

**INFORMATION FOR
IMMIGRANTS
ABOUT THE
SWISS EDUCATION
SYSTEM**

**WHAT
HAPPENS AFTER
SCHOOL?**

Factsheets with important information on education topics



FACTSHEET ON THE INTERNET

References to online factsheets can be found throughout this guide, pointing you to **further information available on the Internet in English**. The Vocational, Educational and Career Guidance website by the Swiss cantons provides such factsheets, covering a number of education topics important in Switzerland.

There is a wealth of information available online in German, French and Italian, Switzerland's most widely spoken national languages:

German: www.berufsberatung.ch/en

French: www.orientation.ch/en

Italian: www.orientamento.ch/en

The website includes factsheets and links on the following topics:

- Transition from primary to lower-secondary school
- Career options: Dual-track VET and mobility
- What is Vocational and Educational Training VET? Three learning locations
- What is a pre-vocational taster like?
- Aptitude tests
- Looking for an apprenticeship position
- Interviews for apprenticeship positions
- How to deal with rejection
- The apprenticeship contract
- What is a pre-apprenticeship?
- Doing a job or pursuing a career?
- The scholastic option
- Education and training costs and financing in Switzerland
- Recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas
- Language learning and skills development

Further materials

The publication "Welcome to Switzerland" provides important information in English on Swiss laws, and on your rights and obligations. It also discusses the key values of Swiss society and gives practical advice on living and working in Switzerland.

www.sem.admin.ch › Publications & Services › Publications › Welcome to Switzerland

Another useful website is Migraweb, a platform *for migrants by migrants*, which provides detailed information on everyday life in Switzerland as well as useful contacts. The website is available in English and over a dozen other languages:

www.migraweb.ch

Further information in a number of different languages can be found on vocational, educational and career guidance websites as well as the website of the department of education (or that of the VET office) of the canton in which you live.

What you need to know about this guide

Hello!

Are you a foreigner in Switzerland?

Then you will certainly be interested in this guide as it can help you make informed decisions regarding your education, your employment or the education of your children.

Complexity is a common feature of education systems in all countries and Switzerland is no different. However, the Swiss system is likely to be very different from the one you are familiar with back home. In Switzerland, education is often organised on a cantonal level or by language region: the conditions will vary depending on whether you live in the German-speaking part of the country, in the French-speaking or the Italian-speaking region. Likewise, different opportunities will be available to you depending on whether you live in Zurich or Bern, Lausanne or Neuchâtel, for example. By contrast, the Swiss system of vocational and professional education and training is more or less standardised across the country. The guiding principle is: no dead-end qualifications. This means that it is not necessarily initial qualifications which matter the most but rather that what you achieve later on through further training and ongoing professional development is just as important. For this reason, it is important that you familiarise yourself with the various conditions and opportunities in your area. This guide is for:

parents with children in primary school: How does the transition from primary school to lower-secondary school take place in Switzerland?

*You will find all of the information you need in **Chapter 1, from page 10**.*

students completing compulsory education (i.e. last year of lower-secondary school), or their parents: how is upper-secondary level Vocational Education and Training organised? What are the characteristics of the different types of VET?

*See **Chapter 2, from page 20**.*

students completing compulsory education (i.e. last year of lower-secondary school), or their parents: how does the transition to upper-secondary level general education (i.e. Baccalaureate School or Specialised School) take place?

*See **Chapter 3, from page 38**, for an explanation of what is expected and a description of alternative education and training pathways.*

students planning to embark on upper-secondary level Vocational Education and Training, or their parents: how does one choose a career? How does one search for and find an apprenticeship?

*See **Chapter 4, from page 48**, for an explanation of how to prepare for these steps and how to improve your chances through a bridge-year option (i.e. 10th year of schooling, an interim year between lower-secondary and upper-secondary level).*

those completing Vocational Education and Training/an apprenticeship, with or without a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB): what options are available after graduation?

See Chapter 5, from page 72, which includes further education and training options and career prospects.

those about to obtain a General Baccalaureate, a Specialised Baccalaureate, or a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate and others preparing to enrol in a College of Higher Education, a University or a University of Applied Sciences:

See Chapter 6, from page 94, for an explanation of the transition from upper-secondary level to tertiary level, the various branches of study and the various qualifications that Switzerland offers.


those already working in Switzerland who lack formal qualifications: how does one obtain vocational qualifications to improve one's job prospects?

See Chapter 7, from page 108.


The individual chapters are all structured in a very similar fashion:

Each chapter and subchapter contains a brief description in the first column on the left.

Below this you will find a list of useful links on the Internet.

Under  you will find important details concerning initial and continuing education and training prospects.

Numerous testimonials given by people from all over the world illustrate the different education and training pathways in Switzerland.

In special infoboxes , parents will find tips and information on how they can help their children to choose an education and training pathway.

For all other questions, contact the vocational, educational and career guidance office in your canton of residence or visit the career counselling centre.

We wish you the best of luck in your education and professional career!

