

Master's Standard

Updated version 2026

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**Netherlands Association of
Universities of Applied Sciences**

Foreword

In recent years, master's programmes have gained a more prominent place in higher professional education, thus adding value to the knowledge society. In this knowledge society, increasingly complex issues are at play. Master's programmes provided by the universities of applied sciences are professionally oriented, are linked directly to actual practice, and train highly educated professionals to deal with these complex issues. Furthermore, master's programmes are also important for the institutes themselves, as these programmes can strengthen their research quality and research culture.

We have seen a steady increase in the number of master's programmes in higher professional education. The diversity in the programmes offered in higher professional education is also on the rise. More and more universities of applied sciences provide associate degree, bachelor's and master's programmes. It is expected that the Professional Doctorate (PD) that is still being developed will be added soon. The various professional master's programmes are in line with these recent developments in the professional field and in higher professional education.

The professional master's standard is based on national and international master's level standards. The purpose of this master's standard is to specifically describe the essence of a master's programme provided by universities of applied sciences. The standard serves as a guideline for the development of (national) professional and educational profiles and for their incorporation into the curricula of the individual study programmes.

This document contains an updated description of the 'national professional master's standard' as adopted by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) in 2019. The updating of this master's standard stems not only from the established practice of adhering to a certain quality cycle when revising this type of document (where six to eight years is the norm) but is also driven by developments within practice-oriented higher education itself, such as the recent development of cross-sectoral master's programmes, the expansion of full-time professional master's programmes, the development of the aforementioned PD programmes, and advancing knowledge and understanding regarding the definition of professional orientation in master's programmes, particularly within the Research Competence pillar.

This 2026 master's standard has been updated by a team of the National Platform for Professional Master's Programmes of the VH, supplemented by a few subject matter experts. They developed the standard further in consultation with colleagues and in line with the international frameworks. This working group built on the work of the previous master's standard team (2019): Willie van der Galiën-Roodhardt, Margreet Riemersma, Ellis Visch, Miriam Losse, Lisette Munneke, Petra Kanters, Marianne Kok, Hugo Nierstrasz, Jacqueline Kok and Didi Griffioen.

We have outlined the master's programme in higher professional education with the aim of presenting a clear and consistent description of the master's level within the context of the professional orientation of universities of applied sciences. Finally, we wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who have contributed to shaping form and

content to this updated master's standard. Input for the updating of this master's standard was provided by, among others:

- Professors Daan Andriessen and Arienne van Staveren, Professional Doctorate Programme Committee involved in clarifying the position of the master's programme within higher professional education in relation to the PD;
- Professors Anje Ros and Petra Poelmans, involved in further clarifying the several aspects of complexity and the Complextool.

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This version has been officially adopted by the General Meeting of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences on 9/10/2026.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the master's standard

The purpose of the master's standard is to explicitly describe the reference points for the graduation level of a master's programme in higher professional education. The master's standard is frequently used when developing new master's programmes and redeveloping existing master's programmes.

The master's standard aims to:

- Inspire programme staff at universities of applied sciences who focus on (further) broadening and deepening master's students' understanding of professional practices (*Chapter 2*): *What are the substantive pillars for master's programmes?*
- Provide an understanding of the diversity in master's programmes within higher professional education (*section 1.3*): *What types of master's programme are there?*
- Help clarify the level difference between bachelor's and master's programmes, on the one hand, and between master's programmes and the PD, on the other hand (*section 1.4*). *What are the factors that account for the relative differences in level between bachelor's and master's programmes and between master's programmes and the PD?*

The pillars, the diversity and the relative position of master's programmes provided by universities of applied sciences are briefly explained in the following sections.

1.2 Pillars of a master's programme in higher professional education

The pillars of the master's standard are detailed out in Chapter 3.

Here is a brief summary:

- A. Mastery, as a feature of seniority in professional practice;
- B. Research Competence, as a basis for dealing with knowledge and the lack of knowledge;
- C. Interprofessional conduct, as a feature of the complexity of tasks of the professional master's graduates;
- D. Effect, as a focus of situational issues of the professional master's graduates.

