

Education system

# Zimbabwe

described and compared with  
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of Zimbabwe. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Zimbabwe 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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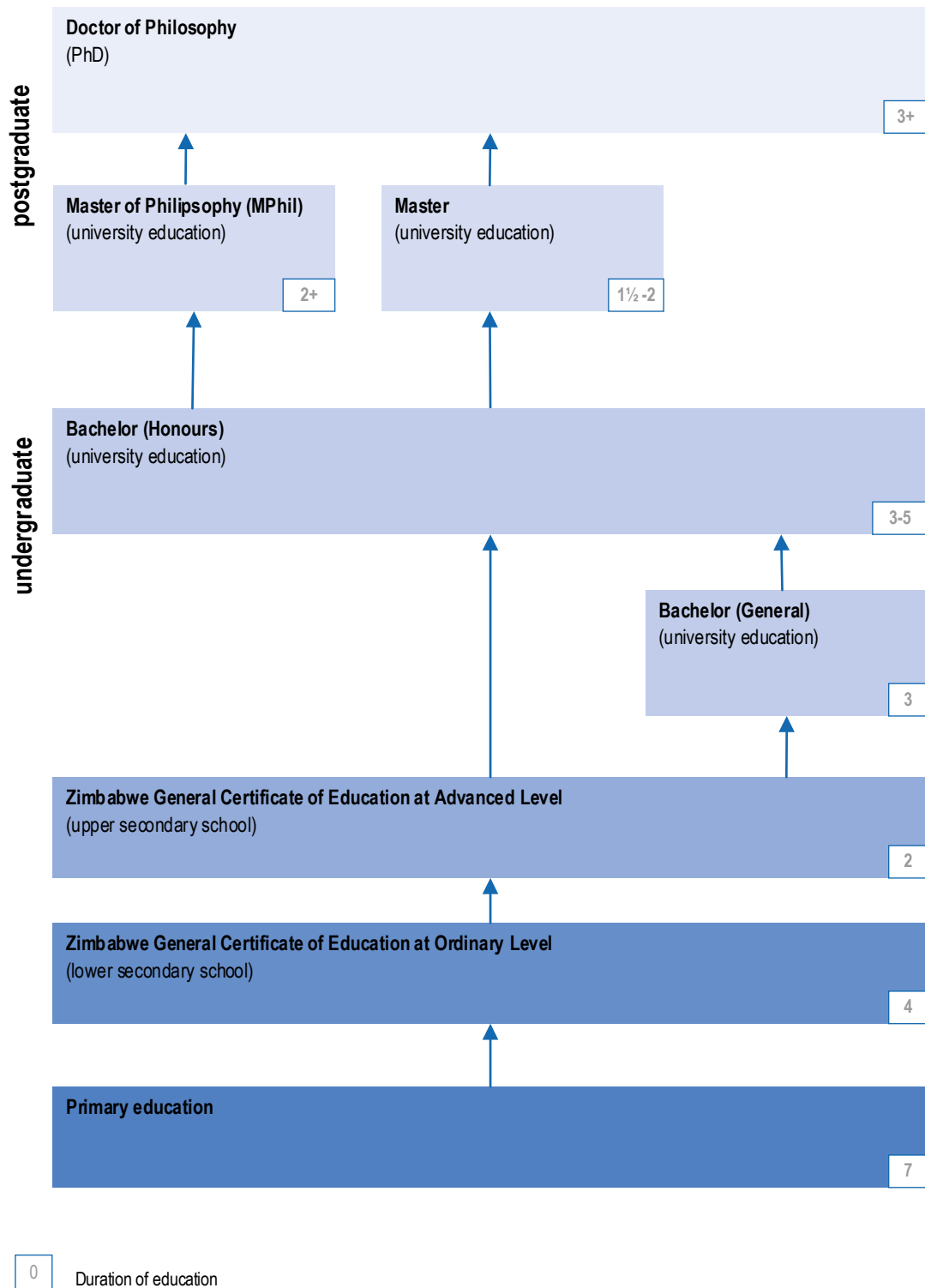


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## ■ Background

- **Country:** Zimbabwe, officially the Republic of Zimbabwe.
- **History:** In 1980, Zimbabwe became independent from the United Kingdom. Until that time, the majority of the population only had limited access to good quality education. Since independence, the country has invested heavily in building schools, developing teacher training and the availability of resources.
- **Responsible for education:** The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development.
- **Compulsory education:** Ages 6-13 (primary education).
- **Language of instruction:** Primary education: Shona or Ndebele and, from the 4th grade, English. Secondary and higher education: English.
- **School year:** January to December (secondary education).
- **School examinations:** June or November.
- **Academic year:** January to December.

