

The education system of

Canada

described and compared with
the Dutch system

Education system Canada

This document provides information about the educational system of Canada. We describe to which Dutch diplomas you can compare certain diplomas from Canada.

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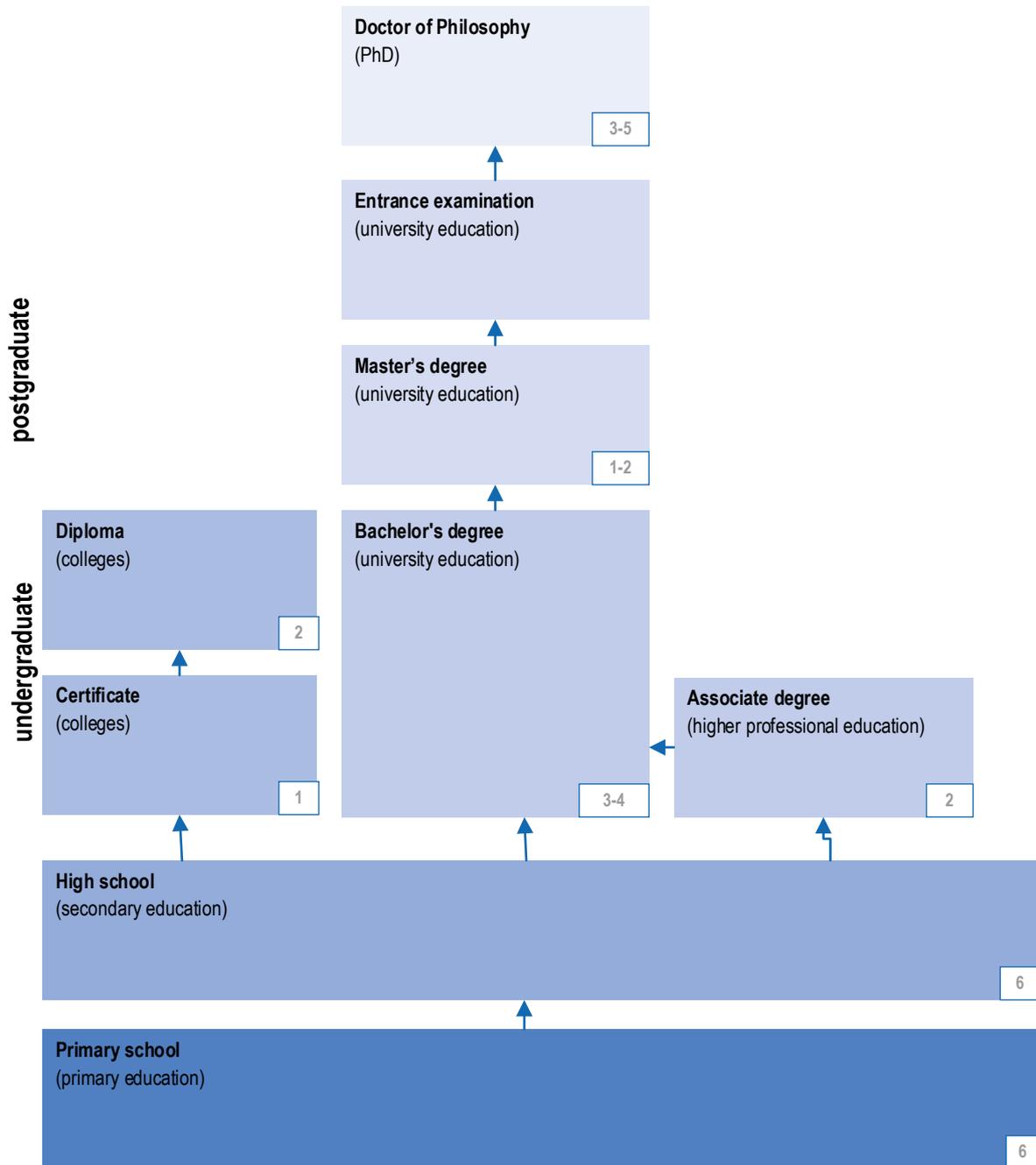
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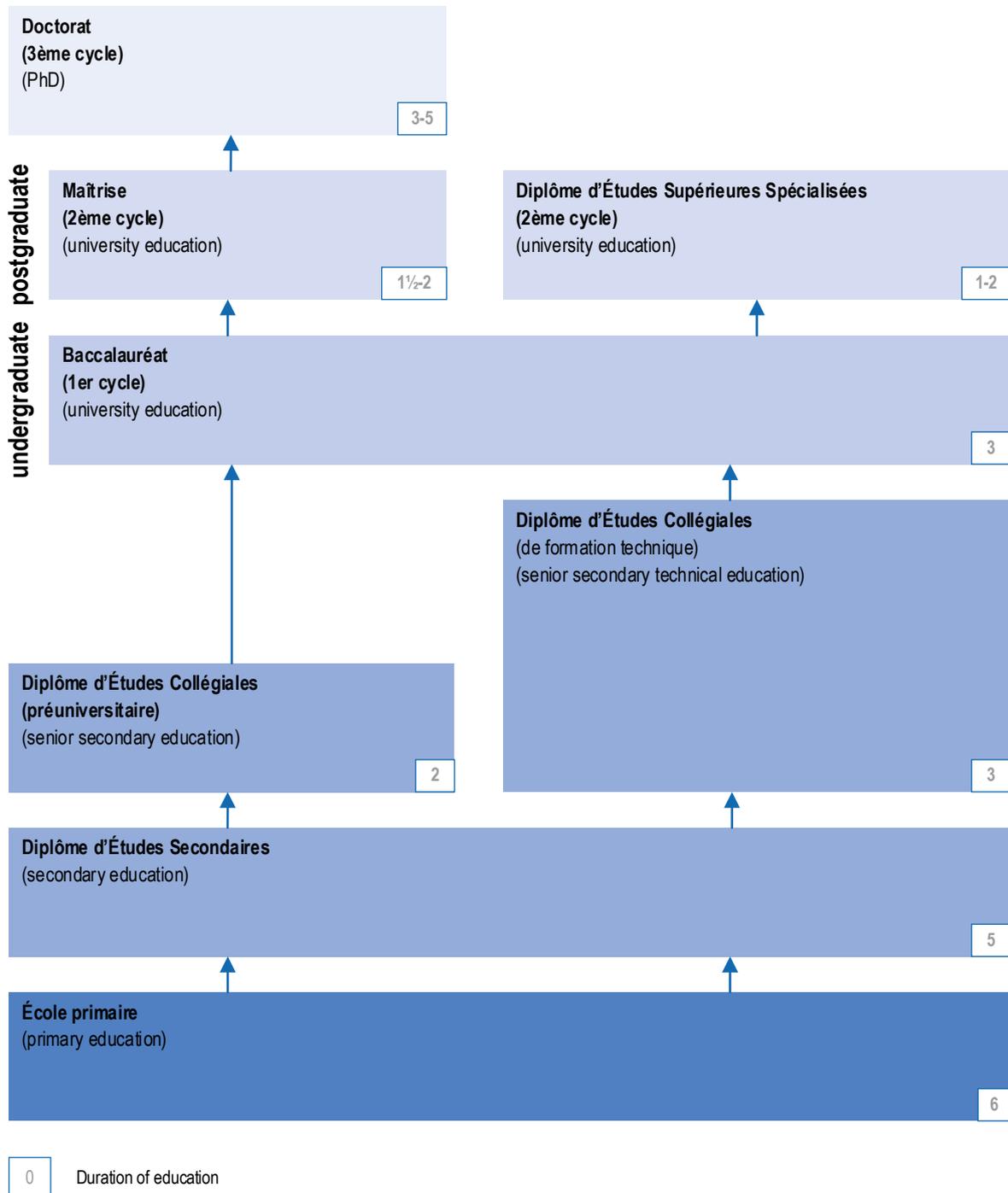
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Chart: education system in English-speaking Canada