1.3 Diversity in master's programmes

Depending on the sector, purpose, and target group of a master's programme, the educational structure of master's programmes in higher professional education varies. This is also evidenced by the diversity of master's programmes provided by universities of applied sciences.

Master's programmes are provided on a full-time, part-time and dual basis. Master's programmes in higher professional education can be primarily aimed at national or international target groups. Universities of applied sciences offer both government funded and non-government funded master's programmes. Various types of master's programmes can be distinguished.

Variation in types of master's programmes:

- Consecutive master's: a master's programme that links up directly with the bachelor's programme;
- Post-experience master's: a master's programme that broadens and deepens the professional's knowledge within their own profession or around a social issue. Relevant professional experience is a prerequisite for attending the study programme.

Variation in orientation:

- Professional qualification master's: The master's degree is required for practising a profession;
- Specialist master's: The increasing complexity of professional practice may lead to far-reaching specialisations in one field or sector. A master's degree provides students with more in-depth knowledge and raises the level of professional practice. The range of new students spans from experienced professionals to recent bachelor's graduates who are moving on to further study.
- Crossover master's: The increasing complexity of professional practice often leads to crossovers between fields or sectors. The master's programme trains the student in combining knowledge and skills from various disciplines in order to contribute to complex issues.

The description of the master's programme in higher professional education provided in this document does justice to the rich diversity of professional master's programmes mentioned above.

1.4 Master's level in relation to the bachelor's and the PD

Master's versus bachelor's in higher professional education

For thinking about level distinctions it is, above all, important that it always concerns relative differences within professional practices. However, from a global perspective, a master's programme (NLQF level 7) differs from a bachelor's programme (NLQF level 6) in higher professional education by:

- a more specialist nature of professional tasks;
- a greater degree of depth;
- a higher complexity of professional issues such as more aspects beyond the boundaries of their own discipline;
- being able to connect perspectives across sectors and disciplines;
- a higher complexity of professional contexts such as more involved stakeholders, relatively higher focus on professional issues than on professional tasks, while professional bachelor's programmes relatively focus more on professional tasks.

Professional issues at a master's level often go beyond the 'daily' tasks and frequently take the form of projects.

Master's level versus Professional Doctorate

The PD is a doctorate programme provided by universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands. It is a learning pathway focused on (professional) practice which trains highly qualified, research-oriented professionals to 'learn to intervene in complex practices' at level 8 of the NLQF. It is therefore equivalent to, but distinct from, PhD programmes provided by research universities. PD candidates learn to develop actionable knowledge, processes and products for developing and validating interventions to address complex practical issues.

In 2023, a pilot project was launched for developing PD programmes. The process for enshrining the PD in law took shape in 2026. PD candidates learn to influence a complex social issue in a specific context in a methodical way, whilst developing actionable knowledge, processes and products that can also be applied in other contexts.

The PD programme trains students to become independent, research-oriented, intervening professionals who primarily learn to tackle complex issues in specific contexts, and to this end, develop new, generic knowledge about new interventions for a relevant challenge in society or the professional field, with a possible effect on science – for example by publishing in academic journals too.

1.5 Complexity in master's programmes

The master's in higher professional education is characterised by working on complex practice-related issues in dynamic contexts, with several stakeholders, conflicting interests, and incomplete information.

The complextool offers a shared reference framework to specifically describe this complexity and to explain it in relation to the level of education of students who work on it. In this way, the tool supports the distinction between and monitoring of the master's level (NLQF level 7) in relation to the bachelor's level (NLQF level 6) and the higher level NLQF level 8 (PD), without reducing the complexity of practice-related issues to uniform or linear learning

outcomes. The complextool is thus aligned with the essence of the master's standard, in which complexity is regarded an essential characteristic of professional master's practices.

The function of the complextool in relation to this master's standard is analytical and it provides design support and is neither normative nor assessing. The tool helps study programmes, lecturers, students and industry partners to systematically explore the level and nature of practice-related issues along eight dimensions, focused on the complexity of the issue itself and the complexity of the collaboration process. This creates a common language for describing how mastery, research competence, interprofessional conduct and effect present themselves specifically within specific educational and practice-related contexts, and how the right balance can be struck between the required degree of autonomy and guidance.

