

## Education and training in the Netherlands from 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 for 2 years.

### **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. Depending on results pupils will start in different forms of general secondary education

### **General Secondary education**

All types of secondary education start with a period of basic secondary education, which usually lasts 2 to 3 school years and offers a broad range of subjects that is in principle the same for everyone. The pupils are also offered 'educational and professional orientation'.

At the end of the second year, the schools advise their pupils about the type of education that is the most suitable for them. They can choose between general secondary education (havo or vwo) and secondary vocational education (vmbo).

### **General secondary education (havo or vwo)**

General secondary education consists of two types of education:

- Pre-university education (vwo), which lasts six years; it comprises the 'gymnasium' that includes Latin and Greek and the 'atheneum' that does not include Latin and Greek, and the 'lyceum', which is a combination of both;
- Senior general secondary education (havo), which lasts five years.

In the upper cycle of havo (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year) and vwo (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year) the pupils choose subject combinations, the so-called profiles. These profiles were introduced to improve the connection between secondary and higher education. Pupils can choose between the following profiles:

- culture and society
- economics and society
- science and health
- science and technology.

Each profile includes a common component that is the same for all pupils, a component that is specific for the chosen profile, and an optional component that pupils are free to choose. In the upper cycle the focus is on increasingly independent work of the pupils.

### **Pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo)**

The vmbo consists of four sectors: technology, care and welfare, economics and agriculture.

Within their own sector pupils can choose between four learning pathways:

- The theoretical learning pathway is offered at schools that provide vmbo education; it prepares pupils for the middle management training and vocational training in senior secondary vocational education (mbo) or havo;
- The mixed learning pathway is offered at schools that provide vmbo education; it prepares pupils for middle management training and vocational training in senior secondary vocational education (mbo);

- The advanced vocational learning pathway is offered at schools that provide vmbo education; it prepares pupils for the middle management and vocational training in senior secondary vocational education (mbo);
- The basic vocational learning pathway is offered at schools that provide vmbo education; it prepares pupils for the basic vocational training in senior secondary vocational education (mbo).

Learning pathways are tracks that lead to senior secondary vocational education (mbo). Each learning pathway represents a different way of learning. For each learning pathway and for each sector groups of subjects are determined. A group of subjects consists of a common component, a sector-related component and an optional component. The common component is obligatory for all pupils and consists of Dutch, English, Social Studies, Physical Education and Fine Arts. The pupils take a central school-leaving examination for the subjects Dutch and English. For Social Studies, Physical Education and Fine Arts the pupils have to pass a school exam. The sector-related component is obligatory for all pupils in one of the sectors technology, care and welfare, economics and agriculture. For the optional component pupils can choose from a number of subjects depending on the chosen learning pathway.

### **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. Both pathways are integrated in the national qualification structure and offer equal opportunities with both sets of apprentices actually eligible for the same qualifications. In the apprenticeship system, the apprentice spends at least 60 percent of the time in a so-called apprentice or traineeship company. In the school-based system, the amount of time which is spent in practice varies between 20 and 60 percent.

The national qualification structure has been decreed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The regional training centres are responsible for the examinations, which are fully based on the national standards which are specified in the national qualification structure. The training centres also present the diplomas and certificates. The training centres are obliged to involve external, independent examination centres in the examination of at least 51% of the training programme. These independent examination centres are responsible for the quality assurance in relation to the examinations.

Senior secondary vocational education and training comprises five types of courses, which vary in length and duration:

- *assistant vocational training* (0,5 - 1 year) prepares participants for simple operational work (assistant);
- *basic vocational training* (2 - 3 years) prepares participants for operational work (skilled worker);
- *professional training* (2 - 4 years) prepares participants to work competently and independently at;
- *middle-management vocational training* (3 - 4 years) trains participants to work competently and independently and to perform a wide variety of duties;
- *specialist vocational training* (1 - 2 years) trains participants to work competently and independently and to specialise in a particular field.

