



NETHERLANDS

INFOPACK - RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

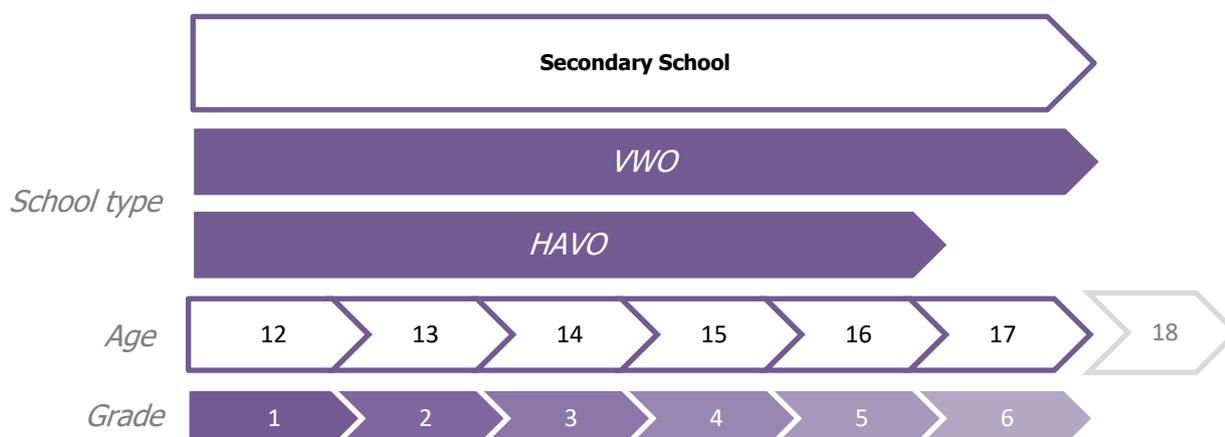
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The information below gives an overview of procedures¹ for the recognition of learning periods abroad in general secondary school. It can be consulted by pupils, as well as their families and teachers, who are or plan to be involved in long-term individual pupil mobility programmes abroad. Please note that this general overview does not include details on different programme types (which may be run by governmental agencies, civil society organisations, private companies or schools themselves) and such information can be obtained directly with the provider of the respective mobility programme.

¹ Based on data gathered in February 2021.

GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM



Education is compulsory until 18 years of age. In the Netherlands there are two types of general secondary schools:

- HAVO (*Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs*) prepares pupils to enter higher professional education. After completing a core curriculum in the three lower years, pupils enter the second two-year stage where they choose one of four subject combinations.
- VWO (*Vorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*) is pre-university education and prepares pupils to enter university.

Pupils can transfer from HAVO to VWO.

Graduation and Certification

The secondary school certificate is awarded following the final exam, which consists of two parts of equal importance: preliminary school exams that are assessed internally and a national exam that is externally assessed. The content of the examination for both parts is approved by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science².

The school exam usually consists of two or more exams per subject which may be oral, practical or written, and practical assignments for which no marks are given. Every secondary school in the Netherlands has made the choice to organise school exams as continuous assessments and exams in grade 5 (HAVO) or 4-5-6 (VWO). Moreover, schools have the discretion to change the content and assessment of their exams annually.

The national exam in May of the final school year consists of exams with open or multiple-choice questions and in some cases, a practical component³.

In general, the end-of-school certificate gives pupils free access to universities and universities of applied science.

² Every year, schools are required to submit their preliminary school exam syllabus to the Inspectorate and decide the number of exams for the school exam. To help schools, the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) publishes school exam guidelines for every subject and level of education (<https://www.slo.nl/international/>)

³Eurydice, National Educational Systems, Netherlands, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/assessment-general-lower-secondary-education-25_en

Higher education institutions select students on the basis of a fixed maximum number and they are free to decide on the selection which can consist of exam results, entrance exams, letter of motivation or interviews.

For more information on the structure and features of the different national education systems in Europe please see the Eurydice overview: National Education Systems | Eurydice (europa.eu).

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS GOING ABROAD FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Age and grade

Usually, pupils enrol in individual long-term mobility programmes:

- at the age of 16/17, after having completed 4th grade of HAVO or VWO;
- at the age of 17/18 after having completed secondary school (as a gap year before starting university).