0 Duration of education

Chart: education system in French-speaking Canada



Overview of diploma evaluations

To which Dutch diplomas can you compare Canadian diplomas? We give an overview of diplomas that Dutch higher education institutions often see when Canadian students apply for a degree programme.

Diploma	OQF level	Compared to	NLQF level	EQF level
<p>A high school diploma from an English-speaking province, such as the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta High School Diploma • Manitoba High School Diploma • Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) • Senior Secondary Graduation Diploma (Dogwood diploma) 	-	usually a HAVO diploma, but sometimes a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO-diploma or at least a HAVO diploma	4	4
<p>A high school diploma from an English-speaking province (such as the Alberta High School Diploma, Manitoba High School Diploma and Senior Secondary Graduation Diploma) obtained with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good grades; and • a relatively large number of academic courses in Grades 11 and 12. 		at least a HAVO diploma*	4	4
<p>Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) obtained with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an average of 65% in all subjects; and • 6 relevant Grade 12 subjects, including English and mathematics, with the subject code U or M. 	-	at least a HAVO diploma*	4	4
Certificate obtained at a college	5	1 year of HBO	5	5
Diploma obtained at a college	7	2 years of HBO	5	5
Associate Degree obtained at a college	7	1 year of WO	5	5

Education system Canada

Diploma	OQF level	Compared to	NLQF level	EQF level
Bachelor's degree (3 years)	10	an HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO	6	6
Bachelor's degree (honours) obtained at a college (4 years)	11	an HBO bachelor's degree	6	6
Bachelor's degree (honours) obtained at a university (4 years)	11	a WO bachelor's degree	6	6
Master's degree	12	an HBO or a WO master's degree	7	7
Quebec				
Diploma		Compared to	NLQF level	EQF level
<i>Diplôme d'Études Secondaires (DES)</i>		4 years of VWO	4+	4
<i>Diplôme d' Études Collégiales (DEC) with the designation préuniversitaire (2 years)</i>		a VWO diploma	4+	4
<i>Diplôme d' Études Collégiales (DEC) with the designation de formation technique or de formation en métiers d'art (3 years)</i>		a VWO diploma with vocational subjects	4+	4
<i>Baccalauréat (Bachelier)</i>		a WO bachelor's degree	6	6
<i>Maîtrise professionnelle</i>		an HBO master's degree	7	7
<i>Maîtrise de recherche</i>		a WO master's degree	7	7

* This comparison has been changed compared to the previous version.

Please note:

- This is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- [OQF](#) = Ontario Qualifications Framework.
- [NLQF](#) = Dutch Qualifications Framework.
- [EQF](#) = European Qualifications Framework.
- The NLQF or EQF level is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- You can find information about the Dutch diplomas on our web pages about [the education system in the Netherlands](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#) evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may be different if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or for work in the Netherlands.

■ Introduction

Canada consists of 10 provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador) and 3 territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut).

In Canada, the provinces and territories are individually responsible for primary, secondary and higher education. Every province has a Ministry/Department of Education for educational policy, funding and quality assurance. This description will deal with education in the different provinces, including the 2 most significant provinces, Ontario and Quebec. On the whole, the education systems of the remaining provinces are similar to that of Ontario.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, education in Canada was influenced by French and British rule, but in the 20th century influence came increasingly from its neighbour, the United States. It is for this reason that many elements of the Canadian education system resemble the American system.

