



GUIDE TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE NETHERLANDS AND ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES IN COLOMBIA

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of National Education of Colombia (MEN) has been working, in recent years, on the creation of guides for the educational systems of different countries. These instruments aim to facilitate decision-making as to where and what to study abroad, as well as guiding the process and requirements for the recognition of higher education titles in Colombia.

The Directorate of Quality of Higher Education of the MEN completed a diagnosis of the Guides of Educational Systems that are already published on the website. In the exercise, the need to bring the technical language of education closer to the citizen was highlighted, as well as to generate an interactive instrument. In this order of ideas, the MEN and the Colombian Association of Universities – ASCUN, updated and redesigned the Educational Systems Guides.

For the writing of this guide, information from different official sources was consolidated, which allowed to offer a practical and relevant instrument for the citizen. Therefore, relevant information on four central aspects is included: 1) the higher education system; (2) legality of higher education programmes and institutions; (3) quality assurance of higher education institutions and programmes; and, 4) aspects to be considered to initiate the process of recognition of higher education titles obtained abroad.

All the information herein includes the different accessibility requirements in Web tools and products, facilitating access to the impaired. This work was possible thanks to the invaluable collaboration of the National Institute for the Blind – INCI, in Spanish.



1. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE NETHERLANDS

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen - OCW*) is the body responsible for regulating education in the Netherlands. Education, from January 1st 1901, was established as compulsory for ages between 5- and 16-year-old youth. Subsequently, based on the Constitution of 1917, the government decided to start funding education. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science also deals with government policy in the field of art and science.

Secondary and vocational education

Regulated education in the Netherlands was mainly a basic training for learning to read, write and count. Throughout the nineteenth century, the need for a "secondary" education cycle became evident in preparation for the exercise of a profession. Thus, in 1863, the Secondary Education Law came into force. In addition to the Higher Civil School of Commerce and Business (*HBS - Hogere Burgerschool Voor Handel in Bedrijf*), this law provided for agricultural schools and the polytechnic school for engineers. Later, in the twentieth century, more types of secondary education and specific vocational training were incorporated. Currently, the vocational column has three phases:

- Pre-vocational secondary education (*VMBO - Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs*).
- Upper vocational secondary education (*MBO - Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs*) y,
- Higher vocational education (*HBO - Hoger Beroepsonderwijs*).

Higher education

Currently, higher education in the Netherlands is a binary system. In addition to academic education, it also provides a wide variety in higher professional education, which is affiliated with specific orientation in the labor market. In fact, several higher professional education courses have originated in the professional practice.

Additionally, the Netherlands has several Institutes of International Education (IE Institutes) with a relatively small student population. Most of these IE institutes are part of a Dutch university. They offer a wide range of study programs in specific fields of study and, usually,



lead to a master's or doctoral degree. More information can be found on the website of the Platform for International Education, Home - PIE Online (Education System Netherlands NUFFIC 2018).

For more details on higher education in the Netherlands, the following link can be opened:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-onderwijs-cultuur-en-wetenschap/organisatie/geschiedenis>.

Higher education in the Netherlands encompasses scientific university education (*WO-Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*), which is provided by the *Universiteit (universities)* and the *Hogescholen (universities of applied sciences)*, which provide higher vocational training. *Universiteits* focus more on academic research; in contrast, *Hogescholen* focus on practical knowledge that can be applied in a work setting.

The system is organized into three cycles: 1. *Bachelor*, 2. *Masters and*, 3. *PhD*. The scientific university education, known as *WO (Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs)*, is focused on preparing students to work in an academic environment, emphasizing on research. Higher vocational training, called *HBO (Hoger Beroepsonderwijs)*, is responsible for preparing students for special professions. That is why it is usually more oriented to practice than to a scientific training.

To be admitted to (WO) it is necessary to obtain the *VWO diploma (Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs)*, which is a secondary education diploma that can only be gained after having completed 13 years of basic general education and secondary education. On the other hand, for a student to be admitted to HBO, it is necessary to have obtained the *HAVO diploma*. This is a secondary school diploma attained after spending 12 years of basic general education and secondary education.

