This includes setting up a system based on 2 cycles, undergraduate and graduate, also known as the bachelor-master structure. In 2003 a [third cycle](#) was added for doctoral programmes. Currently, the EHEA has [48 members](#).
- **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 an associate degree or bachelor's degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: [undergraduate](#).