The education system in Canada is varied, containing differences in level, content and quality. However, these differences are less pronounced than in the neighbouring United States. In contrast to the United States, most universities are public. Canada has almost no private universities, although the number has increased slowly over recent years. In that time, Canada has also become a popular country in which to study. The 2 main reasons for this are that tuition fees in Canada are generally lower and the immigration procedures less rigorous than in the United States. Increasing popularity also has a drawback: institutions are placing higher and higher demands on potential students.

Canada is a bilingual country, the official languages being English (67% of the population) and French (13%, mostly in Quebec). 20% of the population has a native language that is neither English nor French. The language of education is either English or French. Some higher education institutions are bilingual, such as the University of Ottawa and the Laurentian University.

French is mostly used in Quebec. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and North-West Territories education is mainly offered in English, but also in some cases in French, while Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia and Yukon offer their education solely in English.

In most provinces education is compulsory from age 6-16. The academic year runs from September until May/June.

■ Primary and secondary education

Primary and general education in English-speaking provinces

In principle, general education consists of 6 years of primary (or 'elementary') education, followed by 6 years of secondary education. The division of grades up to and including the 12th year varies from province to province.

The most common divisions are:

- 6 + 3 + 3 (elementary + junior high + senior high school);
- 8 + 4 (elementary + secondary); and
- 6 + 6 (elementary + secondary).

Regardless of the division, secondary education starts in the 6th year, when pupils attend classes in individual subjects with specialist subject teachers.

Secondary education

Secondary education is predominantly general in nature, with the option of taking vocational-technical subjects to varying degrees, depending on the school and region. Usually, students can take subjects at different levels.

High school diploma

At the end of grade 12, the same certificate (the high school diploma) is awarded to all graduates, regardless of the programme taken. The name of the diploma varies from province to province.

Each province determines the minimum requirements for obtaining a high school diploma, expressed in terms of the minimum number of credits that students must obtain in the last 2 or 4 years. This number also varies by province and is around 30 credits (Ontario), 18 credits (English-speaking New Brunswick) and 20 credits (French-speaking New Brunswick), or 80 credits (Dogwood diploma of British Columbia).

Subjects at different levels

Students can receive credits for compulsory subjects and electives. They can also get credits for non-academic subjects, such as helping the elderly. Students choose a subject cluster according to their ability and ambitions. Students who wish to continue to higher education will always need to fulfil more than the than the minimum requirements for the high school diploma.

Therefore, grades are very important: a sufficient number of subjects at academic level with good grades (70 or even 80% on average) must have been obtained. Subjects at academic level are called academic courses. These are general education subjects that are approved for admission to higher education.

A number of provinces, such as British Columbia, have central provincial exams in addition to school exams.

We compare a high school diploma from one of the English-speaking provinces usually to a HAVO diploma, but sometimes to a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO diploma or at least a HAVO diploma. This depends on the content of the study programme and the study results.

We compare a high school diploma from one of the English-speaking provinces to at least a HAVO diploma* if it is obtained with:

- a relatively large number of academic courses in grades 11 and 12; and
- good study results.

* This comparison has been changed compared to the previous version.

Please note: 'at least a HAVO diploma' means that the high school diploma has a higher level than a HAVO diploma, but a lower level than a VWO diploma. The level of the diploma lies between a HAVO diploma and a VWO diploma.

Primary and general secondary education in Alberta

After 6 years of elementary education, general secondary education in Alberta lasts 6 years (K-12). The senior high school consists of a 3-year upper level programme (grades 10 to 12). Finally, students can obtain the Alberta High School Diploma.

Students must obtain a minimum of 100 credits to complete the 3-year programme. Compulsory graduation subjects are English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education and career and life management. The French curriculum (French First Language - Francophone) also requires 100 credits.

For more details on graduation requirements, see the Guide to Education on the [Alberta Ministry of Education website](#).

We compare the *Alberta High School Diploma* usually to a HAVO diploma, but sometimes to a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO diploma or at least a HAVO diploma. This depends on the content of the study programme and the study results.

Please note, a more challenging curriculum has been completed if the *Alberta High School Diploma* is obtained with:

- 5 relevant subjects, including English and mathematics, at level 30-39 (Grade 12);
- an average of at least 65% in these 5 subjects; and
- more than 100 credits.

Primary and general secondary education in British Columbia

Elementary education lasts for 6 years and is followed by general education that again lasts for 6 years (K-12).

The current curriculum is named the 2018 Graduation Program, in which the students need to complete 80 credits in order to be able to graduate:

- 48 credits for the compulsory subjects;
- 28 credits for the electives; and
- 4 credits for graduation transitions (physical education, 30 hours of community service and a personal plan of development).

After completion, the Senior Secondary Graduation Diploma, also known as the Dogwood diploma, is issued to the student. The final exam consists of the subjects language arts, mathematics, social studies and science. The Dogwood diploma is also issued in a French version by the institutions.

In case a student has obtained a Grade Point Average (GPA) higher than 3.0 (B), the transcript will state that the pupil has 'honours standing'. However, this is not mentioned on the diploma.

We compare the *Senior Secondary Graduation Diploma (Dogwood Diploma)* usually to a HAVO diploma, but sometimes to a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO diploma or at least a HAVO diploma. This depends on the content of the study programme and the study results.

Please note, a more challenging curriculum has been completed if the *Senior Secondary Graduation Diploma (Dogwood Diploma)* is obtained with:

- 5 relevant Grade 12 subjects, including English and mathematics; and
- an average of at least 65% in these 5 subjects.