■ Flow chart: education system Zimbabwe



## 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.

| Foreign degree or qualification   | ZNQF level | Dutch equivalent and NLQF level  | EQF level |
|---|------------|--|-----------|
| <i>Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level</i><br>(final result of A, B or C obtained for at least 5 examination subjects)  | 2          | <a href="#">VMBO-T</a> diploma   | 2         |
| <i>Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level</i><br>(final result of A, B or C obtained for at least 5 examination subjects) plus the <i>Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level</i> with at least 2 subjects | 3          | at least a <a href="#">HAVO</a> diploma                                | 4         |
| <i>Bachelor's (General)</i> (3 years)   | 7          | 3 years of <a href="#">HBO</a> or 1 year of <a href="#">WO</a>         | 6         |
| <i>Bachelor's (Honours)</i> (3 years)   | 8          | <a href="#">HBO</a> bachelor's degree or 2 years of <a href="#">WO</a> | 6         |
| <i>Bachelor's (Honours)</i> (4 years)   | 8          | <a href="#">HBO</a> or <a href="#">WO</a> bachelor's degree            | 6         |
| <i>Master</i>   | 9          | <a href="#">HBO</a> or <a href="#">WO</a> master's degree              | 7         |
| <i>Master of Philosophy</i>   | 9          | <a href="#">WO</a> master's degree                                     | 7         |

Note:

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- ZNQF = *Zimbabwe National 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.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

## ■ Primary and secondary education

### Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 13 years and runs from Grade 1 to Grade 7. At the end of Grade 7, pupils take national examinations in English, mathematics, 1 native language and they write a general paper.

About 30% of the Grade 7 pupils do not continue to secondary education due to a shortage of schools in a few poorer areas and due to insufficient resources to pay school fees.

### Secondary education

Secondary education is based on the British education system and is divided into:

- 4 years of lower secondary school; and
- 2 years of upper secondary school.

### Lower secondary school

Lower secondary school is for pupils aged 13 to 16 years and lasts 4 years. It consists of 4 classes: Form I to Form IV. They complete Form IV with the national examinations for the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level*. The examining authority for these exams is the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC).

To obtain the certificate, pupils must achieve a pass in at least 5 subjects, including English, mathematics, science, history or one of the technical/vocational subjects.

In terms of level, the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* with an A, B or C for at least 5 examination subjects is comparable to a VMBO-T diploma.

### Upper secondary school

After obtaining the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level*, pupils may continue to the 2-year upper secondary school (Forms V and VI).

Due to the limited number of available places, access to upper secondary education is competitive. Selection is based on the results achieved for the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level*. Due to the strict selection, the majority of Ordinary Level students start working or move on to senior secondary vocational education, for instance to a technical school, nursing college or teaching college.

### **Advanced Level examinations**

At the end of Form VI, pupils in upper secondary education sit examinations for the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* in at least 2 courses at Principal or Subsidiary Level. If an unsatisfactory mark has been achieved on the Principal Level, a pass on the Subsidiary Level can be awarded (see the [Assessment systems](#) chapter).

In terms of level, the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* with an A, B or C for at least 5 examination subjects plus the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* with at least 2 subjects is comparable to at least a HAVO diploma.

## ■ Admission to higher education

For admission to a university bachelor's (*honours*) programme, the minimum requirement is that students hold:

- the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* with at least 5 passes; plus
- the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* with at least 2 passes.

Higher requirements may be set depending on the degree programme.

Most universities conduct a selective admissions policy, which means in practice, good results should be achieved.

## ■ Higher education

When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, the country had only 1 national university, the University of Zimbabwe. Since then, the number of higher education institutions has risen enormously.

### **Types of institutions**

At the moment, there are 43 higher education institutions in Zimbabwe:

- 14 state universities;
- 7 private universities;
- 7 polytechnics; and
- 15 teacher colleges.