When used within master's programmes, the complextool can be used as a reflective tool for designing, executing and evaluating practice-related learning pathways and research tracks. For example, the tool can provide support in advance when selecting and shaping suitable practice-related issues at a master's level, help to adjust guidance and collaboration during the process; and, afterwards, contribute to a shared interpretation of the level achieved and the effect realised. The complextool thus serves as an aid for explicitly addressing the issues of complexity, level and professional development within the framework of this master's standard, without replacing or oversimplifying it.

The complextool can be consulted online through this link: [Complextool](#).

2 Basic principles

The standard describes the essence of the master's programme in higher professional education and can be used as a reference point for several purposes. Firstly, the master's standard can be used for developing or adopting (national) professional and educational profiles. The master's standard is also helpful in developing new master's programmes and functions as a collective quality framework. Finally, the master's standard can also be used to develop a concise profile for master's programmes in higher professional education.

The standard serves as a guiding principle based on the adage 'apply or explain'; it can be deviated from, provided that deviation is substantiated. This provides flexibility given the diversity of master's programs and sectors that we know within higher professional education.

The primary focus of the master's standard is to define the graduation level of master's graduates. This master's standard does not replace the level descriptions of the Dublin Descriptors and the Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF). These standards were, however, used to validate this master's standard. In addition to them, this master's standard puts emphasis on the professional orientation of master's programmes within higher professional education. It sets out what this means in terms of what is expected of a master's graduate.

2.1 Description

A master's level professional is able to work in an unfamiliar varying living and working environment with a high degree of insecurity, including internationally (NLQF level 7). The high complexity of contexts lead to challenging issues. These require a solid — sometimes even specialist — knowledge base — and also the ability to identify the limitations of existing knowledge (NLQF level 7). Therefore, universities of applied sciences are an ideal setting for providing master's programmes masters with a professional orientation.

Complex issues often require a multidisciplinary approach too, beyond the boundaries of their own discipline. That requires the continuous ability to change perspectives and question one's own assumptions and judgements. A master's programme with a professional orientation responds to the need to equip professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Complex contexts require a high level of analytical skill, with mostly incomplete information. A master's programme prepares students to put new situational knowledge into practical use.

What characterises a professional master's graduate and what a professional oriented master's programme therefore trains for is summarised in the following description:

Professional master's graduates work on complex practice-related issues in a professionally oriented context.

They do so on the basis of solid theoretical and up-to-date knowledge, a research-based attitude as well as research-based methods.

They act professionally with ethical and moral awareness, and are autonomous and reflective.

They have progressed to an advanced level and demonstrate mastery in their discipline.

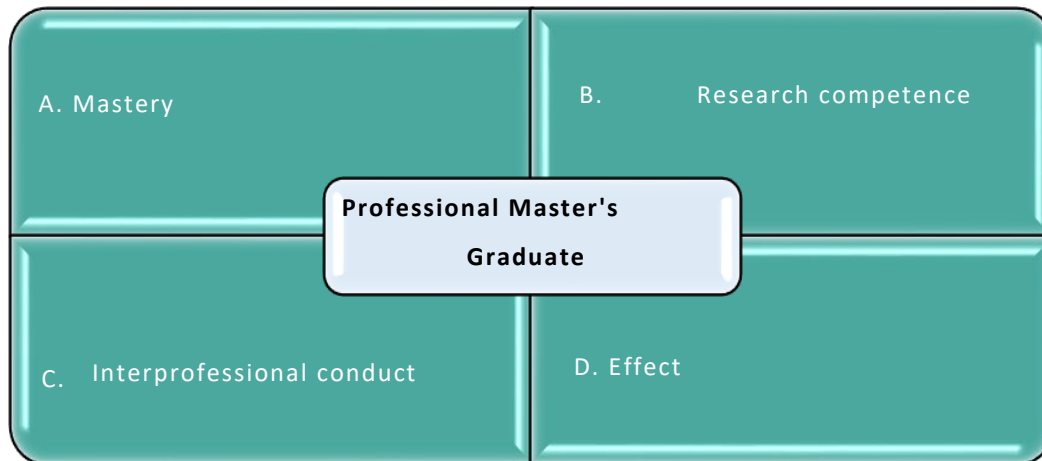
In this process, they collaborate independently and interprofessionally in various networks.