Regarding the language in which education is taught, secondary education is mainly developed in Dutch, although there are also schools offering bilingual education, known as *TTO (Tweetalig Onderwijs)*. In higher education, instruction can be offered in English or Dutch.



To know about the academic programs of higher education that are taught in English, the following link can be addressed:

<https://www.studyinholland.nl/dutch-education/studies>.

Grading: The scale used in higher education in the Netherlands is as follows:

1. 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent).
2. The minimum qualification to pass is equivalent to six, becoming exceptional the obtaining of a nine or ten.

Degrees and academic titles

In the Netherlands, there are two types of higher education: 1) Research-oriented higher education (WO - Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs), and 2) Professional higher education (HBO - Hoger Beroepsonderwijs).

There are also some concepts specific to the Education System of the Netherlands, about which it is worth mentioning:

- VWO (*Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*): "preparatory science education". Students typically go through this education stage between the ages of 12 and 18.
- HBO (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs*): "vocational higher education". It is professionally oriented.
- HAVO (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*): "Higher General Secondary Education". Students usually go through it between the ages of 12 and 17.
- MBO (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*): "Higher Secondary Vocational Education and Training". This teaching is technically focused and can last between one and three years, depending on the area of study. In addition, it is divided into four levels, differentiated by the degree of depth and complexity of the knowledge attained by students.

The degrees and academic degrees according to the two types of higher education in the Netherlands, are:



1. Research-oriented higher education (WO - *Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*)

- Bachelor's Degree

Interval: three years (180 ECTS).

Admission requirements: a VWO diploma or a first-year certificate from HBO (*Propedeuse*).

Diploma: *Bachelor of Arts (BA)/Bachelor of Science (BSc)/Bachelor of Laws (LLB)*.

- Master's Degree

Interval: one year (60 ECTS; most degrees), 2 years (120 ECTS; specializations in natural and technical sciences; and research master's degree in various areas), 3 years (180 ECTS; medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry).

Admission requirements: *Bachelor's Degree* Diploma; depending on the area of study, additional requirements may be required.

Diploma: *Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Laws (LLM), Master of Business Administration (MBA)*.

- PDEng

- Universities with a focus on technology can also offer *PDEng (Professional Doctorate in Engineering) programs*. These programs emphasize on technological design, and are more focused on practice and business.

Interval: 2 years.

Admission requirements: A master's degree from WO and additional requirements such as a motivation letter and references.

Diploma: *PDEng (Professional Doctorate in Engineering)*.

- PhD

Interval: usually four years (in most cases, without ECTS).

These programs require independent research in combination with master classes and the development a thesis defense.

Admission requirements: A WO master's degree and additional requirements such as a student presentation and research plan.



Diploma: PhD degree in the chosen research area.

Regarding medical specialties, professionals who wish to exercise their profession in the Netherlands must demonstrate a perfect command of the official language of the country (Dutch), as well as have a valid immigration status, diplomas and degrees validated by the relevant authorities, as well as pass the tests of medical knowledge and skill.

For more information, you can visit the following link of the Official Medical Association of the Netherlands, (*KNMG - Koninklijke Nederlandsche Maatschappij tot bevordering der Geneeskunst*):

<https://www.knmg.nl/over-knmg/about-knmg/about-knmg.htm>.

- Higher Vocational Education (*HBO - Hoger Beroepsonderwijs*)
- Associate Degree

These types of programs emphasize on a practical approach. Students are usually taught about a trade sector that is in demand within the labor market.

Interval: two years (120 ECTS).

Admission requirements: a HAVO diploma, a VWO diploma, or a level 4 MBO diploma.

Diploma: Associate Degree (AD).

- Bachelor's Degree

Duration: 4 years (240 ECTS). Students with VWO diplomas can enter intensive programs at universities of applied sciences.

Admission requirements: HAVO Diploma or MBO Level 4 Diploma.

Diploma: Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Education (BEd), entre otros.



- Master's Degree

Interval: one year (60 ECTS), teaching programmes lasting two years (120 ECTS).

Admission requirements: Bachelor's Degree diploma and, in some cases, professional experience.