Heinz Stauffer, SDBB

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Pathways after lower-secondary school

	Certificate	Duration	Costs	Provides direct access to
Bridge-year options	Testimonial (no certificate)	Normally 1 year	Depending on the canton, domicile and bridge-year option: free or up to CHF 14,000 a year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vocational Education and Training (VET) - Baccalaureate School or Specialised School
Vocational Education and Training (VET) (2-year programme)	Federal Certificate of Vocational Education and Training	2 years	As a student you get a student salary which differs on the profession you are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job - Vocational Education and Training (3- or 4-year programme)
Vocational Education and Training (3- or 4-year programme)	Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training	3 or 4 years	As a student you get a student salary which depends on the profession you are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job - Making up for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate - Federal Diploma of Higher Education - College of Higher Education
School-based VET-programmes	Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training	3 or 4 years	Public offers normally are free; the school fees for an apprenticeships in a private school easily reaches several thousand Swiss francs a year; no students salary, but a traineeship salary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job - Making up for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate - Federal Diploma of Higher Education - College of Higher Education
Federal Vocational Baccalaureate FVB	Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (only in combination with at least a triannual VET)	3 or 4 years	The host company and the canton cover the costs. You or your parents have to pay the fees for materials, school camps, field trips etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job - Studies at an University of Applied Sciences - Bridge-to-university examination and studies at University
Specialised School	Specialised School Diploma	3 years	The canton covers the costs. You or your parents have to pay the fees for materials, school camps, field trips etc.	- College of Higher Education
	Specialised Baccalaureate	4 years (incl. Traineeship)		- University of Applied Sciences
Baccalaureate School	(General) Baccalaureate	3 to 5 years (depending on the canton)	The canton covers the costs. You or your parents have to pay the fees for materials, school camps, field trips etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University - Federal Institute of Technology FIT - University of Applied Sciences UAS: after min. 1 year of traineeship



TEAMING UP FOR THE CAREER-CHOICE PROCESS

The decision-making stage is much easier when everyone works together: you, your parents or other key persons, your class teacher and the careers adviser.

Careers advisers coordinate the entire process and help you whenever you need support. Careers advisers work one-on-one with you, help you to identify suitable occupations and assist you with the choice of education and training.

Teachers meet with you and your parents to help you make the first main decision: Baccalaureate School, Specialised School or vocational school? Your teachers can also help you to prepare for admission and aptitude tests or to draft a state-of-the-art application.

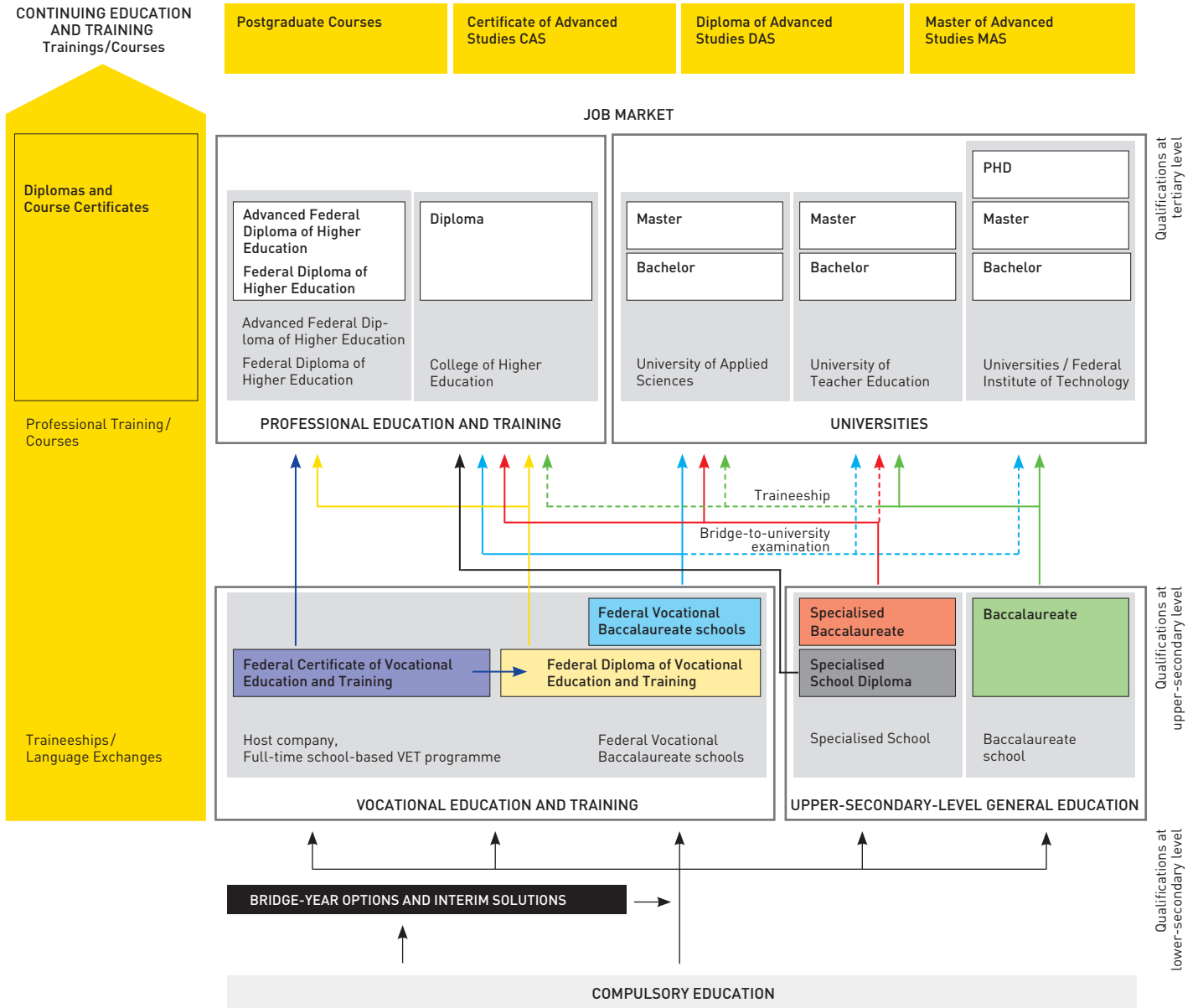
Your parents know the world of work. They can talk to you about what type of education and training you want to pursue. These discussions can help you make the choice that is right for you.