They contribute to knowledge that has an effect on their own professional practice.

3 The standard

The graduation level of a master's graduate within higher professional education is characterised by the following four pillars :

- A. **Mastery**, indicating professional development, learning ability, and ethical and moral conduct.
- B. **Research competence**, explaining how research competence enables master's professionals to change professional practice and create impact.
- C. **Interprofessional conduct**, in which the importance of acting from a broad perspective and collaborating in a multidisciplinary network has been characterised as a prerequisite for operating at professional master's level.
- D. **Effect** describing the professional master's graduate's objective. Researching and solving practice-related issues results in an impact anchored in professional practice and the broader professional domain.



Please note:

These pillars do not stand alone, but are inextricably linked to the other pillars of the master's standard. For example, the effect pillar presupposes research competence in the way in which knowledge development takes shape in interaction with practice. The mastery pillar is also reflected in professional and ethical conduct and is evident in interprofessional practice and collaboration with various stakeholders within and outside one's own practice.

3.1 A. Mastery

Professional development, learning ability, and ethical and moral conduct are the essence of the mastery pillar.

Master's professionals are reflective and direct their own professional development¹. They are able to assess the degree of complexity of practice-related issues and determine what in-depth knowledge and support they need from their own network in order to investigate issues and take them forward.

Master's graduates have the ability to critically review their own conduct as well as the conduct of others based on moral values. They are willing to engage in a debate on that conduct with colleagues, clients, and other parties. Master's professionals thus demonstrate ethical sensitivity along with an ability to analyse and compare multiple perspectives. They are also able to formulate judgements based on incomplete or limited information.

The above requires the ability to reflect, enabling master's professionals to surpass their professional competence and develop towards mastery in their professional domain.

3.2 B. Research competence

The essence of the research competence pillar is the ability to deal with (missing) knowledge in complex practice-related issues and, with appropriate thoroughness and in collaboration with others, to gain actionable knowledge that contributes to solving these issues in a strategic, tactical and creative manner.

Research competence is about using and developing knowledge by professionals in a self-regulatory and active manner. A professional links different sources of knowledge in a targeted manner and makes well-considered choices regarding depth and methodology to create evidence-based actionable knowledge² that does justice to the nature, urgency, risks and context of the issue.

Actionable knowledge comprises all knowledge focused on enhancing or optimising practical situations, both through direct interventions and through the analysis, design, decision-making, communication and evaluation of professional processes and the development and justification of related products and artefacts.

Master's professionals work in professional practice in which complex, unstructured and often unpredictable issues are central. These issues are characterised by multiple perspectives, insecurity, conflicting interests and varying stakeholder values and interwovenness of substantive, organisational, social and ethical dimensions. It is precisely in dealing with the multi-layered complexity of these issues that research competence at master's level comes to the fore. This competence enables professionals not to reduce complexity, but to analyse it explicitly by bringing to light interrelationships, systemic and knowledge contexts, and underlying assumptions, interests, and uncertainties.

¹ See, for instance, David Schön's work on the reflective practitioner

² Markauskaite, M., & Goodyear, P. (2017). Epistemic fluency and professional education: innovation, knowledgeable action and actionable knowledge. Springer Nature <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4369-4>

Research competence has three essential and interrelated forms of expression:

1. Actively seeking out and making use of **non-knowing**, such as it arises in complex practice-related situations;
2. Making conscious and context-oriented choices in the **appropriate thoroughness** of knowledge development;
3. Ensuring **effect**, where insights are developed collectively and sustainably anchored in practice³.

Dealing with complex practice-related issues continuously requires actively seeking out, recognising and using **not-knowing**. Master's professionals move between conceptualising and specifying: they connect their own professional expertise, data from context and experiential knowledge of those involved to academic, conceptual frameworks and use these frameworks to deepen, reformulate the issue, and develop new actionable perspectives⁴.