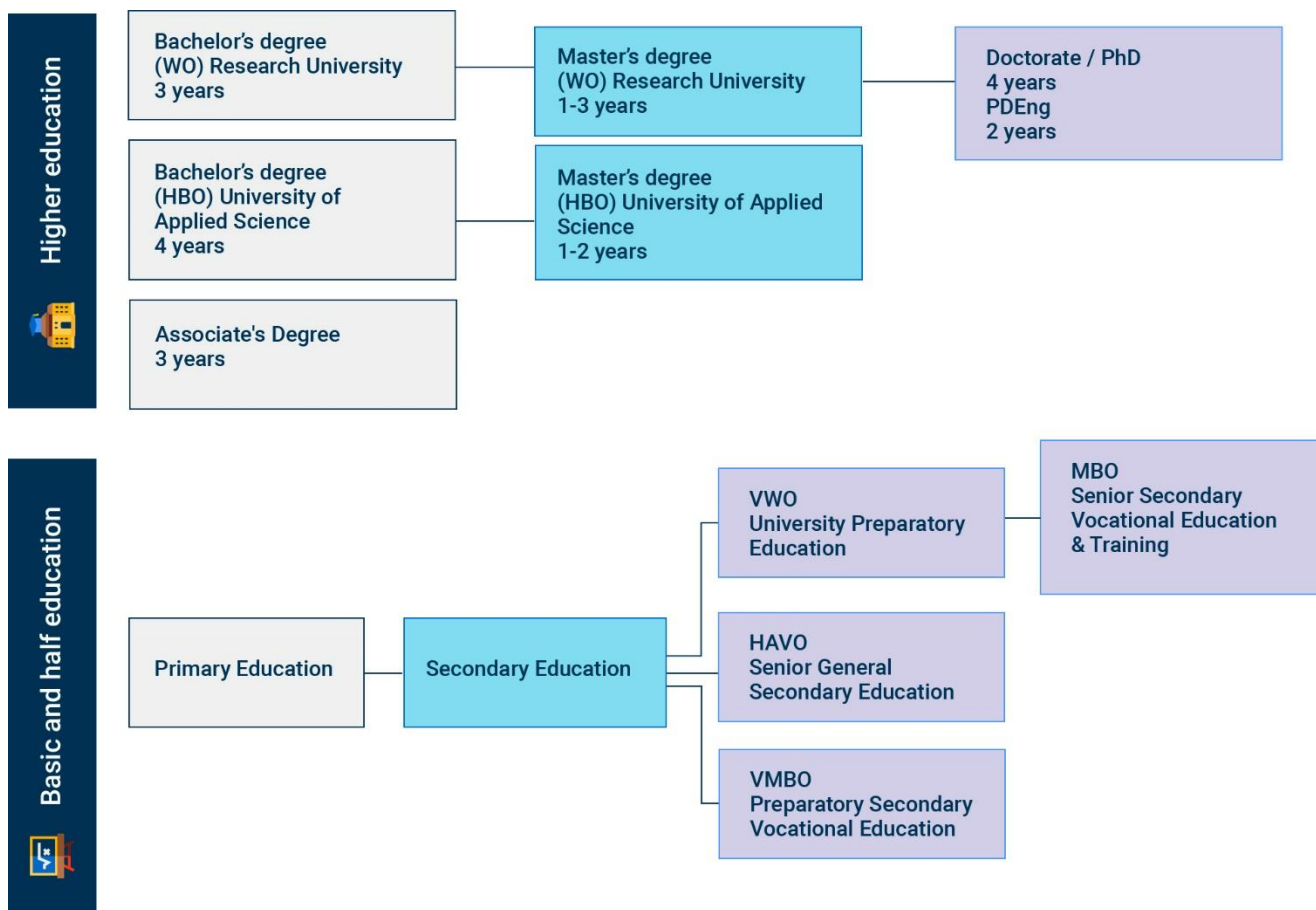
Diploma: Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Business

Administration (MBA), Master of Social Work (MSW), among other.

For more details on degrees, academic degrees and qualifications from the Netherlands, the following link can be retrieved:

<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/education-systems/netherlands/higher-education#types-of-higher-education-institutions>.