### **Degree and non-degree programmes**

Universities provide both academic and higher professional education. They offer:

- degree programmes; and
- non-degree programmes.

Students complete degree programmes with an academic degree, such as bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. The universities are authorised to award academic degrees.

Students complete non-degree programmes with non-degree qualifications, known as certificates and diplomas.

### **Undergraduate and postgraduate**

The structure of higher education is divided into 2 phases:

- undergraduate
- postgraduate

Students usually conclude undergraduate education with a bachelor's degree. Some institutions also offer certificate or diploma programmes, which last 1 or 2



years respectively. Postgraduate programmes are completed with a master's degree or a doctorate.

## ■ University and higher professional education

Students can obtain the following degrees in Zimbabwean higher education:

- Bachelor (General)
- Bachelor (Honours)
- Master
- Master of Philosophy
- Doctor of Philosophy

### **Bachelor (General)**

The content of the programme defines the difference between a *general* and *honours* bachelor. For example, students do not write a thesis for a general bachelor. A general bachelor can lead to an honours bachelor if the student completes an additional year of study.

- Duration: 3 years.
  - Content: core subjects, elective subjects and possibly an internship.
  - Admission requirements: the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* with at least a pass for 5 subjects and the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* with a pass for 1 subject.
- Diploma: *Bachelor (General)*.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor (General)* following a 3-year programme is comparable to 3 years of higher professional education (HBO) or 1 year of university education (WO), depending on the content and type of study programme.

### **Bachelor (Honours)**

Honours programmes can be recognised by the classification with which the degree was obtained. This classification (class), for example 'upper second division', is indicated on the qualification. More examples can be found in the [Assessment systems](#) chapter.

- Duration: 3 or 4 years; 5 years for medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and engineering.
  - Content: core subjects, elective subjects, an internship and/or thesis.
  - Admission requirements: the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* with at least a pass for 5 subjects and the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* with at least 2 passes.
- Diploma: *Bachelor (Honours)*.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor (Honours)* following a 3-year programme is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of academic education (WO), depending on the content and type of study programme.

In terms of level, the *Bachelor (Honours)* following a 4- or 5-year programme is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor's degree, depending on the content and type of study programme.

### **Master**

In most cases master's programmes build on the specialisation of the obtained bachelor's degree.

- Duration: 1½ to 2 years.
  - Content: specialised subjects and a thesis.
  - Admission requirements: a bachelor's (*honours*) degree with at least *lower second division*.
- Diploma: *Master*.

In terms of level, the *Master* is comparable to an HBO or WO master's degree, depending on the content and type of study programme.

### **Master of Philosophy**

Degree programmes leading to a *Master of Philosophy* are, in contrast to the regular master's programmes, mainly focused on research.

- Duration: at least 2 years.
  - Content: a curriculum focused on research, and concluding a thesis.
  - Admission requirements: a bachelor's (*honours*) degree with at least *upper second division*.
- Diploma: *Master of Philosophy*.

In terms of level, the *Master of Philosophy* is comparable to a WO master's degree.

### Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

After completing a master's degree, students can be admitted to a university doctoral programme leading to the title: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

- Duration: at least 3 years.
- Content: a period of study and research, and a doctoral thesis.
- Admission requirements: a master's degree.
- Diploma: *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)*.

## ■ Assessment systems

### Secondary education

Both the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* and the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level* are assessed using grades A to E. Grade A is the highest passing grade and E the lowest.

At Advanced Level, pupils take the examinations at Principal Level. If an unsatisfactory grade has been achieved on the Principal Level, then a pass (sufficient) can be awarded on the Subsidiary Level. The level of the subject is indicated by AO Subsidiary Level and the score obtained with pass plus a number (1-6). This equals a subject at Ordinary Level obtained with a score of at least a C.