In many places, there are also mentorship programmes.

Men and women work free of charge to help you to find an apprenticeship. Ask your teachers or careers advisers where you can register for a mentorship.

You are the right person to take charge of your own career path. You do this by gathering information and by comparing different education and training options with your interests and aptitudes. You make decisions and act upon them. You keep going and don't lose heart, even when things seem difficult.

The education system – permeable and interconnected



- Direct pathways
- Indirect pathways (dotted lines): These pathways are either only partially accessible or are only accessible under certain preconditions (such as the attendance of extra courses or the passing of specific tests).

No dead-end qualification

The Swiss education system is interlinked and permeable. Not only are there different forms of education and training you can embark on after completing compulsory education, but also you can always change your plan of action later on, set yourself new goals and start on a different course leading to new qualifications.

Every stage in a person’s education and training leads to a certain qualification, and each qualification will always lead to further education and training options. With the current education system, the most important thing is not which education and training path, even occupation, you initially choose. It is much more important to take advantage of the opportunities and possibilities offered to you along the way.

This diagram only shows the major pathways. Numerous other paths and particularities exist. Your careers adviser can tell you about them.



FUNDING OF INITIAL AND HIGHER-LEVEL TRAINING

The labour market expects people to pursue lifelong learning but this can be costly. Depending on the education institution, there are tuition fees to be paid, and other expenses such as for books and materials will vary. If necessary, you can apply for financial aid from your canton of residence.

Financial aid from the cantons

The cantons establish the conditions for the awarding of financial aid. Each canton has its own legislation in this regard. Based on these regulations, a decision will be reached as to whether you qualify for financial aid. This can take the form of a grant, which normally you will not have to pay back, or – more rarely – a repayable loan.

Financial aid from private institutions

In addition, there are numerous private foundations that provide financial aid to those wishing to pursue initial and continuing education and training. Careers advisers and/or financial aid advisers can help you to find a suitable private institution and to submit your application for financial aid.

Detailed information about cantonal financial aid can be found here: <http://stipendien.educa.ch> (in German, French or Italian). You can also obtain more information from a financial aid advisor at your local vocational, educational and career guidance office.



TAREQ ZEINEDDINE, LEBANON

1ST YEAR

CHEMICAL AND PHARMACEUTICAL TECHNICIAN (CPT)

On the way to the dream job: “My choice of apprenticeship has a lot to do with my future dream job. ...

My ultimate goal is to become a university-qualified chemist. I worked really hard at finding an apprenticeship that would serve as a first stepping stone on the way there. I spent days, even weeks, on my letter of motivation. But it's all been worth it: CPT turns out to be the ideal occupation to start off with. As a chemical and pharmaceutical technician CPT, I have to use my brain as well as take great care and always be conscientious, because my work involves large quantities of potentially hazardous chemicals. I am proud of the work I do.

The firm I work for is in a village. I think this has made things easier, as everyone is

really nice. When I started the apprenticeship I was worried about how I might cope with the Swiss mentality because of what I had heard about the Swiss from other people. I thought that they would be very distant and inflexible. But nothing is further from the truth. My Swiss colleagues are open-minded and outgoing – we enjoy talking to each other. Things are going great in the firm. At vocational school, I have no problems with the occupation-specific subjects like chemistry. However, the language is tricky. It takes me four times longer than my classmates to do my homework. Luckily, my VET trainer helps me out, and I have enrolled in evening classes which I attend three times a week.

I am still determined to become a chemist. Once I have completed my apprenticeship, I would like to get more work experience and study on a part-time basis for the professional baccalaureate. I intend to take the 'Passerelle' – the Bridge-to-university Examination – and go on to study chemistry at university.”



While the first tracks are already laid at the time of transition from primary to lower-secondary level, the Swiss education system offers plenty of room throughout one's professional career for personal development, readjustments and fresh starts. Academic and vocational pathways are interwoven and many crossovers exist.

This chapter is intended for foreign parents whose children attend primary school in Switzerland. It also provides useful information for those wishing to gain a better understanding of the transition from primary to lower-secondary level and how streaming at that transition point affects further education and training options

First steps in education

From primary school to lower-secondary level

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Final-year students share their experiences

The transition from primary school to lower-secondary school is an important step in a child's education in Switzerland because this is when streaming first takes place: Depending on how well they do in primary school, students are assigned to different performance groups in lower-secondary school.