Structure of the Education System of the Netherlands



*Based on the official scheme of the education system of the Netherlands. *Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF)*:

https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/English2018/Schematic_overview_NLQF_2020.pdf

and in Nuffic's description of the Dutch system:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hes7RfuNqvU>.



Comparative table of educational levels in the Netherlands and Colombia

It is important to know the particularities of each of the educational levels, both in the Netherlands and in Colombia. Therefore, the following table presents a comparative analysis of both systems. In this comparison, reference is made to the highest levels of higher education:

Level 8: PhD level or equivalent.

Level 7: Master's level, specialization or equivalent.

Level 6: Degree in tertiary education or equivalent level.

Level 5: Short cycle tertiary education.

Comparative table: educational levels in the Netherlands and Colombia

ISCED UNESCO LEVELS	LEVELS NETHERLANDS	YEARS	LEVELS COLOMBIA	YEARS
8	Doctorate/ PhD (4 años) PDEng (2 años)	2-4	Doctorado	4-5
8	Medical Specialist	>4	N/A	N/A
7	N/A	N/A	Medical Surgical Specialization	1-5
7			Medical Specialization	2
7	Master's Degree (WO) Research University	1-3	Masters	2
7	Master's Degree (HBO) University of Applied Science	1-2		
6	N/A	N/A	University Specialization	1
6	Bachelor's Degree (WO) Research University	3	University Professional Degree	4-5
6	Bachelor's Degree (HBO) University of Applied Science	4		
5	N/A	N/A	Technological Specialization	<1
5			Technical Specialization	1
5	Associate's Degree	2	Technologist	3
5			Professional Technician	2



*Based on the official scheme of the education system of the Netherlands. Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF):

https://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/English2018/Schematic_overview_NLQF_2020.pdf.

It is important to highlight the chronological measure corresponding to educational levels and their comparison with respect to international standards:

- **Academic credits:** Both in Colombia and in the Netherlands, the estimated time of academic activity of the student depending on the academic competences that the program is expected to develop, is expressed in units called academic credits.
- **Academic credit in the Netherlands:** In the Netherlands, the workload of students is determined using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), with an academic credit representing 28 hours of work. Students must attain at least 60 academic credits per year. For more information on the characteristics of higher education in the Netherlands, the following link can be addressed:

<https://www.government.nl/topics/secondary-vocational-education-mbo-and-higher-education/higher-education>.

- **Academic credit in Colombia:** it is a unit of measurement of the student's academic work, indicating the effort to be made for the achievement of learning outcomes. It is equivalent to forty-eight (48) hours in an academic period. Institutions determine the ratio between the direct relationship with the teacher and the independent practice of the student, justified according to the training process and the foreseen learning outcomes for the program.

Institutions must express in academic credits all training activities that are part of the curriculum (Decree 1330 of 2019, article 2.5.3.2.4.1).

- **ISCED-UNESCO Levels:** The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a frame of reference for collecting, compiling and internationally analyzing comparable statistics in the field of education.



LEGALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND INSTITUTIONS

Three types of higher education institutions are recognized in the Netherlands:

- Public or official institutions (*bekostigde*): These are institutions funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science or the Ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Innovation, with authority to grant officially recognized degrees. These institutions offer programs with tuition fees established by law.
- Approved (*aangewezen*): These are institutions that do not receive government funding but enjoy authority to award officially recognized bachelor's or master's degrees. These institutions are not subject to official tuition fees, so they can determine the prices of academic service on their own.
- Private institutions (*particuliere*): These are institutions not covered by the regulations of the government of the Netherlands, for example, foreign universities.

Legally constituted higher education institutions are regulated by the NVAO (*Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders*), following the guidelines established by the Dutch *Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)*. In the following link, there is a database, both of programs and of higher education institutions with legal academic offer in the Netherlands:

<https://www.nvaio.net/en/procedures/the-netherlands/recognition-of-new-higher-education-institution-recognised-private-institutions>.

