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BE Flemish Community

General Education

In Flanders, primary education includes both pre-primary and primary schooling.

Pre-primary education is available to children aged 2.5 to 6. Those between 2.5 and 3 years old can begin attending at seven specific times throughout the school year—typically the first school day following each holiday and the first school day of February. From the age of 3 onward, children may enter pre-primary education at any time during the academic year.

Although attendance is not compulsory, nearly all children in Flanders participate in pre-primary education. This early education stage promotes broad development—cognitive, emotional, and physical—helping to lay the foundation for later learning.

Primary education, usually starting at age 6, is compulsory and lasts for six consecutive years, usually from 6 to 12. Upon completion of primary education, students who meet the curriculum requirements are awarded a certificate of primary education.

Secondary education (*secundair onderwijs*) in Flanders is designed for students aged 12 to 18 and is structured into three stages, each consisting of two grades. Full-time secondary education includes various educational tracks.

During the first stage, all students follow a common curriculum. It is only at the beginning of the second stage that they choose a specific field of study.

From the second stage onward, four distinct types of education are available. In Flanders, students select a study programme within one of these educational pathways:

1. General secondary education (gse), which focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare pupils for a specific profession, but rather lays a firm foundation for higher education.
2. In technical secondary education (tse) attention goes in particular to general and technical-theoretical subjects. After tse a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education. This type of education also contains practical training.
3. Secondary education in the arts combines a broad general education with an active practice of art. After secondary education in the arts a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education.
4. Vocational secondary education (vse) is a practically-oriented type of education in which the youngster receives general education but where the focus primarily lies on learning a specific profession.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational programmes are provided by SYNTRA Vlaanderen. SYNTRA stands for the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training. It has five regional centres and around nineteen campuses, offering a wide range of professional training programmes for youth and adults. Programs offer full-time day courses, evening classes, and custom corporate training.

There are SYNTRA programs which are integrated into secondary education for pupils with chosen vocational pathways but also adult vocational training. It offers a wide range of professional and entrepreneurial training courses specifically tailored to adult learners — typically 18 years and older, but some programmes are open from age 16.

Higher Education

Higher education institutions of Flanders fall into two main categories: universities and university colleges, though other types also exist. Each has a distinct role—universities are the only institutions authorized to confer doctoral degrees, while university colleges exclusively offer professionally oriented bachelor's programmes.

These institutions often work closely together, particularly in the area of research, through collaborative networks known as "Associations." Each Association typically includes one university and one or more university colleges.

Higher Education Qualifications

- **Academische bachelor; Bachelor-na-bachelor; Professionele bachelor**

First cycle

Level 6

Level 6

Academische bachelor - an academic bachelor, the student acquires a broad (theoretical) education or an education in the arts. Academic bachelors are taught at a university ("Universiteit"), a School of Arts or the Antwerp Maritime Academy.

Bachelor-na-bachelor - an advanced bachelor is a specialised education programme in a specific field. Advanced bachelors are taught at a university college ("Hogeschool").

Professionele bachelor - a professional bachelor focuses on professional practice: the student acquires the skills needed for the independent practice of one or more professions. Professional bachelors are taught at a university college ("Hogeschool").

Rights Granted

Professionele bachelor grants access to master programmes (level 7) if a bridging year (45-90 ECTS) is completed

Professional bachelors grant access to advanced bachelor degrees in a relevant field.

Bachelor-na-bachelor - an advanced bachelor grants access to master programmes (level 7) if a bridging year (45-90 ECTS) is completed

Recognition Status

Accreditation in Flanders is at programme level. All accredited courses can be found at the website of the NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie):
<https://www.nvao.net/nl>

Other Information

<https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be>

<https://enic-naric.net/page-Belgium-Flemish-Community>

- **Graduaat**

Short cycle

Level 5

Level 5

An associate degree is part of higher vocational education and prepares students for a particular profession. These programmes focus on the job market and are therefore more practice-oriented and less theoretical than bachelor programmes. An associate degree focuses on acquiring and applying skills in actual work contexts.

Rights Granted

An associate degree grants access to professional bachelor degrees. If the associate degree is obtained in a relevant field, credit transfer is possible.

Recognition Status

Accreditation in Flanders is at programme level. All accredited courses can be found at the website of the NVAO ("Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie"):
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• Master; Master-na-master

Second cycle

Level 7

Level 7

In a master's programme, students acquire advanced scientific or artistic knowledge and skills. Students conclude their master's degree by writing a research thesis. Masters are taught at a university ("Universiteit"), a School of Arts or the Antwerp Maritime Academy.

An advanced master is a specialised education in a specific field. Advanced masters are taught at a university ("Universiteit") or a School of Arts.

Rights Granted

Master degree grants access to a doctoral studies ("Doctoraat") (level 8).
Master degree grants access to a relevant advanced master's studies (level 7).

Master-na-master grants access to a doctoral degree ("Doctoraat") (level 8).

Recognition Status

Accreditation in Flanders is organised at programme level. All accredited courses can be found at the website of the NVAO ("Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie"):
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• Doctoraat

Third cycle

Level 8

Level 8

During a PhD, students complete a scientific research project on which they write a doctoral thesis. The thesis is defended in the presence of an (international) jury.

Rights Granted

This is the highest academic qualification.

Recognition Status

Recognition Status

A PhD can be obtained at a recognised higher education institution. All recognised institutions can be found at the website of the NVAO ("Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie"): <https://www.nvao.net/nl>

Other Information

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<https://enic-naric.net/page-Belgium-Flemish-Community>

Useful Links

- [Vlaanderen.be provides a comprehensive, official information for all aspects of education in Flanders](#)
- [Belgium Flemish Community profile on ENIC-NARIC portal](#)
- [Official register listing all the recognised higher education programmes offered by all the recognised higher education institutions.](#)

For more information, please visit ar-go.online.