Level	Training programme	Duration	Admission requirements	Attainment targets	Transfer
1	Assistant training	0,5 - 1 year	without a threshold	After the training, the participant can carry out simple tasks under supervision	With the diploma of the assistant training it is possible to transfer to basic vocational training (qualification level 2).
2	Basic vocational training	2 - 3 years	diploma preparatory senior secondary vocational education (vmbo), vocationally oriented learning pathway;  diploma assistant training	The participant develops skills to carry out executive tasks. The participant has his own job responsibilities.	With the diploma of basic vocational training it is possible to transfer to vocational training (qualification level 3).
3	Vocational training	2- 4 years	diploma 'vmbo', theoretical, mixed or advanced vocational learning pathway;  diploma basic vocational training	The holder of a vocational training diploma can account for his/her activities to colleagues and monitors and guides the activities of others; he/she works out procedures for work preparation.	With the diploma of vocational training it is possible to transfer to middle-management training or specialist training (qualification level 4).
4	Middle-management training	3 - 4 years	diploma 'vmbo', theoretical, mixed or advanced vocational learning pathway;  diploma vocational training	The holder of a diploma of middle-management training has his/her own responsibilities, not in the sense of executive activities, but in a formal and organizational sense; he/she works out procedures.	After this training programme it is possible to transfer to higher vocational education.
4	Specialist training	1 - 2 years	diploma vocational training  diploma middle-management programme	The specialist has his/her own responsibilities, not in the sense of executive activities, but in a formal and organizational sense; the specialist works out procedures.	After this training programme it is possible to transfer to higher vocational education.

Courses in senior secondary vocational education and training are run by regional training centres (ROC's), agricultural training centres (AOC's) and labour organisations. Private institutions may also provide courses in senior vocational education and training, as long as they take into account the national qualification structure.

## **Adult education**

Adult education is offered to adults from the age of 18. The main types of adult education are:

- Dutch as a Second Language: this programme is meant for foreigners living in the Netherlands;
- Adult basic education: very elementary skills in the field of language, arithmetic, and social interaction;
- General secondary education for adults (VAVO) focuses on a diploma or modular certificate at vmbo, havo or vwo level.
- Vocational education: an extensive offer of training programmes;
- Open university: distance education at higher education level approved by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

## **Higher professional education**

Higher professional education (hbo) is a more practice-oriented type of higher education. Its main objective is preparation for professional practice and entry of the labour market. hbo is offered at universities of professional education (hogescholen), but the new bachelor/master (bama) structure will also enable academic universities to offer hbo education. Educational programmes in hbo last 4 years (240 credits) and they are divided into a propaedeutic year (the first year), followed by a main phase of 3 years. Usually in the third year, students perform a mandatory internship approximately 9 months to gain practical experience. On the basis of this internship, they complete a thesis or final project. hbo is offered in 7 sectors: Teacher Training, Higher Education in Agriculture, Higher Technical and Scientific Education, Higher Education in Health Care, Higher Education in Economics and Management, Higher Education in Social and Community Work and Higher Education in Fine Arts and Performing Arts.

A diploma of senior general secondary education (havo) or pre-university education (vwo) is required for admission to hbo, in some cases with additional requirements regarding specific subjects. A middle management or specialist training certificate of secondary vocational education (mbo) also gives access to hbo. Graduates are conferred the degree of Bachelor, stating the professional field in which the degree was earned (Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Education). Graduates of hbo bachelor programmes can also still opt for the 'old' titles, namely 'baccalaureus (bc.)' and 'ingenieur (ing.)'. Universities of professional education are also allowed to offer master programmes.

## **Academic Higher education**

Academic higher education (wo) offers educational programmes with the main objective of 'independent exercise of scholarly activities or the professional application of academic knowledge'. wo is offered by academic universities, but in the new bachelor/master (bama) structure it can also be offered by universities of professional education. A pre-university diploma or a propaedeutic hbo year is required for admission to wo, sometimes with additional requirements regarding specific subjects.

In the new bama structure, study programmes are divided into a bachelor programme of 3 years (180 credits), followed by a master programme of: 1 year (most programmes, 60 credits), 2 years (technical and scientific programmes, dentistry programme, 120 credits) or 3 years (veterinary medicine programme, pharmacy programme, 180 credits). The bachelor programme may have a propaedeutic phase and, depending on the institution, students are offered education in predominantly one field of study or in a major and minor (the so-called major/minor structure). Each bachelor degree automatically gives access to at least one master programme at the same university, but a bachelor degree can also be regarded as the end of formal education. Transfer to other master programmes at other institutions is also possible if this is approved by the board of the institution and if a written confirmation of admission is handed out. Upon graduation, the students are conferred the degree of master, indicating the nature of the degree, 'of arts' or 'of science', depending on the field of study. Graduates of current master programmes may still use the 'old'

university titles, namely 'doctorandus (drs.)', 'ingenieur (ir.)' and 'meester (mr.)'.

A master degree, both from hbo and from wo, can give access to the pursuit of a doctorate, which generally lasts 4 years and leads to a Doctor (dr.) degree.