

The education system of the Netherlands

The Dutch education system consists of eight years of primary education, a diversified secondary education system with different tracks and a binary higher education system.

Primary and secondary education

Children are allowed to begin school at the age of four, but are not legally required to do so until the age of five. Secondary education, which begins at the age of twelve and is compulsory until the age of sixteen, is diversified and offered at different levels. *Vmbo* programmes (four years) combine general and vocational education. Only the six-year *vwo* diploma grants access to bachelor's programmes at research universities; the *vwo* diploma, *havo* diploma and the highest level of *mbo* grant access to bachelor's programmes at universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*).

The last two years of *havo* and the last three years of *vwo* are referred to as the 'second phase' (*tweede fase*), or upper secondary education. During these years, pupils focus on one of four subject clusters (*profielen*): 1) Science and Technology (*Natuur en Techniek*); 2) Science and Health (*Natuur en Gezondheid*); 3) Economics and Society (*Economie en Maatschappij*); 4) Culture and Society (*Cultuur en Maatschappij*).

Higher education

Higher education in the Netherlands is offered at research universities and universities of applied sciences. In this binary, three-cycle system, bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees are awarded. Short cycle higher education leading to the associate's degree is offered by universities of applied sciences (part of the first cycle). Universities of applied sciences are increasingly offering three-year bachelor programmes for students with a *vwo* diploma.

Workload is measured in ECTS credits. According to Dutch law, one credit represents 28 hours of work. The grading system used in the Netherlands is on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (outstanding). The lowest passing grade is 5.5 or 6; 5; 9s are seldom given and 10s are extremely rare. For certain subjects the assessment pass/fail is used. The academic year is 42 weeks long.

The third cycle of higher education, leading to a PhD or to a Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng), is offered only by research universities. A Professional Doctorate offered by *hogescholen* is currently being developed. The three engineering universities offer technological designer programmes leading to a Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng).

Quality assurance and accreditation

Quality assurance is carried out through a system of accreditation, administered by the [Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders \(NVAO\)](#). Higher education programmes are accredited for a period of six years and eligible for government funding. All accredited programmes are listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO).

National Qualifications Frameworks

The qualifications framework in the Netherlands is referred to as the Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF) and was officially referenced to the EQF in 2012. Further information on the Dutch Qualifications Framework can be found on the website of the [National Coordination Point NLQF](#).