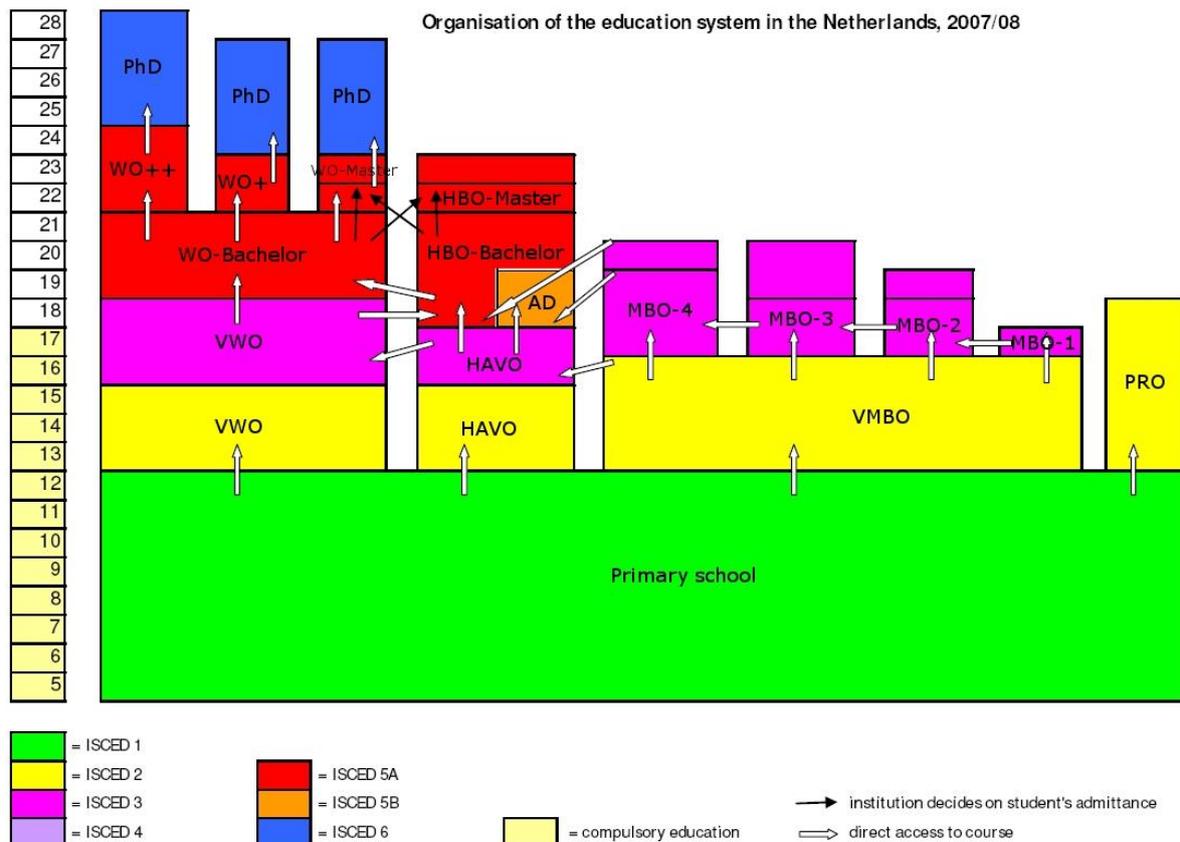


Dutch education system.

The Netherlands is committed to choice in Dutch education and you'll find a huge range of schools in the Netherlands to consider when enrolling your child into the Dutch education system, including numerous [international schools](#) of which some are also subsidised.

Compulsory education in the Netherlands, by law, applies to children of all nationalities from 5 to 18 years who are living in the Netherlands. Children are *leerplichtig* (under a learning obligation or *leerplicht* of Netherlands education) from age five for 12 years of full-time education (until 16), plus one or two years part-time until the attainment of a diploma (until 18). In the Netherlands, however, most children start primary school (*basisschool*) the day after their fourth birthday, with many children transitioning from [Dutch childcare](#) or [preschool](#) centres, for which most parents can receive government [childcare allowance](#).

Generally, [schools in the Netherlands](#) offer high-quality Dutch education. In the renowned global Pisa/OECD (2012) rankings for 15-year-olds, the Netherlands' education was 'above average' for mathematics (10th), and ranked 15th for reading and science, while all 13 state-funded [Dutch universities](#) typically score well in The Times Higher Education World University Rankings. A 2017 education ministry report, however, found that Dutch school standards varied considerably and that school choice could significantly impact a child's future, with pupils of equal skill scoring some 10–20 percentage points less on key tests as a result of primary school management and teaching, influencing pupils to enter further education phases on lower levels and making it unlikely to catch up.



The Netherlands is among the world's top countries for equity in education opportunities, which means [anyone can open a school](#) based on their personal beliefs, provided they meet Dutch education system standards. Additionally, private schools following particular religious or pedagogic principles have received equal state funding as public schools since 1917. The number of privately run schools more than doubles public ones in the Netherlands.

