

Education and training in the Netherlands until August 1997

In the Netherlands, education is compulsory for pupils between 5 and 16 years of age. The law requires 16-year-olds to attend part-time education.

The Dutch education and training system distinguishes five components, which are explained separately.

Primary education

Primary education is intended for pupils between 4 and 12 years and lasts for eight consecutive years. The first year is not compulsory.

General secondary education

General secondary education is intended for pupils between 12 and 18 years of age.

There are four different types of education:

1. *pre-university education (VWO)* lasts six years and prepares pupils for a university course or higher vocational education;
2. *senior general secondary education (HAVO)* lasts five years and prepares pupils for higher vocational education;
3. *junior general secondary education (MAVO)* lasts four years and prepares pupils for senior secondary vocational education and training;
4. *junior secondary pre-vocational education (VBO)* lasts four years. The final two years comprise subjects which prepare pupils for follow-up courses in senior secondary vocational education and training.

Senior secondary vocational education and training

Senior secondary vocational education and training is provided in two learning pathways: the apprenticeship system and the school-based system. In both learning pathways the courses are based on national standards, decreed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The apprenticeship system

Trainees attend courses at school during one or two days a week; they work in practice during three or four days. The apprenticeship system is divided into three levels:

1. *foundation courses* (1 – 3 years) train apprentices to the level of starting vocationals;
2. *secondary level courses* (maximum 2 years) train trainees to be independent vocationals;
3. *tertiary courses* (maximum 2 years) prepare individuals for middle management functions or independent business professions.

Practical and theoretical examinations are distinguished. The national bodies for vocational training are responsible for both types of examination. The examinations are based on national standards.

The school-based system

Senior secondary vocational education and training is indicated as MBO. Trainees attend courses at school on a full-time basis, supplemented with periods of practical training, lasting from a few weeks up to one year within a company or institution.

The courses are divided into four variants:

1. *orientation and intermediary courses* (max 1 year), for students who are as yet undecided or who lack the necessary entry qualifications to move on to the "long" courses or "intermediate" courses of the MBO;
2. *"short" courses* (1 - 2 years) prepare students for the "intermediate" and "long" courses and for secondary level courses within the apprenticeship system. Students are trained to the level of starting vocationalals;
3. *intermediate courses* (2 – 4 years) prepare students to work competently and independently;
4. *"long" courses* (3 – 4 years) prepare students for middle management functions.

Examination is the responsibility of the schools. In specific cases they cooperate to develop common exams. The examinations are based on national standards.

Adult education

Adult education is oriented towards adults aged 18 and over. The most important forms are:

1. *Dutch as a second language*: these courses teach Dutch to foreigners who live in the Netherlands;
2. *basic education*: very elementary skills are taught (language skills, numerical skills, social skills);
3. *secondary adult education (VAVO)*: allows many adults to acquire a diploma or course certificate at junior or senior general secondary level (mavo, havo) or pre-university level (vwo);
4. *vocational courses*: a broad range of training provisions;
5. *Open University*: higher distance education accredited by the Minister of Education.

Higher education

Higher education is distinguished into *higher professional education* (HBO, age group 17 - 21) and *university education* (WO, age group 18 - 22). The identity of HBO is defined in relation to its focus on vocational practice; the identity of the universities is intertwined with scientific research. University education has a two-phase structure. The first phase lasts four years. The second phase, which lasts 2 or 3 years, is an advanced training programme for scientific research. It has limitations in capacity and admission.