Appropriate thoroughness requires professionals to determine, on a context-specific basis, what level of depth and systematic approach is necessary. This assessment concerns the balance between what research and quality frameworks require and what the practical context demands. Depending on this, appropriate thoroughness can range from carefully consulting (looking up) and linking existing knowledge (seeking out) to conducting practice-oriented research (investigating).

Effect is reflected in the way in which the master's-level professional shapes knowledge development in interaction with professional practice. The professional makes conscious and context-sensitive choices regarding how knowledge is generated, shared and given meaning, so that it aligns with the thoughts, actions and decisions of those involved.

3.3 C. Interprofessional conduct

The essence of interprofessional conduct is the ability to make sense of and translate important, complex issues into an actionable perspective, together with and based on different disciplines, stakeholders, perspectives and points of view.

Master's professionals have a broad outlook on society and the future. Traditional fields of work are disappearing and boundaries between sectors, professions and disciplines are becoming more flexible. In addition, the globalising world demands professionals who recognise social challenges and embrace the social responsibilities that come with their profession.

Master's professionals feel comfortable in an international context and have sufficient intercultural competences to be able to work with others. Master's professionals develop and maintain professional networks in professional practice, both nationally and internationally, and are able to share knowledge, ideas and analyses in a learning network, thus contributing to the development of knowledge in everyday practice and among their professional peers.

³ See Munneke, E. L. (2024). *Moedige ruimte maken: onderzoekend vermogen als essentiële competentie in het werken aan complexe opgaven*. Utrecht University of Applied Sciences.

⁴ Heusdens, W. T., Bakker, A., Baartman, L. K. J., & De Bruijn, E. (2015). *Contextualising vocational knowledge: A theoretical framework and illustrations from culinary education*. *Vocations and Learning*, 9(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-015-9145-0>

Consequently, master's professionals possess integrative ability and can bring parties together. In this way, new potential practices and perspectives emerge, opening up the possibility of various new forms of cooperation, each based on their own motivation.

Master's professionals operate in new or unfamiliar circumstances within a broad or multidisciplinary context related to the professional domain. They have a critical awareness of complex issues concerning their own field and on the interface between different fields, allowing them to act interprofessionally and manage multiple processes.

3.4 Effect

The essence of the effect pillar⁵ is the way in which the master's professional's development of knowledge, through interaction with professional practice, takes on meaning within professional practice and the wider professional domain.

Effect manifests itself in both the process in which knowledge is developed and used collectively and in the results stemming from it, including interventions, designs, applications, products or working methods with direct consequences for professional practice.

Effect refers to the purposeful and responsible realisation of design, change or professionalisation objectives⁶ based on knowledge development, in interaction with the practical context. The master's professional tackles complex practice-related issues in contexts in which multiple perspectives, interests and conditions converge. In this dynamic, effect is not achieved as a separate phase at the end of a process, but as an integral part of addressing the issue.

Effect manifests itself in the way in which the master's professional links knowledge development to specific practical situations and gives it meaning together with those involved. This is shown in conscious choices about the way in which knowledge is developed, shared, applied and embedded, and how it contributes to changes in professional conduct, decision-making or specific products.

Depending on the domain, effect takes the form of interventions and change processes, as well as the design, realisation and implementation of applications, products, systems or working methods. In this sense, effect also encompasses innovation, understood as the improvement, modification or renewal of practices based on the development of knowledge⁷.

Innovation is therefore not an end in itself, but a possible result of effect brought about when existing working methods, assumptions or solutions are no longer adequate.

⁵ In the literature and policy, various terms are used to describe the value of knowledge development, such as *impact*, *knowledge utilisation*, *effect* and *valorisation*. In this master's standard the term effect has been chosen here in line with the report entitled *Meer waarde met hbo* ('Added value with higher professional education') because it seeks to express how value develops and manifests itself through interaction with practices. This choice does not imply any rejection of other terminology, but rather emphasises an aspect that is in keeping with the character of professional master's programmes.

⁶ Greven, K. & Andriessen, D. (2019). Practice-based Research Impact Model for Evaluation: PRIME. EAIR Conference 2019, (August), 1-11

⁷ Vanlommel, K., Coppoolse, R., & Schaap, L. (2024). *De grote vragen over onderwijsinnovatie*. Utrecht: Boom.

