

THE DUTCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

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One important feature of the Dutch school system is that there are public and so-called special schools. The origin of this division comes from the different political movements like liberals, socialists and Christian-democrats, which had a major influence on the Dutch society in the last century. There is a wide range of types of special schools like Catholic, Protestant and Islamic schools, but also schools based on particular educational philosophies like Montessori, Steiner or more recent initiatives.

The Dutch educational system consists of 8 years of primary schooling, 4–6 years of secondary education and afterwards either vocational training or higher education. Education in the Netherlands is compulsory up to the age of 23 unless people get a degree before that age.

The primary school starts at age 4 and includes two years of Kindergarten. The teachers working at these schools have completed 4 years of study at a special university of applied sciences (PABO). In the last year of the primary education nearly 85 % of the pupils pass an exam, which is called CITO.

There are three main different types of secondary schools.

University preparatory education (vwo) lasts 6 years and leads directly to higher education at universities. Senior general secondary education (havo) lasts 5 years and leads to higher education at universities of applied sciences.

The preparatory vocational secondary training (vmbo) consists of 4 types of schools: a theoretical branch, a theoretical-practical branch and two types of practical branches (according to the level of the pupils). For those who are not able to obtain a diploma there is a fifth option, which consists of only vocational and practical training and has very low theoretical demands. All these types of schools should lead to a kind of qualification for the senior secondary vocational education.

After having finished the preparatory vocational secondary training students are admitted to secondary vocational education and training (vmbo). Most of the studies are combined in regional educational centres (ROC) but there are some specialised schools, which specialise in arts, for example. There are four so-called qualification levels. Students

who have successfully absolved the vmbo will qualify for the second, third or fourth level. The first level is for those, who have not successfully finished secondary education. There are two types of universities for higher education in the Netherlands: so-called research universities and universities of applied sciences. Both universities have a bachelor and master structure. After completing a master degree at the universities it is possible to study for a PhD.

Generally it is possible to switch from one kind of school to the other: for example, pupils from the highest level of vmbo can switch after four years. Senior secondary vocational education and universities of applied sciences have both introduced competence-based forms of learning.