Primary and general secondary education in Manitoba

In Manitoba, the early years school education lasts for 4 years (Grades 1-4), while middle years school lasts for 4 years (Grades 5-8), followed by 4 senior years of general secondary education (Grades 9-12).

Students can choose 1 out of 4 programmes:

- English;
- *Français* (French as first language);
- French immersion (French as 2nd language); and
- senior years technology education.

In the senior years a credit system is used in which 30 credits are required to obtain the *Manitoba High School Diploma* (also known as *Manitoba Senior Years Diploma*). The number of required credits has changed several times in the past years.

Compulsory subjects in Manitoba

Compulsory subjects in the English programme consist of 17 credits and include English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science and physical education.

The French programme and the French immersion programme also require 30 credits to complete. Compulsory subjects consist of 21 credits, including French.

The subjects are described in distinctive levels:

- F (foundation)
- G (general)
- S (specialised)
- A (advanced)
- M (modified)
- I (individualised)
- E (English as Additional Language, EAL).

We compare the *Manitoba High School Diploma* (also known as *Manitoba Senior Years Diploma*) usually to a HAVO diploma, but sometimes to a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO diploma or at least a HAVO diploma. This depends on the content of the study programme and the study results.

Primary and general secondary education in Ontario

In Ontario, pupils first attend elementary education from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Then they continue learning during a 3-year programme of general secondary education, Grade 9 to 12.

If the students obtain the graduation requirements, they will receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). All subjects (courses) for the OSSD are given a code made up of 5 characters (for example, ENG4C). The first 3 letters indicate the subject (ENG = English), the next digit indicates the school year (1 = Grade 9,

4 = Grade 12) and the following letter indicates the type of subject (C for "college preparation", see the list below).

The letters for the various subject types are as follows:

P =	applied
D =	academic
O =	open
E =	workplace preparation
C =	college preparation
M =	university/college preparation
U =	university preparation

We compare the *Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)* usually to a HAVO diploma, but sometimes to a VMBO-T diploma, an MBO diploma or at least a HAVO diploma. This depends on the content of the study programme and the study results.

We compare the *Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)* to at least a HAVO diploma* if it is obtained with:

- an average of at least 65% in all subjects; and
- 6 relevant Grade 12 subjects, including English and mathematics, with subject code U or M.

* This comparison has been changed compared to the previous version.

Please note: 'at least a HAVO diploma' means that the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) has a higher level than a HAVO diploma, but a lower level than a VWO diploma. The level of the diploma lies between a HAVO diploma and a VWO diploma.

Primary and general secondary education in Quebec

General education is organised differently in Quebec than in the other provinces. The language of education in Quebec is mainly French. In Quebec, the *Diplôme d'Études Secondaires (DES)* is awarded after 6 years of primary education and 5 years of secondary education (grades 7-11).

Students who wish to continue studying must then complete another 2 years at a *Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CÉGEP)*. At the end of this programme, they are awarded the *Diplôme d'Études Collégiales (DEC)*. This diploma, with the designation *préuniversitaire*, grants entry to universities in Quebec.

The DEC has a number of different subject clusters, such as:

- *Sciences de la nature*;
- *Sciences, Lettres et arts*; and
- *Sciences humaines*.

CÉGEPs also offer 3-year vocational programmes that prepare students for a certain profession. Students who complete this programme are also awarded a *Diplôme d'Études Collégiales* (DEC). It is also possible, in individual cases, to get access to higher education in a related study field.

We compare the *Diplôme d'Études Secondaires* (DES) to 4 years of VWO.

We compare the *Diplôme d'Études Collégiales* (DEC) following a 2-year programme with the designation *préuniversitaire* to a VWO diploma.

We compare the *Diplôme d'Études Collégiales* (DEC) following a 3-year programme with the designation *de formation technique* or *de formation en métiers d'art* to a VWO diploma with vocational subjects.

■ Admission to higher education

Most institutions in Canada select students according to their own criteria, although selection is usually less competitive and organised in a different manner than in the United States. The most important components in selection and admission are the subject list and the grades accompanying the diploma. A high school diploma is the minimum requirement in all provinces.

For example, a student with an Alberta High School Diploma who wishes to study in Ontario will need to satisfy certain criteria, such as specific subjects taken at a certain level. Centralised tests, such as the SAT in the United States, are not required for admission to university.

Admission to higher education in Alberta

For many undergraduate programmes, admission based on a high school diploma is not directly possible. Admission requirements may vary from 1 year university study with certain subjects to a completed bachelor programme. The programme in business for example requires for admission 1 year of study (with

subjects in the areas of English, economics, mathematics and statistics), and the programme in education requires 1 year of study.

For admission to an undergraduate programme in law a bachelor's degree in any field plus an entrance exam are required. For medical programmes, 2 years of natural sciences subjects is required (dentistry), while medicine requires 4 years of natural sciences subjects plus an entrance exam. Engineering in general offers a common curriculum for students in the first year, after which specialisation is possible. The engineering programmes usually last for 4 years (traditional programme) or 5 years (co-op programme, including a 20-month paid practical training).

For admission to the first year – based on a secondary education diploma – and in preparation to admission to a bachelor's programme, pupils need an average result of at least 70% in 5 required subjects, while for admission to the honours programme 80% is required. For admission to the 2-year Diploma programmes, percentages are lower (50%).

Admission to higher education in British Columbia

For admission to a bachelor programme the universities require that high school students meet the high school graduation requirements with an average result of at least 70% in 4 Grade 12 subjects (including English), relevant for the programme they have selected.