The nature and scope of effect in the master's programme within higher professional education are context-specific and domain-specific. Effect may be evident within the student's own professional context, but also in contributions to working methods, products, changes or professional development within a broader professional network or other contexts.

Within the duration of a master's programme, achieving large-scale or lasting innovation is not what matters, but demonstrating that the master's professional acts in a conscious and well-founded manner with a view to achieving meaningful effect, whilst being able to link their own professional practice to broader professional and conceptual frameworks.

4 Justification

In describing the standard, relevant sources from the higher education sectors were used to validate the standard for master's programmes within higher professional education. These are the national and international descriptions of the master's level as elaborated in the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF compared in order to position the standard at the appropriate level. This chapter explains how these national and international master's level standards were used in the development of the updated master's standard.

Two frameworks were used in the analysis to feed the descriptions of the standard with terminology appropriate to the degree of difficulty attached to level 7. The following sections contain several examples taken from the various frameworks so as to provide an insight into how they relate to the standards.

4.1 Dublin Descriptors

The member states of the European Union adopted the Dublin Descriptors in order to establish the universal graduation level of master's programmes in the context of the Bologna Process. These descriptors are used to determine the graduation level of the higher professional education study programmes.

Dublin Descriptors		Second cycle master's level
1	knowledge and understanding	have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
2	applying knowledge and understanding	can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
3	making judgements	have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;
4	communications skills	can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and nonspecialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
5	learning skills	have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

Table 1: Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes

4.2 The Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF)⁸

The NLQF in the Dutch education system

In 2008, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was drawn up in Europe to enable comparison between the various education systems and the exit qualifications of study programmes in Europe. The EQF covers the entire education system and comprises eight levels. The highest levels are based on the Dublin Descriptors that describe the graduation levels of higher education study programmes. All EU countries have translated the EQF into their own level descriptions.

NLQF levels: the semi-circle diagram

In the Netherlands, the EQF has been translated into the NLQF. The Dutch qualification framework (NLQF) comprises eight levels and one entry level. The levels are adopted on the basis of descriptions of a student's knowledge and skills upon completion of the learning process. These descriptions of the levels of knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibilities are called learning outcomes. All qualifications recognised by the government have an NLQF level.

The semi-circle diagram below shows the various types of education in the Netherlands clustered around the NLQF and the EQF. The master's level is shown under level 7 of both the EQF and the NLQF. The master's level is shown under the description of NLQF level 7 in the following section.