QUALITY ASSURANCE



The organization responsible for monitoring quality in education in the Netherlands is the NVAO - Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders. The NVAO has developed criteria that allow a review of the quality of higher education institutions. "General" universities and universities of applied sciences must designate an evaluator body (accreditation agency), who will review the quality of a degree program based on these criteria. The accreditation agency must be composed of independent experts. NVAO will then issue a decision based on the accreditation agency's report. If the degree program meets the criteria, NVAO will accredit the degree program. This accreditation is valid for a period of six years.

Higher education institutions in the Netherlands can also access institutional quality certification. This benefit is achieved through an audit by the NVAO and, if the result is satisfactory, the university can access an institutional quality certification.

The database where the information of the certified academic programs of public institutions is found is the CROHO - Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes. To consult the catalog of accredited programs, the following link can be addressed:

<https://duo.nl/zakelijk/hoger-onderwijs/studentenadministratie/opleidingsgegevens-in-croho/raadplegen-en-downloaden.jsp>.

For information related to quality accreditation in the Netherlands, the following links can be addressed:

<https://www.nvao.net/en>.

<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/education-systems/netherlands/accreditation-and-quality-ssurance>.

CONSIDERATIONS TO START THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES OBTAINED IN THE NETHERLANDS

Resolution 10687 of 2019, issued by the Ministry of National Education, regulates the recognition of higher education degrees granted abroad, recognizing the quality assurance systems of the countries where the degrees were obtained.



The process of recognition of higher education degrees in Colombia is part of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System, which guarantees that, like the national offer, that from other countries has the official quality recognition by the states where the degrees were issued.

IMPORTANT: If an undergraduate degree is in law, accounting, education or the area of health, additional requirements must be verified, all stipulated in chapters one and two of resolution 10687 of 2019 of the Ministry of National Education, available at the following link: https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1759/articles-401316_archivo_pdf.

Considerations for performing the recognition process

It is worth remembering that it is not mandatory to advance the process of recognition of higher education degrees that have been obtained in other countries. Recognition is necessary in the following cases:

1. For regulated occupations in which professional associations require recognition.
2. For people who wish to work in the public sector as contractors or public officials.
3. For public tenders in which specifications indicate it as necessary.
4. For teachers of public educational institutions who seek to place in the ranking.

To study in the Netherlands and subsequently obtain recognition of the degree in Colombia, the following must be considered:

- Studies must be advanced at a higher education institution recognized by the Netherlands.
- Have the respective apostille or chain of legalization in the documents.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is the body responsible for the apostille process. In the case of educational degrees and degrees, the diploma must meet the following requirements:



- It must be original and complete.
- It must be signed by an official representative of the school or university.
- It must be printed on the original paper of the educational institution.
- The educational institution and the study programme must be recognized and accredited by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.
- The diploma must be recorded in the DUO diploma register, which contains the information of diplomas awarded by most study programmes in the Netherlands.

The procedure can be requested in any district court, once the payment of fees for the apostille is generated. The citizen can choose in which office to request it, since the process varies between the districts. The apostille can be requested by the interested party or by a third party without requiring special authorization.

To access detailed information about the apostille process, following links can be addressed:

- <https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/living-working/legalisation-of-dutch-documents-for-use-abroad/legalisation-of-dutch-documents-by-apostille>
 - <https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/living-working/using-dutch-qualifications-abroad/options/legalising-a-dutch-diploma-or-certificate>
 - <https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/contact/contacting-the-24-7-bz-contact-centre>.
- The different recognition criteria must be taken into account, according to the program and the higher education institution granting the degree.

If you have a degree issued by a higher education institution in the Netherlands, and your recognition is required in Colombia, the following questions and answers can help you understand the process:

- a) When is it necessary to recognize a foreign higher education degree? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:



<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidations/Convalidations-Education-Superior/350670:Know-the-process>

- b) What is the difference between homologation and recognition? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>

- c) In case of doubt, who can help? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>

- d) What are the steps for the recognition of higher education diplomas? The answer to this question can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.co/ficha-tramites-y-servicios/T366>

- e) What are the costs of the process of validation of higher education diplomas? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidations/Convalidations-Education-Superior/350995:Cost-and-duration>

In case of more questions regarding the process, the following link might help:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353> (FAQ).

Para más preguntas respecto del proceso, se puede ingresar al siguiente enlace:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>.



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