Registration in the sending school

If you participate in a full school year exchange programme, you are not enrolled in your sending school. In case of a shorter mobility (semester or trimester), you remain enrolled in your sending school.

Funding for the sending school

There is no funding for the sending school when a pupil is abroad for a full school year exchange.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD

The following information addresses learning periods abroad lasting either up to 3 months, or a full school year. According to the analysis conducted, there is no information available on recognition procedures for periods abroad of up to 3 months finishing after the end of the school year in the Netherlands. In fact, mobility programmes foreseeing these timings and durations are not usually offered.

The same procedures are applied, irrespective of which country the learning period is spent in (EU or non-EU).

Please note that in the case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership⁴ (e.g. Erasmus+) the learning agreement between sending and host school can be used as a tool for recognition, although there is no evidence that it can be successful for the recognition of a full school year abroad.

⁴ within a school-to-school partnership, learning outcomes are usually recognised based on a learning agreement developed between the schools concerned.

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Periods of up to 3 months

If you go abroad for a trimester, you are enrolled back in your class and follow the curriculum with your peers⁵ upon return.

Periods of between more than 3 months and a full school year

If you stay abroad for more than three months, you will need to repeat the academic year and there is no partial recognition of any subjects you have taken abroad⁶. Even though pupil exchange organisations provide participants with a certificate, this is not sufficient for re-admission into the next grade upon return.

The system of continuous assessment in the Dutch school curricula is not compatible with interruptions of more than three months. The structure and practice of school exams is too detailed and rigid to allow alternative learning routes when you return to school to compensate your stay abroad⁷.

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS HOSTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

Registration in the host school

Schools decide autonomously on admitting exchange pupils. In order to be enrolled, you need to provide school reports and grades from your sending school. You are generally assessed to establish the subject and school level you can follow. It is common practice to place hosted pupils with their same age group (i.e. 16/17-year-old peers), in the regular pre-exam year of secondary school (4th grade in HAVO, 4th or 5th grade in VWO).

Some schools develop a tailor-made timetable for the school year in order to meet your expectations, requirements and level.

Placement in the final year is not common because the school year is shorter (until mid-April instead of July) and the focus is on final exams.

Funding for the host school

Your host school will receive funding from the Dutch government if you are staying for a full school year and you enrol before 1 October.

Certification for hosted pupils

There is no procedure for certification of your studies in the Netherlands as an exchange pupil. However, at the end of your stay, schools can choose whether to write a final report of assessments, skills and competences by subject taken, and/or a letter of recommendation for university entrance.

⁵ E. Briga, 'Recognition of school study periods abroad: An overview and policy recommendations. European Federation for Intercultural Learning', EFIL, Brussels, 2018.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Feedback received by pupil exchange organisations (AFS, STS, Travel active) October 2020.

Possibility of graduating in the host country during the exchange

You may receive a secondary school certificate if you pass the same exams as your peers. However, you would still need the results of continuous assessment for grades 4 and 5 (or 4, 5, 6 in the case of VWO), and you are very seldomly placed in the grades where you could obtain a proper final certificate during your exchange. This is a rare practice.

TESTIMONIAL

Tygo from the Netherlands: a full school year in Sweden

"It's not a year in your life but a life in one year."

I left for the exchange in search of adventure, nature and culture.

Before leaving I had quite a preparation with my exchange organisation, discovering social and intercultural differences but I didn't study the language, and that would have been helpful.

I left with no expectation and everything went smoothly, I even came back homesick, not for the Netherlands but for Sweden! The only difficulties I encountered were the cold weather and the lack of sunlight, but since there wasn't anything I could do about that, I just let it go.

No need for recognition during a gap year

When I left for Sweden, I was about to start higher education, so it didn't really change anything for my school career, I was going to change school anyway.

The exchange was a very valuable experience because I could learn things that I could have never learnt otherwise, and I am sure this will help me in the future too. I recommend other students to participate as well, it is a once-in-a-lifetime kind of experience. My only advice is to leave without expectations and just to go with the flow.

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