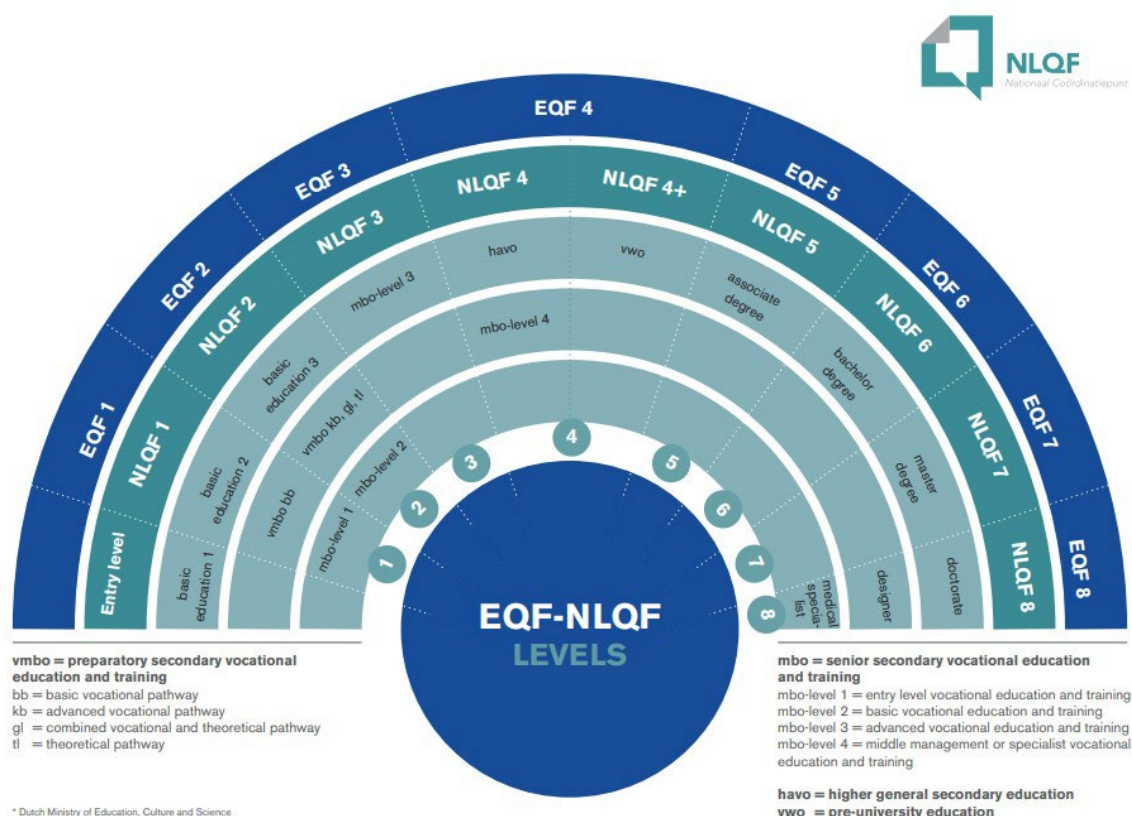


Figure 1 EQF, NLQF and the Dutch education system

⁸ Link: [NLQF/EQF level 7 - NLQF](#)

NLQF	Master's / level 7
Context	An unfamiliar, changeable and highly uncertain living and working environment, also internationally.
Knowledge	- Possesses exceptionally specialist and advanced knowledge of a profession, knowledge domain and area of science and on the interface between various professions, knowledge domains and areas of science. - Possesses a critical understanding of a range of theories, principles and concepts, including the primary ones associated with a profession, knowledge domain and area of science. - Possesses extensive, detailed knowledge and critical understanding of some important current topics and specialisms associated with the profession or knowledge domain and areas of science.
Skills	- Reproduces, analyses, integrates and applies knowledge, also in other contexts and handles complex matter. - This knowledge shapes the foundation for original ideas and research. - Uses the acquired knowledge at a higher abstraction level. Thinks conceptually. Creates and deepens argumentation. - Uses methodological knowledge to succeed independently at fundamental research. - Provides an original contribution to the development and application of ideas, often in a research context. - Identifies limitation of existing knowledge in professional practice and in the knowledge domain on the interface between various professional practices and knowledge domains and takes action. Analyses complex professional and academic tasks and executes them. - Recognises and analyses complex problems in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and solves them in a tactical, strategic and creative way. Contributes in professional practice and in the knowledge domain to the (academic) solution of complex problems by identifying and using data. - Develops independently for the most part. - Collects and analyses broad, in-depth and detailed academic information about a range of theories, principles and concepts of and associated with, a profession or knowledge domain in a responsible, critical way, as well as information about some important current
Knowledge application	
Problem-solving skills	
Learning- and development skills	
Information skills	
Communication skills	

	topics and specialisms associated with the profession and knowledge domain and conveys this information. • Focused communication with peers, specialists, non-specialists, superiors and clients based on conventions that apply to the context and professional practice.
Responsibilities and autonomy	• Works together with specialists and non-specialists, peers, superiors and clients. Bears responsibility for results of own work and study and the result of the work of others. • Bears responsibility for managing complex processes and the professional development of individuals and groups. • Formulates assessments based on incomplete or limited information and takes social, academic and ethical responsibilities associated with the application of one's own knowledge and assessment into account.

Table 2: The NLQF at master's level

5 Explanation of validation master's standard

The following sections explain how the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF were used to validate this master's standard. Several examples have been highlighted and described to explain how the level description of a learning outcome contained in the above tables has been incorporated in the master's standard.

5.1 Context and description

The context and description of the master's graduate within higher professional education are partly based on what the Dublin Descriptors group under 'Making judgements'. The level of the context is expressed aptly here as it concerns new or unfamiliar circumstances as well as the broader perspective.