FACTSHEET
ON THE INTERNET
See page 2

Three children – each on a different path



COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Most students complete compulsory education (i.e. primary and lower-secondary school) in the public school of their commune of residence.

Only around 5% attend a private school. Public (i.e. state) schools fulfil an important integration function: children with different social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds attend the same school.

The cantons are responsible for compulsory education. The communes run the schools. Attendance of public school is free of charge.

At the start of compulsory education, children are generally four years old. Compulsory education lasts for eleven years. Primary school – including two years of kindergarten or (in some cantons) the first two years of the first primary-school learning cycle – lasts for a total of eight years.

Lower-secondary school lasts for three years. In the Canton of Ticino, lower-secondary school (Scuola media) lasts for four years.

TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL TO LOWER-SECONDARY SCHOOL

Not all children have the same aptitudes in school. Not all have the same talents, interests and abilities. Some are very intellectual, others are good at music, socialise well with others or are particularly good at crafts. And some struggle frequently with the demands of school. At this juncture in a child's education, it is therefore important for him/her to be assigned to the right performance level in lower-secondary school.

EXPECTING NEITHER TOO LITTLE NOR TOO MUCH

Generally speaking, students are twelve years old when they start lower-secondary school. Their grades at the end of primary school, their teacher's recommendation (often in consultation with the parents) and, in some areas, performance in an entry test or during a trial period in lower-secondary school all determine what stream the child will be assigned to.

Tips and suggestions for parents

As a mother or father, it is all right to acknowledge and accept weaknesses. You need to be able to say: "My child is not as good at school as I had imagined." If you can accept this fact, then new opportunities open up for your child.

The school works best as a community. As parents, you should perceive school, the classroom, as a whole and not seek to obtain special favours for your own children.

Get involved in school activities, contribute to the school and discuss matters with teachers. If it is clear that you take the conditions and interests of the school into account, then you will also be listened to if you express criticism.

Avoid putting pressure on your children. You should not expect them to constantly improve their grades.

Allow your children to develop their own interests and accept that these interests change over time – so your child will change his/her mind again and again.

Avoid putting your children under time constraints. You should allow your son or daughter to take the time needed to make his/her own decisions.



THE MENI FAMILY, SWITZERLAND

Every child is different:

“Children all have their own different traits.”

One of the Menis’ sons had difficulty engaging with other people, the other may not have been quite ready to start school when he did. ...

Eveline Meni is the head of the day care centre at Steckborn primary school. She occasionally works as a teaching assistant at the primary school. From time to time, she helps children who have difficulties fitting in.

Michael Meni is deputy head of the Regional Employment Centre in Winterthur.

They have three children:

Lars, 19, holds a Federal VET Diploma in Retail with a specialisation in foodstuffs, beverages and tobacco

Jano, 18, is in the 3rd year of training for the Federal VET Diploma in Retail with a specialisation in automotive parts logistics

Sina, 12, is in her last year of primary school

Can you remember what it was like when Lars started school? What was important for you?

Eveline: I can remember very well. I wanted his first days in school to go as smoothly as possible for him. He was the youngest in the class but also the tallest. And he had minor difficulties articulating his words. He wasn't able to pronounce the "ts" properly. I wanted to send him to a speech therapist at the start of the school year. However, we later decided that he should start school without too many distractions and simply get through this age-related speaking disorder. Looking back, as we often have, maybe we really should have waited a year before sending him to school.

Michael: Every now and then on a Friday morning, I would go to the kindergarten and take the children for walks in the forest, for instance. Even slight age differences between children this young are very much palpable. Lars tried hard but was still unable to do certain things as well as the other kids. He clearly had some catching up to do. I also really wanted Lars to feel happy on the first day of school.



Was Lars able to fit in?

Eveline: In the first few years of primary school, things were fine. The difficulties actually started at the age of about ten. Lars worked hard and diligently. Despite this, his scholastic performance went from good to no more than average. Among other things, his difficulties were caused by problems that he had with his teacher.

Michael: We always do our best to maintain active contact with the school and we always act quickly to resolve any pending issues with the teaching staff. We also regularly go to parental board meetings and parent-teacher conferences. However, in this case, there was no point in trying to get things changed because the teacher was coming up for retirement and Lars just had to deal with it.

Wasn't this a rather unfortunate situation at that stage, right when he was supposed to prepare for the transition to secondary school?

Michael: No, not really. As parents, we never put our children under pressure to succeed. I never wanted to get caught up in this competition among parents to see whose son is the best and whose daughter is the greatest. From my own professional experience, I know how important it is to obtain a good end-of-school qualification. I also know that it is just as important to be able to begin a professional career with a VET qualification.

Eveline: Lars had been assigned to the middle performance group. He completed lower-secondary school in three years and his grades were so high that in the third year of lower-secondary school, he was placed in the high performance group. The level assigned to him at the start of lower-secondary school did not have a major impact.

At the time, he actually wanted to work as a kindergarten teacher. Unfortunately, he didn't quite pass the admission test for the Specialised School that would have enabled him to pursue this path.