International education is available at both local Dutch and private schools in the Netherlands. Eighteen Dutch schools are currently following a pilot program for bilingual (Dutch/English) education, where certain subjects such as history, biology or music are taught solely in English. If the Ministry of Education concludes in 2019 that the pilot was a success, the number of bilingual schools in the Netherlands is expected to grow rapidly. There are also some Dutch schools that have recently introduced the theme-based International Primary Curriculum (IPC). In 2013, there were 965 primary schools in the Netherlands that offered English classes, and a further 100 that taught German, French and Spanish.

Many schools also combine groups one and two (age four and five). The children in this group are called *kleuters*, and the group is known as *kleuterklas*. In *kleuterklas* the focus is on learning through play, social skills, fine and gross motor skills, structure and gradual preparation for reading and writing. Formal reading and writing starts in group three (age six).

In any case, by law all schools in the Netherlands are obliged to start teaching English as a subject by group seven (about age 10) at the latest. An increasing number of schools, however, are deciding to start English earlier, sometimes even from group one. You can also find primary schools that teach French, German or Spanish.



Primary Dutch education (*primair onderwijs* or *basisonderwijs*)

The government sets attainment targets in six curriculum areas for the education system in the Netherlands: Dutch, English, arithmetic and mathematics, social and environmental studies, creative expression and sports and movement.

There are eight years of primary Netherlands education. Children are placed in 'group 1' upon entry (at age four or five), and move up a group every year after Dutch school holidays; different age groups may therefore be in the same class depending on when each child started.

In group 8, the last year of primary school (*basisscholen*), all pupils take the 'Central End Test for Primary Education' (*Centrale Eindtoets Basisonderwijs*, known as the *CITO test*) in February. This is a standardised aptitude test with questions testing Dutch language and comprehension skills, mathematics, study skills and (optionally) world orientation, which is a combination of history, geography, biology and world religions. All primary schools are obliged to take part in the end exam.

Before the end exam takes place, group eight teachers assess which level of secondary school education would fit each pupil best. They base their recommendations on various factors including the pupil's test scores from their whole school career, intelligence, attitude towards learning, eagerness to learn, interests and motivation.

Based on the end exam results and teachers' opinions, each pupil gets a recommendation for the appropriate level of secondary school education. The assessment of the teacher is generally the decisive factor.

Secondary Dutch education (*voortgezet onderwijs*)

From 12 years, pupils choose from vocational or pre-university diplomas based on their ability under the Netherlands education system. In the first years all pupils study the same subjects (to different academic levels), known as the *basisvorming*, followed by a second stage (*tweede fase*) in which students choose a specialist profile.

It is typically difficult to change vocational streams, however, in 2017 the Dutch government announced they would consider testing again at age 14 to reassess a student's capabilities before entering the third year. This would give a chance for late bloomers or hard-working students to change to a higher education stream, and create more equality in the Dutch education system.

VMBO (a further four years of school)

Prep school for vocational secondary Dutch education; those who achieve the highest level (*theoretische leerweg*) can enter HAVO studies. VMBO graduates must continue studying until age 18 or until they obtain a basic qualification (minimum MBO level 2). Read more about [vocational Dutch education](#).

MBO: Secondary vocational Dutch education

MBO programmes vary from one to four years depending on the level (1–4). All programmes combine practical learning in the classroom with hands-on training. If a student has successfully completed the Dutch VMBO or the international middle school programmes IGCSE or IB-MYP, but is not admitted to the IB-Diploma Programme, the MBO can prepare pupils for work or, if level 4 is achieved, professional studies (HBO). A number of English-language programmes are offered.

HAVO (five years)

Senior general secondary Dutch education. Provides entrance to higher professional education (*hogere beroepsonderwijs* HBO) at 'vocational universities'.

VWO (six years)

Pre-university Dutch education. Prepares students for academic studies at a research university (*Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs* WO). VWO schools can be *atheneum*, *gymnasium* or *lyceum* (a combination of the first two), a difference being that Greek and Latin are core subjects in *gymnasium* programmes.

English is a compulsory subject in the secondary Dutch education system. VMBO pupils study one modern language and HAVO/VWO pupils at least two. Other core areas include mathematics, history, humanities, arts and sciences.

Also at a secondary level, students have the choice between state-run or special private schools. Just under a third of the 659 secondary schools are run by the public authority.

Dutch universities of applied sciences (HBO)

In 2016, more than 440,000 students were enrolled at 37 'universities of applied sciences' or *hogescholen*, which provide practical-based programs lasting four years. Students can prepare for particular professions in one of seven sectors: agriculture, engineering and technology, economics and business administration, healthcare, fine and performing arts, education/teacher training and social welfare.

For more information visit the official association [Vereniging Hogescholen](#) or [see a list of courses](#), or check the government's list of [Dutch universities of applied sciences](#).

Research Dutch universities (WO)

In 2016 there were 13 research universities in the Netherlands offering international degrees and short courses, with some 240,000 students involved in intensive, academic studies in 12 different cities (Amsterdam has two universities). For more information, visit www.studyinholland.nl.