Dublin Descriptors – Making judgements –

*Has the ability to apply knowledge and understanding and problem-solving abilities in new or **unfamiliar** circumstances within **broader** (or multidisciplinary) **contexts** that are related to their field of study; has the ability to **integrate** knowledge and handle **complexity**.*

5.2 A Mastery

Mastery contains the elements of **lifelong learning** and of **ethical** and **moral** conduct. These elements are included in the 'Learning and development skills' of the NLQF and in the Dublin Descriptors under 'Applying knowledge and understanding'.

Mastery refers to 'Social, ethical and moral conduct in which they are able to debate with others in the network'. This interpretation of mastery is inspired by the following Dublin Descriptor.

Dublin Descriptors – Applying knowledge and understanding –

*Has the ability to apply knowledge and understanding and take **social and ethical** responsibilities associated with the application of their own knowledge and judgements into account.*

Mastery can be considered as the superlative of professional competence and assumes knowledge acquisition at a more in-depth level. This text therefore quotes the text in the NLQF under the heading of Knowledge.

NLQF

Master's-level professionals possess advanced knowledge of a profession, knowledge domain and area of science as well as and on the interface between different professions, knowledge domains and areas of science.

The elements of self-management and the ability to work in an autonomous working environment are mentioned under mastery. They are also included in the NLQF under 'Learning and development skills'.

NLQF - Learning and development skills -

Develops independently for the most part.

5.3 B Research competence

In the Dublin Descriptors, research competence falls under 'Knowledge and understanding' which refers to 'research context'. The research competence pillar is best described in the NLQF. Only the category in which the research competence is placed differs.

Dublin Descriptors – Knowledge and understanding –

*Possesses knowledge and understanding that is founded upon the knowledge and understanding that is associated with a bachelor's level and that exceed and/or deepen it, and that provides a basis or an **opportunity for originality** in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.*

NLQF – Problem-solving skills –

*Recognises and analyses **complex problems** in professional practice and in the knowledge domain and **solves** them in a tactical, strategic and creative way.*

Under 'Knowledge application', the NLQF refers to fundamental research. This does not fit in the context of the master's graduate within higher professional education. The research method suited to a professional oriented master's graduate is reflected better in the 'Problem-solving skills' category.

NLQF – Knowledge application –

Identifies limitation of existing knowledge in **professional practice** and in the knowledge domain on the interface between various professional practices and knowledge domains and takes action. **Analyses** complex professional and academic tasks and executes them.

5.4 C Interprofessional conduct

Interprofessional conduct relates to the ability to take a transdisciplinary and broad approach to researching, analysing and solving issues. Level descriptions that address this can be found in the Dublin Descriptors and the NLQF.

Dublin Descriptors – Knowledge application –

*Has the ability to apply knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within **broader** (or **multidisciplinary**) contexts related to their field of study; has the ability to **integrate** knowledge and handle complexity.*

NLQF – Responsibilities and autonomy –

*Formulates assessments based on incomplete or limited information and takes **social**, academic and ethical responsibilities associated with the application of one's own knowledge and **assessment** into account.*

The NLQF also establishes, under the same description, a link to the **mastery** pillar. The first part under interprofessional conduct is used to indicate the level. It relates to situations in which incomplete or limited information is available and yet the master's professional is required to express an opinion.

5.5 D Effect

The details of the level with respect to effect can partly be found in the Dublin Descriptors under 'Communication' and can mainly be found in the NLQF under 'Problem-solving skills' and 'Responsibilities and autonomy'.

Dublin Descriptors – Communication –

*Can **convey conclusions** as well as the knowledge, motives and considerations underpinning them clearly and unambiguously to an audience of specialists or non-specialists.*

NLQF – Problem-solving skills –

Makes a contribution - in professional practice and in the knowledge domain - to (academic) solutions of complex issues by identifying and using data.

The contribution to knowledge creation in the professional domain is expressed here.

NLQF – Responsibilities and autonomy –

Carries responsibility for managing complex processes and the professional development of individuals and groups.

The management of complex processes and the professional development of individuals and groups are explored in greater detail in the effect pillar, which highlights the extent of the effect on professional practice.



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