Admission to higher education in Manitoba

For admission to a bachelor's programme in Manitoba a student needs to have graduated from high school with 5 full credits and subjects from category A, S or G, including English and mathematics, and an average result of at least 65-70% in 3 Grade 12 S subjects. For Diploma programmes a high school diploma with certain S subjects, depending on the programme the student has selected, is required.

For architecture, law, arts and social work requirements apply and direct admission based on a high school diploma is not possible.

Admission to higher education in Ontario

For admission with the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) students need to have completed a minimum of 6 University (U) level or University/College (M) level subjects, including English. For these subjects, the level 4U must have been obtained with an average of 70%. The curriculum requirements may vary significantly from one university to another, but relevant subjects at academic level are always required.

Admission to universities and the Ontario College of Art and Design is coordinated by the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). The Ontario College Application Centre deals with the admission to colleges of applied arts and technology and the agricultural colleges. The admission to private career colleges is not arranged by any central body.

Admission to higher education in Quebec

The most common method for admission to higher education in Quebec is the submission of a DEC (*Diplôme d'Études Collégiales*) from a 2-year pre-university programme in *sciences, lettres et arts* or in computer science and mathematics. In total this represents 13 years of education. These programmes are offered by *colleges d'enseignement general et professionnel*, the so-called *Cégeps*.

A DEC from a 3-year technical programme **can** offer admission, but only when certain subject requirements have been met and when the programme is in a related study field. However, usually these programmes are preparing students for work.

Another requirement for most universities in Quebec is the French language exam for non-francophones. Canadian students from other provinces (and also Dutch students with a VWO diploma) first need to complete a preparatory year, an *année de transition*, before they can enrol into the *Bachelier*-programme, for example. Another possibility for admission for students from Quebec is with enrolment after the completion of 1 year of higher education outside Quebec, after which they can be admitted as a transfer student.

The higher education institutions in Quebec use a calculation method named *cote de rendement au collegial* (abbreviated as *Cote R*) for student ranking and to determine how high above average the student has scored. The *Cote R* is determined by the ministry on a yearly basis. The higher education institutions also take into account the average of the required subjects.

■ Higher education

An important feature of the higher education system is that it is based on the principle that anybody who wishes to do so should be able to complete a higher education programme in any specialisation they wish. All programmes that require a high school diploma fall under the category of higher education. Status from education does not come so much from the fact that one has completed higher education, but rather from the level to which one has done so.

The names of the most common degrees are limited, however just as in secondary education, the differences in level and content can vary greatly. Two-year programmes resembling the (Dutch) MBO or HBO are provided by

community colleges, and there are undergraduate and graduate programmes at colleges and universities up to PhD-level.

No distinction is made between higher professional education and academic education; both types of education can be provided by the same institution. Students in bachelor's programmes always have ample freedom to choose electives, allowing a professional major to be supplemented with subjects of a more academic nature, and vice versa.

Types of higher education institutions

The same applies to the terms 'college' and 'university', which are used interchangeably. The education offered by both types of institutions can be of varying quality. Officially, the difference between these 2 types is that universities provide both graduate and undergraduate programmes and have multiple professional schools, whereas colleges concentrate on undergraduate education.

Higher education institutions in Canada can have various legal statuses. 'Recognized' higher education institutions are authorised to issue their own diplomas, and the quality of the programmes they offer is guaranteed. 'Authorized' institutions have limited authority to issue degrees or diplomas for certain programmes. Institutions that are 'registered' or 'licensed' are monitored by the government, to examine the quality of the institutions and their programmes. 'Non-registered' institutions are private institutions, whose programmes are not monitored for quality.

In order to give students in remote areas the opportunity to study, much education in Canada is offered in the form of distance learning.

Credit transfer is also very common, for example in 'articulated' programmes, for which institutions make official agreements regarding which institution will provide which part of a certain programme, and which institution will issue the diploma. Information on these programmes can be found in transfer guides.

Higher education in Alberta

Higher education in Alberta is offered by universities, colleges and technical institutes. Well-known universities are the University of Alberta (also francophone), the Athabasca University (distance education), the University of Lethbridge and the University of Calgary. The undergraduate programmes usually have a duration of 4 years and the graduate programmes 2 years (thesis and non-thesis).

The colleges and technical institutes are allowed to offer (applied) undergraduate and a number of graduate programmes, besides certificate programmes (1 year) and diploma programmes (2 years).

Applied bachelor's programmes also last for 4 years and consist of 3 years of study and 1 year paid practical training.

Higher education in British Columbia

Higher education in British Columbia is offered by universities, colleges, university colleges, institutes, community colleges and career training institutions, public as well as private. Well-known universities are the Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria. Undergraduate programmes usually have a duration of 3 to 4 years and the *graduate* programmes 1 to 2 years.

University colleges offer associate (2 years), undergraduate programmes (3 to 4 years) and applied masters (1 to 2 years). Colleges offer associate programmes and since 2003 public colleges are allowed to offer applied bachelors (4 years).

The Private Training Institutions Branch (PTIB) of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training administers the Private Training Act (PTA). On its [website](#) the PTIB maintains a [Private Training Institution Directory](#) of all certified institutions and the programmes they provide, along with formerly certified institutions.

Higher education in Manitoba

Higher education in Manitoba is offered by universities, one university college and colleges. Well-known universities are the University of Manitoba (also francophone), the University of Winnipeg and the Brandon University. Most universities offer undergraduate programmes, graduate programmes and doctoral programmes. General Bachelors have a duration of 3 years, while honours Bachelors last 4 years and graduate programmes usually 2 years. The university college focusses on undergraduate programmes. The colleges offer certificate programmes (1 year) and diploma programmes (2 years).