Michael: Admission tests for Specialised Schools and Baccalaureate Schools took place in April – too late in the year. All children who failed these admission tests were required to find an apprenticeship position within a short period. Lars, too.

Fortunately, he found an apprenticeship position for the Federal VET Diploma in retail. This was an occupation that he liked and for which he had already done a pre-apprenticeship. The host company in question was one that provided learners with a good deal of support to maximise their learning. After he finished his apprenticeship, the host company hired him. He now has a promising career ahead of him if he wants to pursue these opportunities.

You were able to learn a great deal from this experience with Lars. Did this help you with your other two children?

Eveline: Every child is different and has different traits. Jano, our second son, didn't have any difficulties in school but couldn't handle change very well.

He found it hard to leave home and accept other adult role models. It took him about six months before he began opening up to teachers.

When he entered lower-secondary school, he was assigned to the highest performance group. However, Jano is someone who needs enough freedom to feel happy and grow. When we saw how the pressure was increasing, and how much effort he had to put in to keep up, we decided to have him switched to the middle performance group. We didn't want him to be subjected to so much pressure. Jano's happiness was more important to us. The childhood years are decisive in one's personal development and he will never be able to relive those years.

Michael: For us, the most important things is for our children to be able to get an education and obtain a qualification. We feel that Vocational Education and Training is just as valid as general education. If Jano has other plans and wishes to pursue the baccalaureate path, then he will always have this possibility. Our education system is permeable enough to allow this.

And what about Sina, your youngest daughter?

Michael: Sina is a free spirit, if not to say hard-headed. Sina had difficulties learning mathematics and also needed a very long time to learn other subjects in school. Sina has a different, slower pace of learning than other children in her class.

Eveline: I worked as a teaching assistant and helped individual children with integration difficulties. By carrying out the instructions given to me by the special needs educator I learnt a great deal about how to approach learning difficulties. However, I am only able to help Sina to a limited extent. In her life, I play a different role. I am her mother, not her teacher.

We have discussed this problem with the school. The first step was to have her study mathematics with a special needs educator, although this was still a major challenge. She is now in her last year of primary education, and the school has adapted the curricular learning objectives for Sina. We will just have to wait and see how things develop and continue working with the school to find the best possible solution.



DIFFERENT SCHOOL MODELS AT LOWER-SECONDARY LEVEL DEPENDING ON THE CANTON

Each canton decides what procedure will be followed for the transition from primary school to lower-secondary school as well as what model of streaming or setting will be used in lower-secondary school. There are three different models:

Separate-streams model

The separate-streams model means that according to their performance level, students are assigned to different classes or different schools with differing curricula and teaching materials. In most cantons, there are either two or three types of schools at the lower-secondary level, although the exact names of these schools will differ from one canton to another. Each type of school corresponds to a different performance stream with different attainment objectives, high, middle and basic (e.g. lower-secondary school, type A, B and C).

Cooperative model

The cooperative model still uses core classes in which students assigned to the same performance group study together. However, these same students may attend classes at different levels in certain subjects, depending on how well they do in those subjects. For example, a student may attend basic-level mathematics but advanced-level languages.

Integrated model

The integrated model uses core classes without any streaming or setting according to performance: students of different ability levels all attend the same core class. Thus, classes remain as diverse as at primary school. In certain subjects, however, students may attend classes placing higher or lower demands on them, just as in the cooperative model.

A square deal for every child: “Since I teach the middle level of primary school, I am also responsible for the transition to lower-secondary level. That is either lower-secondary school with its three performance streams or pre-Baccalaureate School. ...

MARC MORAN, SWITZERLAND
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER,
GRADES 4 TO 6, WINTERTHUR



This is a lot of responsibility for me. I need to be certain that the decisions I make for each student are fair. The aim is to ensure that students are not over- or under-challenged.

My decision – which I may also discuss with colleagues who teach specific subjects – I then convey to the parents. We do not always see eye to eye when it comes to a child’s potential. I might consider a child’s scholastic performance over the past three years and conclude that he/she should be assigned to the middle performance group in lower-secondary school. However, that child’s parents may be concerned that this ‘lower’ level might be detrimental and restrictive, thereby limiting his/her choice of occupation later on. A second meeting is sometimes scheduled, in certain cases the principal and the lower-secondary school teachers are brought in. We always have to find a solution that is in the best interests of the students.”



IMPACT OF PERFORMANCE LEVEL AT LOWER-SECONDARY LEVEL

The performance group in which a student has completed secondary school has an impact on the options available to him or her afterwards at upper-secondary level (see page 15). Upon completion of compulsory education, there are two alternative pathways:

1. More in-depth general education at a [Baccalaureate School](#) or at a [Specialised School](#). While the first type is purely academic and the second more closely linked to specific occupations, neither of them provides any direct vocational training. Rather, they both prepare students for further study at universities, Universities of Applied Science and/or Colleges of Higher Education.
2. Vocational Education and Training (VET, apprenticeship). Here, some courses are entirely school-based, but most follow a dual-track model. This combines part-time practical work for an employer, where trainees learn on the job, with classes at a vocational school and inter-company training workshops.