### Higher education

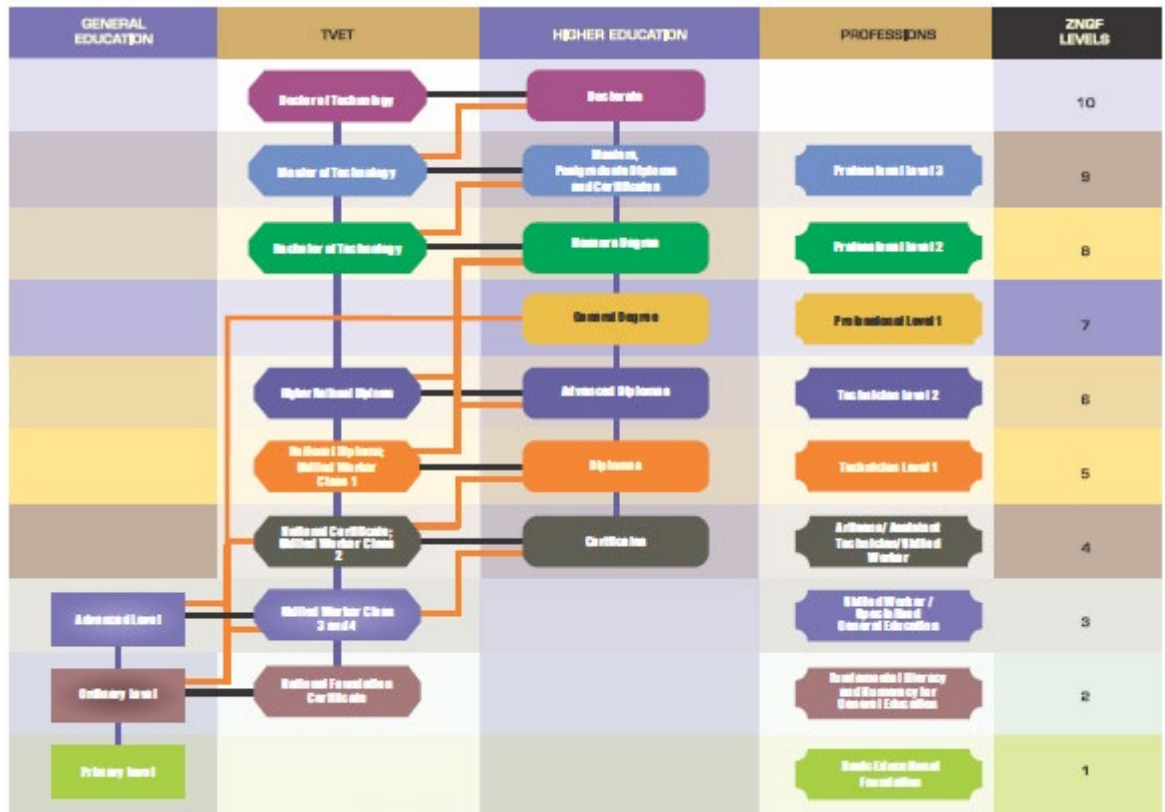
Institutions use the following assessment system for bachelor's and master's programmes. Only honours bachelor's degrees receive a classification (class).

| Results | Description | Classification        |
|---------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 80-100% | Distinction | First Division        |
| 70-79%  | Merit       | Upper Second Division |
| 60-69%  | Pass        | Lower Second Division |
| 50-59%  | Pass        | Third Division        |
| <50%    | Fail        | Fail                  |

## Qualification frameworks

Since 2018, Zimbabwe is using the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF). A description of the different levels can be found on the website of the [Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education \(ZIMCHE\)](http://www.zimche.gov.zw).

### Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework 2018



Source: [Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education \(ZIMCHE\)](http://www.zimche.gov.zw)

## Quality assurance and accreditation

The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) has been responsible for the registration and accreditation of higher education institutions since 2006. A list of registered higher education institutions can be found on the [ZIMCHE website](http://www.zimche.gov.zw).

In Zimbabwe there is no system for the accreditation of study programmes.

## Checking documents

For admission to higher education, the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level* must be handed over, as well as the *Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level*.

Upon completion of a higher education programme, the diploma or degree is awarded, generally featuring an academic transcript: an overview of subjects and the study and examination results achieved.

### 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 website of the *Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education* (ZIMCHE) provides [an overview of registered higher education institutions](#).

## ■ Useful links

- [Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education \(ZIMCHE\)](#) with, amongst others, information about the [Zimbabwe National Qualification Framework](#).
- De [Zimbabwe School Examinations Council \(ZIMSEC\)](#) with information about the Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations.
- [Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology](#).
- [Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education](#).

## ■ 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](#).