Higher education in Ontario

In Ontario higher education is offered by universities, colleges of applied arts and technology, colleges and private career colleges (PCCs). Well-known universities are the Carlton University, Charles Sturt University, Trent University, University of Toronto, University of Ottawa and the University of Guelph. The Ontario College of Art and Design partly has university status.

Most universities offer undergraduate (3 years, honours programmes (4 years) as well as graduate programmes, although some concentrate on undergraduate programmes. Colleges of applied arts and technology offer mainly professional certificates (1 year) and diploma programmes (2 or 3 years), although some currently also have been granted the right to confer applied bachelors. The Ontarian government provides a complete [list of colleges](#).

The PCCs offer certificate and diploma programmes for paramedical professions, ICT, tourism, etc. These programmes must be approved by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Registered PCCs can be found online via the [Private Career College Search Service](#).

Higher education in Quebec

Higher education in Quebec is offered by universities. Well-known universities are the Université du Québec, Université Laval, Université de Montréal, McGill University and Concordia University.

The universities offer bachelor's, master's and PhD programmes. The bachelor's programmes (*Baccalauréat*) have a duration of 3 years (90 credits). The honours programmes also have a duration of 3 years and provide more in-depth study in the major. The master's programmes (*Maîtrise*) usually have a duration of 1½ to 2 years (45 to 60 credits).

There are 2 types of master's programmes:

- *Maîtrise de recherche* (research master) with a *mémoire* (thesis);
- *Maîtrise professionnelle* (professional Master) without a *mémoire*.

Furthermore, several non-degree graduate programmes are offered leading to the *Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées*.

■ University education

Academic education in Ontario and English-speaking provinces

There are 93 universities or institutions that provide university education and are members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). As is the case in the United States, there are differences between universities.

Canada has 3 types of universities, described as:

- Primarily undergraduate: universities whose focus is more on undergraduate education, and less on graduate programmes;
- Comprehensive: universities that provide undergraduate and graduate programmes;
- Medical doctoral: universities that offer undergraduate and graduate programmes, specialise in conducting a lot of research and have a medical faculty.

Bachelor's degree in Ontario and English-speaking provinces

Bachelor's degrees are awarded by colleges and universities, after a nominal undergraduate programme of 3 years in length (4 years for an honours degree), expressed in the number of credits required (90 or 120). Such study programmes usually consist of general subjects (liberal arts) and electives (both of which may

or may not be related to the major), 1 major or a double major, and sometimes a minor.

Usually there is a progression from general to more specialist subjects, however 3 or 4 years of general subjects is not unusual. Honours programmes (4 years) devote more time to specialisation and research. If an internship forms part of the programme, it is usually no longer than a few months.

Students graduate as soon as they have obtained the requisite number of credits according to a certain distribution of content and level. There is no final exam. The name of the degree often indicates whether the student took an arts or a science programme, i.e. Bachelor of Arts (BA), or Bachelor of Science (BS).

The transcript states the subjects taken and at which level. The first year of a bachelor's programme consists of subjects that begin with a number ranging from 100-199, in second year from 200-299, and so on. In addition to the Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science programmes, there are also bachelor's programmes with a professional focus. These last 3 years (4 for honours) and the name of the degree states the specialisation taken, for example Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Tourism, or Bachelor of Social Work.

Some institutions also offer what are called 'Co-op' (cooperative education programme) Bachelor's programmes, which aim to provide students with lots of work experience by means of an internship, during which they also take classes. The length of these Co-op programmes is 4½ years.

We compare a *Bachelor's degree* following a 3-year programme to 2 years of university education (WO) or to an HBO bachelor's degree. This depends on the content of study programme.

We compare a *Bachelor's degree (honours)* obtained at a college following a 4-year programme to an HBO bachelor's degree.

We compare a *Bachelor's degree (honours)* obtained at a university following a 4-year programme to a WO bachelor's degree.

Master's degree in Ontario and English-speaking provinces

All programmes taken after a Bachelor are provided by a university graduate school. Separate graduate faculties make decisions regarding admission to a master's programme, which require at least a Bachelor's degree as well as additional criteria, which vary according to the selectiveness of the institution and/or programme. These additional requirements can relate to the GPA, prerequisite subjects, possibly entrance examinations, knowledge of a foreign language, etc.

Master's programmes normally take 2 years, but may also take 1 or 3 years, depending on the specialisation. In contrast to the Bachelor, master's programmes focus on a single subject/specialisation. Students can choose between master's programmes with either an academic or professional focus.

Master with an academic focus

Academic programmes usually involve a final paper and/or comprehensive examinations at the end. These requirements can also apply to professional master's programmes; however, the emphasis here lies on professional practice at an advanced level. Programmes with an academic focus usually award either a Master of Arts (MA) or Master of Science (MS).

Master with a professional focus

Professional master's programmes usually take longer (2 to 3 years) and the type of programme is included in its name: Master of Business Administration, Master of Social Work, Master of Public Health, Master of Applied Engineering, and so forth.

We compare a *Master's degree* to an HBO or WO master's degree. This depends on the content of study programme.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Ontario and English-speaking provinces

PhD programmes are also provided by university graduate schools, and usually consist of the following stages: at least 1 year of classes, sitting extensive oral and written exams (qualifying exams), based on which students are granted permission to conduct research, and the writing and (public) defence of a dissertation.

The requirements for entry into a PhD include a Master's degree, yet in some disciplines (such as the natural sciences) it is common for promising students to be admitted with only a Bachelor's degree. In such cases, the programme takes longer to complete. The length of a PhD programme will depend on a range of factors, yet the average length following a Master's degree is 3 to 5 years. Admission is very selective.