Students with good academic performance in lower-secondary school are free to choose either of these pathways. The first leads to a General Baccalaureate or a Specialised Baccalaureate (depending on the type of school). The second pathway also offers a baccalaureate track (Vocational Baccalaureate) for those interested in higher education at tertiary level. Less academically minded students can choose the career path that is best suited to their abilities and interests from a wide range of vocational training options.

Choosing the right education and training pathway is a process. You learn more about yourself, realistically assess your own abilities and compare these with available education and training options. You then decide which pathway is right for you and make your choice.

Making the right choice – the process takes time

Upon completion of compulsory education, there are two equally valid pathways available to you: there is the general education pathway, which entails enrolment in a Baccalaureate School or a Specialised School or the vocational pathway, which prepares you to work in a specific occupation. The choice of pathway depends on your interests and abilities.

Baccalaureate School and Specialised School – even more effort and even more homework

Young people who attend a Baccalaureate School or Specialised School enjoy going to school. They are both willing and able to work even harder in school and study even more than during compulsory education. They have no problem spending two or even three hours a day doing homework.

In order to get into a Baccalaureate School or a Specialised School, you already need to be a good student in compulsory education. You attend the high performance group, get good grades in most subjects and are interested in a wide range of different topics.

In the German-speaking region of Switzerland, lower-secondary schools and careers advisers offer a special test (Stellwerktest) which you can take to get an objective assessment of where you stand.

A score between 600 and 700 points is what it takes to meet the demands of a Baccalaureate School or a Specialised School.

Approaching your career choice with an open mind

Compared to the general education pathway, choosing a suitable career and finding an apprenticeship position is a complex undertaking: there are around 200 different occupations to choose from. At this stage of the process you should keep an open mind, be eager to find out more about different occupations in a variety of occupational fields and compare this information with your own interests and abilities.

Perhaps you will set out on this journey independently or perhaps it will begin at school with career choice classes. In either case, do seek help whenever you need it, and talk with your parents, teachers, classmates or careers advisers.

A class of lower-secondary students preparing for the next stage of their journey of learning: Most of them have opted for an apprenticeship.

Successful career choices for the students of S3a

In Class S3a (highest performance stream) at Fehraltdorf's lower-secondary school, most students knew early on what educational course they wanted to pursue after their last year of compulsory schooling: All but two have decided to attend a VET programme and have already found an apprenticeship position.

Two girls are planning to enrol in an upper-secondary level Bacculaureate School. One of them wants to study geology or more specifically, to eventually work as a volcanologist. The second girl wants to remain in school because she doesn't really know yet what she wants to do later on in life. "I received two offers to do an apprenticeship as a pharmacist but somehow this occupation doesn't seem quite right for me. I don't want to completely lose the habit of studying so I'll attend a Bacculaureate School. If I like it there I'll stay, otherwise I'll look for a different apprenticeship."

A wide range of different occupations

Of the other students, six have enrolled in a VET programme in commerce; three are enrolled in a VET programme in information technology, two in medical assistance and two in mechanical engineering. Many of them intend to combine their apprenticeship with a programme leading to the Vocational Bacculaureate. Another student wants to become a carpenter since this occupation matches his interests. He is a passionate climber and looks forward to erecting roof trusses and working from heights. Another student wants to become an automotive mechatronics technician because he prefers working with his hands to sitting in front of a PC.

One of the female students wants to become an electrician. She has always wanted to pursue a technical occupation and had done a pre-vocational taster as an electrical designer. She found office work to be boring but enjoyed working on a construction site. She knows that in the first year of training, she will be the only girl in her class at the vocational school. She thinks that eventually she will get used to it and will do fine. At any rate, she looks forward to doing her apprenticeship.

Tips and suggestions for parents

It is the students themselves who have to take responsibility for the process. They need to feel motivated to make choices regarding their future education and career. However, they need your support.

The dinner table is a good place to talk about choosing a career. Get involved in an ongoing conversation about your children's interests, their strengths, weaknesses and character traits.

Remind your children of things that they used to enjoy doing.

Respect your children's own interests. Do not try to pursue your personal career dreams through your son or daughter.

Take an active interest in the process of choosing a career, ask your children about their experiences during pre-apprenticeships and assess these with them.

Be curious. Try to broaden your own horizons with your children by learning more about occupations that you yourself are unfamiliar with.

Encourage your children to stay on the ball.

Share your everyday experiences with your children. Talk to them about your work life.

Finding an apprenticeship with only a few applications

Most of the students had to send out fewer than ten applications before finding a suitable apprenticeship position. All of them agree that being in the highest performance group worked in their favour. "It is obvious that we generally do well in school. If you show real interest and commitment, if you are open and friendly, the company is bound to offer you an apprenticeship position," one of the students explains.

"Our apprenticeship positions weren't just handed to us, though," adds another student. "We put in time and effort. We considered our own strengths and weaknesses. We sent out well-presented applications early on. We also intensively prepared for job interviews, gathered information about the company that we applied to and were also able to explain why we chose the specific occupation. This is certainly part of the reason for our success. All of this was just as important as our good grades in school."



VOCATIONAL OR GENERAL EDUCATION PATHWAY?