Academic education in Quebec

University education has a long history in Quebec: *Université Laval* was founded in 1663, making it one of the oldest universities in North America.

The province's largest university is the University of Quebec, which has 11 different campuses. The most notable of these are Chicoutimi, Montréal, Outaouais, Rimouski and Trois Rivières. There are also English-speaking universities: McGill, Concordia and Bishop's.

Universities in Quebec are also members of the AUCC and have the same structure (Bachelor's/Master's/PhD) as the English-speaking universities. There are some differences, however. French terminology, for example, refers to the *1er (Bachelier)*, *2ème (Maîtrise)* and *3ème cycle (Doctor of Philosophy)*. Another difference is the length of the *Baccalauréat (Bachelier-)* programme in Quebec, which is 3 years. The *Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées (2ème cycle)* is a specialised graduate programme, taking approximately 1 to 2 years to complete following a *Bachelier* programme.

There are 2 types of master's programmes:

- the *Maîtrise de recherche* (research master) with a *mémoire* (final paper); and
- the *Maîtrise professionnelle* (professional master) without a *mémoire*.

These programmes normally take 1½ to 2 years.

We compare a *Baccalauréat (Bachelier)* following a 3-year programme to a WO bachelor's degree.

We compare a *Maîtrise professionnelle* to an HBO master's degree.

We compare a *Maîtrise de recherche* to a WO master's degree.

■ Higher professional education

In Canada, (higher) professional education is provided by community colleges, the collective name for various college types, i.e. Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, Institutes of Technology, CÉGEPs and University Colleges.

What they all have in common is that they are not allowed to issue degrees; it is for this reason that they are also called 'non-degree granting institutions'. The principal task of these colleges is to train people for entry into the labour market. However, many students also continue from a college to university and are then able to use their college credits to obtain exemptions within the university programme.

Colleges award diplomas, certificates and associate degrees (Associate of Arts or Associate of Sciences). Recent years have seen more and more colleges that offer bachelor's programmes.

'Diplomas' are usually issued after 2 years of professional education (sometimes 3 years for technical specialisations), and 'certificates' after 1 year. Associate degree programmes are more academic in character and are often intended as preparatory programmes for academic or scientific university education. An Associate degree allows students to enter a bachelor's programme in the second (or even the third) year.

Canada also has a large number of private career and vocational colleges – private institutions that provide short courses and programmes. The level is usually lower than that of the community colleges.

We compare a *Certificate obtained at a college* to 1 year of higher professional education (HBO).

We compare an *Associate degree* obtained at a college to 1 year of university education (WO).

We compare a *Diploma* obtained at a college to 2 years of higher professional education (HBO).

Grading systems

The grading system below (to a large extent resembling the American system) applies to all forms of secondary and higher education, unless otherwise indicated on the reverse of the transcript. There are many variations and more detailed versions.

Canada also often works with a percentage-based system: 50% is usually the minimum pass mark, and 90-100% is excellent. In addition to the student's own percentage, Canadian transcripts also often indicate the group average (*moyenne de groupe*). This gives a good idea of the candidate's performance.

Letter grade	In percentages	Description	Grade points
A+	90% -100%	Excellent	4 or 4.3
A	85% -89%	Excellent	4
A-	80% -84%	Excellent	3.7
B+	77% -79%	Excellent	3.3
B	73% -76%	Good	3
B-	70% -72%	Good	2.7
C (+/-)	60% -69%	Adequate	1.7-2.3
D (+/-)	50% -59%	Marginal	0.7-1.3
F	0 % -49%	Failure	0

Some abbreviations commonly used on a transcript, especially in higher education:

Abbreviation	Description	Meaning
P	pass	pass, no grade awarded
S	satisfactory	sufficient, no grade awarded
INC	incomplete	student did not fulfil the college requirements by the end of the semester, and must complete them by the set date
W	withdrawn	student stopped taking the subject, with permission
NC	no credit	no credits awarded
R	repeat	a subject being taken for the second time, because the student did not pass the first time

The grading system is so different from the Dutch system that conversions between the 2 systems are problematic. Yet it can be said that obtaining an A or B in Canada is relatively easy and occurs very frequently, particularly at graduate level.

Credit systems

Various credit systems are currently used to quantify study outcomes. As mentioned before, higher education in Canada uses many different credit systems, as each province has its own system. However, at university level there is much less variation, and there are 2 systems that we see more often.

The most common system is that in which 30 credits are awarded per year, with each subject being worth 3 or 6 credits. A 3-year Bachelor is therefore worth 90 credits, and a 4-year Bachelor (i.e. with honours) 120 credits. In this system, 3 credits usually represent 3 hours of classes per week.

The second system awards 0.5 or 1.0 credits per subject and is usually related to the semester system. Students usually earn 5 credits per year, making a nominal 4-year Bachelor worth a total of 20 credits. In this system, one credit represents 72 hours of classes per academic year.

In higher education, it is important to know whether an institution uses a semester calendar (15-16 weeks) or a quarter calendar (10-12 weeks), as this will affect the study load. Differences can even exist within one institution; for example, a semester calendar may be used at undergraduate level and a quarter calendar at graduate level. The transcript or the accompanying notes will usually clarify this. A semester year is divided into fall and spring, and a quarter year into fall, winter and spring. Both calendars have a summer semester/quarter.

■ Qualification frameworks

The [Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework](#) was developed by the Council of Ministers of Education to provide a broad framework for each degree level based on learning outcomes.

Every province/territory is to develop its own, more detailed, qualifications framework on degree level. In the framework the Bachelor's degree, Master degree and Doctoral degree are described in terms of learning outcomes and programme design.

Until present, only the province of Ontario has developed a qualifications framework on provincial level, based on the national framework, the [Ontario Qualifications Framework \(OQF\)](#).

The OQF consists of 13 levels:

- Level 1: Certificate I
- Level 2: Certificate II
- Level 3: Certificate of Apprenticeship
- Level 4: Certificate of Qualification
- Level 5: Certificate III
- Level 6: Diploma I
- Level 7: Diploma II
- Level 8: Advanced Diploma
- Level 9: Post-Diploma certificate
- Level 10: Baccalaureate/Bachelor's degree
- Level 11: Baccalaureate/Bachelor's degree (Honours)
- Level 12: Master's degree
- Level 13: Doctoral degree

A [table](#) with all levels, their descriptions and [general information](#) are available on the government website.

■ Accreditation and quality assurance

In Canada, each province is responsible the quality and accreditation of its own institutions. There is no national umbrella accreditation body.

Although the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) does play a guiding role in activities related to quality assurance and accreditation, it does not accredit itself. In Canada, private institutions are not recognised nationally but rather registered or recognised by the individual provinces. Canada has no official rankings, but Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities has been published annually since 1992. It provides a lot of information, including

the positive and negative aspects of each institution and rankings across the recognised universities in Canada.

In the Canadian context, the term 'quality assurance' refers to education standards prescribed by institutions, professional organisations, government authorities, etc., whereas the term 'accreditation' refers to the evaluation of study programmes by professional organisations. 'Professional accreditation' is carried out by Canadian professional organisations for certain (regulated) programmes.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has endorsed in 2007 the *Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework*, in which the standards and learning outcomes of the *Bachelor*, *Master* and *PhD* programmes of Canada have been laid down. For more information, please consult the [website of the Council of Ministers of Education](#).

To check whether an educational institution is accredited, you can consult the [website of the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials \(CICIC\)](#).

■ **International treaties**

Canada signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1997 but has not ratified it.

■ **Checking documents**

The most important fact regarding Canadian files is that the diploma alone never provides enough information on the study programme taken. Students must provide a transcript, or academic record, for both secondary and higher education documents. The transcript includes information on the subject content, grades, study load and date of graduation.

It is highly recommended to make it compulsory for students to have an official transcript sent directly from the institution(s) where the programme was completed to the evaluating body in the Netherlands. Canadian institutions themselves always require this document from students who transfer from one higher education institution to another.

■ **Overview of higher education institutions**

On the CICIC website you can find [a list of accredited higher education institutions](#).

The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) is the [Canadian ENIC](#).

Useful links

- [The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials \(CICIC\)](#) with current links and information on Canada's education system. CICIC is the [Canadian ENIC](#).
- [Overview](#) of all ministries of Education in Canada.
- [The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada \(CMEC\)](#).
- [The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada \(AUCC\)](#).
- [The Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada](#).
- [The Guide to Education](#), issued by the Ministry of Education, Alberta.
- [The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development](#) (Ontario) with information on the Ontario Qualifications Framework.
- [The National Association of Career Colleges](#), the umbrella organisation for all Private Career Colleges (PCCs) in Canada.
- [The Private Training Institutions Branch \(PTIB\)](#) of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training with a [directory](#) of all certified institutions in British Columbia.

Glossary

Accreditation: An organisation checks and assesses the quality of education. Usually, the accreditation is valid for a certain period. In some countries, accreditation is mandatory, in others it is voluntary. The government of a country often appoints one or more organisations responsible for accrediting institutions and/or study programmes. In addition, there are also private accreditation organisations. We only mention and (in the case of diploma evaluations) consult accreditation organisations appointed by the government of that country. Read more about accreditation in the [EAR manual](#).

Duration: The official length of the full-time programme (not part-time) without study delay.

Graduate/postgraduate programme: A programme after completion of a programme in the 1st cycle of higher education, such as a bachelor's degree programme.

Lisbon Recognition Convention: We compare foreign qualifications to Dutch qualifications according to the principles of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention \(LRC\)](#). We compare foreign qualifications to Dutch qualifications according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. You can find a practical implementation of these standards in the European [EAR manual](#).

HAVO: Senior general secondary education (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, HAVO). A HAVO diploma is awarded upon successful completion of a 5-year programme of general secondary education.

HBO: Higher professional education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO). Dutch higher education distinguishes between research-oriented higher education (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, WO) and higher professional education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO). HBO is oriented more towards professions in specific areas than WO and has traditionally been offered at universities of applied sciences (*hogescholen*).

MBO: Secondary vocational education (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, MBO). MBO prepares pupils for the professional practice or further study. This type of education follows on from VMBO; its duration will depend on the chosen qualification. MBO comprises 4 levels (I-IV). Read more on the [website of SBB](#).

Study load: The number of hours that an educational institution sets for a study programme. This is the time an average student needs to master a certain amount of material. It includes the time spent on education and the time spent on writing assignments, reading books and taking exams. The study load is expressed in credits.

Undergraduate programme: A higher education programme after completion of a bachelor's degree.

VMBO-T: Preparatory vocational secondary education – theoretical programme (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs - theoretische leerweg*, VMBO-T). A VMBO-T diploma is awarded upon successful completion of a 4-year programme of vocational secondary education (theoretical programme).

VWO: Pre-university education (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, VWO). A VWO diploma is awarded upon successful completion of a 6-year programme of pre-university education. VWO is the highest level of general secondary education available in the Netherlands.

WO: Research-oriented higher education (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, WO). Dutch higher education distinguishes between research-oriented higher education (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, WO) and higher professional education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, HBO). WO is oriented more towards theory and research than HBO, and has traditionally been offered at research universities (*universiteiten*).