On average, around 20%–25% of young people coming out of lower-secondary school in German-speaking cantons pursue the general education pathway at upper-secondary level; a far larger proportion opt for the vocational pathway. In contrast, the proportion of young people enrolling in Baccalaureate Schools and Specialised Schools is considerably higher. In the French-speaking regions and Ticino, although most young people still enrol in a VET programme. However, school-based VET programmes combined with short-term traineeships are the more common model of organisation in the French-speaking cantons and Ticino, whereas dual-track VET programmes with long-term apprenticeships are the norm in the German-speaking region of Switzerland.

The Swiss education system enjoys a solid reputation, partly due to the good quality of its Baccalaureate Schools, Specialised Schools and higher education institutions, and partly due to the well-designed dual-track VET programmes, which combine classroom instruction with work-based training. For many young people, this is a better and more suitable pathway than general education. Both the vocational and general education pathway at upper-secondary level offer good prospects for further education and training at tertiary level.

The question "apprenticeship or school?" is certainly an important one that requires serious consideration. However, since the Swiss education system is also very permeable, the decision made at this point is not a definitive one on the road to career development.

Seek professional help if you realise that the process is not moving forward.

Talk to the teachers and get their perspective on the most suitable pathway for your child.

Visit the local Vocational Information Centre with your son or daughter. Look at the information available on DVDs, on the Internet and in print.

Take your son or daughter to a job fair. Use this opportunity to talk directly to people who actually work in the various occupations.

If your child feels stuck, find out from a careers adviser if he or she is eligible to receive extra support from a mentor.

The transition from lower-secondary level to upper-secondary level Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the entry point to a given occupational field or branch: Nature or design, construction or sales, information technology or health? A VET programme takes two, three or four years to complete, depending on the type, and there are over 200 different occupations on offer. A VET programme or “apprenticeship”, as it is also known, can be combined with the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate.

This chapter is intended for young migrants (and the parents of young migrants) who are reaching the end of compulsory education, are about to make the transition to VET and would like to know more about what options are open to them at upper-secondary level.

Starting out on the VET path

From lower-secondary school to VET

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Programmes leading to the Federal Certificate of Vocational and Educational Training (VET) take two years and are intended for young people who generally need more time to learn or whose grades in lower-secondary school are not sufficient to permit them to enrol in a three-year or four-year VET programme. Practical training at the host company, classroom instruction at the vocational school and branch courses at the branch training centre will therefore take this into account.



FACTSHEET
ON THE INTERNET
See page 2

Two-year programmes for the Federal VET Certificate



ABOUT TWO-YEAR VET PROGRAMMES

Two-year VET programmes lead to the issuance of a Federal VET Certificate. Learners – in the same occupation – will have comparable skills upon completion of their training whether they trained in Basel, St. Gallen, Lausanne or Bellinzona. This makes the job hunt easier, since the Federal VET Certificate provides potential employers with a clear overview of the person's technical, methodological and social skills.

WHAT PREREQUISITES ARE THERE FOR TWO-YEAR VET PROGRAMMES?

You may be more practically minded and find it difficult to grasp theory. The vocational school will adapt training content accordingly.

It may take you longer to learn. In the host company and in the vocational school, this will be taken into account. You may need clear instructions, familiarity with the working environment and working processes in order to learn successfully. You prefer to have a good grasp of a given set of tasks before trying to learn anything new.

Perhaps you haven't lived very long in Switzerland and your language skills are not yet good enough to enrol in a three-year or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma. In this case, the VET programme for the Federal VET Certificate can be an ideal entry point for working life.

Tips and suggestions for parents

Help your son or daughter to arrive at a realistic assessment of his or her own abilities. The chosen VET programme should neither prove to be a constant struggle nor demand too little effort.

Go along to the careers adviser with your son or daughter. Take part in assessing what abilities and aptitudes your child possesses.

Continue to support your son or daughter throughout VET.

OPTIONS

Occupations have been grouped into occupational fields to make it easier to gain an overall view of working life in Switzerland (see Page 51). Two-year VET programmes are available in nearly all occupations. Typical fields include nature, nutrition, hospitality services, hotels/restaurants/catering, textile, beauty/cosmetics, construction, building services technology, wood and interior design, metalworking, vehicles, business/administration, sales, transport/logistics or health and social care.



RONDIK TAHER MOSA, IRAQ

1ST YEAR

FEDERAL VET CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME
IN RETAIL ASSISTANCE

Enough time to learn properly: “I come from a family that considers learning very important. ...

My father always wanted his children to learn, undergo solid training in a good occupation and pursue a career. For this reason, I attended all twelve years of schooling and obtained my upper-secondary level baccalaureate. When I arrived in Switzerland, I quickly realised that it is not easy to find a good job if you don't have any form of training. And since I do not want to spend my entire life cleaning or staying at home, and since I would have been bored as a housewife, I decided that I wanted to work.

If I had stayed in Iraq, I would have studied to become a pharmacist. Unfortunately, this is not possible for me in Switzerland. In the integration course, I considered many different

occupations; the occupation of retail assistant with a specialisation in food, beverages and tobacco was the one that appealed to me most.

Sociable

It is an occupation where I can interact with other people. This is important to me because I am very open and enjoy interacting with others. In this VET programme, I am learning a great deal about foodstuffs. It is a subject that I can also use in my own life. It is good to know how to eat healthily.

I know that the next two years will not be easy for me. I still have to greatly improve my language skills, which means that I spend a lot more time on my homework than my classmates do. However, I am fortunate enough to be able to rely on my partner. He helps around the house and even cooks our meals. He wants me to have enough time to learn. This is why I am sure that I will succeed.”



SAMUEL FREI, SWITZERLAND
2ND YEAR
FEDERAL VET CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME
IN COOKING

Success, thanks to the right support: “I always enjoyed cooking. When I finished year 10, I started a three-year apprenticeship as a chef. ...

My employer was in another canton so I had to board where I was working. Unfortunately, the restaurant and I were not compatible. I found it especially difficult to adapt to the irregular work hours.

With the help of my parents, I moved back to Zurich. This meant that I had to serve the second year of my apprenticeship in a new environment, get to know new co-workers and get used to working with them. I had a few problems here too: I worked too slowly and found it difficult to do several things at

once. The firm suggested that I change to the two-year Federal Certificate programme. I was initially disappointed but now I see that this option is better for me. At vocational school we are a small class of 10. We know each other well and the teacher has more time to focus on each of us. I also like my new workplace. All in all, I have a great learning environment.

One step closer to the goal

My final apprenticeship exam takes place this summer. This will be the first step towards achieving my goal. If possible, I would like to transfer to the 2nd year of the three-year Federal Diploma programme. In terms of my future career, I have a range of options that would interest me, such as kitchen manager or maybe a teacher at a vocational school – I’d need to do a professional baccalaureate for that. Or maybe I could go abroad and train in Japanese or Chinese cuisine.”



REMEDIAL COURSES AND INDIVIDUAL GUIDANCE

Some learners encounter difficulties at the company or school during their two-year VET programme. There can be various reasons for that:

Perhaps you fall behind with lessons and homework. In such cases, you need to discuss the problem with your teacher as soon as possible. A remedial course might help you to improve your performance.

Perhaps you are having a hard time working at your host company and are unable to interact well with adult co-workers. Or maybe too much is expected of you at the company. Speak about this with your apprenticeship trainer as soon as possible. Arrangements can be made to provide you with personal guidance during your apprenticeship.

NO DEAD-END QUALIFICATIONS

Once you obtain your Federal VET Certificate, you can either look for a job or enrol in a three- or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma. You will normally be admitted directly into the second year of training.

A three- or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma provides the learner with a comprehensive range of competences needed for one of over 200 regulated occupations. In Switzerland, around two-thirds of all young people pursue this pathway, also known as a "dual-track" apprenticeship. While they all combine practical training with classroom instruction, each programme places different practical and academic demands on the learner.



**FACTSHEET
ON THE INTERNET**
See page 2

Three- and four-year VET programmes for Federal VET Diploma



WHAT IS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)?

Most Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Switzerland combines practical training (at a company and in branch courses) with theory (at a vocational school). At all three of these learning locations, the aim is to provide learners with the knowledge and skills needed to find employment and participate fully in society. There are also VET programmes where learners attend classes at the vocational school on a full-time basis. Such programmes include short-duration traineeship phases. This model is mostly found in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland (see page 34).

Host companies

In a dual-track VET programme, you spend 3 to 4 days per week working at your host company. You develop practical know-how while also improving your social and methodological skills.

Branch courses

Over a period of several days per year, branch courses provide you with fundamental techniques and skills needed for the chosen occupation.

Vocational school

In addition to your practical training, you will spend 1 to 2 days per week attending classes at a vocational school to acquire the necessary theoretical knowledge. The vocational part of the classroom instruction focuses on the technical competences needed for your occupation. The general-knowledge part focuses on two main areas: "Language and Communication" provides you with the verbal and nonverbal skills you need to communicate successfully in a variety of personal, occupational and social situations. "Society" mainly covers political, environmental, legal, social and cultural topics.

Tips and suggestions for parents

Instead of focusing on one specific occupation right from the beginning, look at the whole occupational field first. This way, it will be easier to find the occupations which match your child's school education.

Take sufficient time to analyse carefully, together with your son or daughter, where exactly their skills and interests lie.

Talk to the teacher at an early stage to find out what more your son or daughter can do to be prepared for the demands of their favourite occupations.



WHAT PREREQUISITES APPLY FOR THREE- AND FOUR-YEAR VET PROGRAMMES?

In each occupational field, there are careers that match your interests and skills. There will be different requirements (high, medium or basic) in terms of prior scholastic performance. These requirements will vary from one occupational field to another as well as from one occupation to another.

Technological fields: you like mathematics and natural sciences. You are able to think in abstract and logical terms. You have good spatial visualisation capacities and are interested in how technology works.

Technology-related crafts fields: You are good at mathematics and – depending on the occupation – geometry, too. In addition, you have good spatial visualisation capacities and enjoy working with extreme precision.

Crafts-related fields: You like mathematics, but above all, you are very good at manual work, enjoy being physically active and are physically fit.

Service-sector fields: You are interested in all subjects in school, including mathematics. Above all, you have a very solid mastery of the national language of your region.

You also have a talent for foreign languages, communicate and articulate well.

Social and health-care fields: You communicate well with others and find it easy to learn other languages. In addition, you have a knack for natural sciences and enjoy mathematics.

Fields relating to creative arts: Whether you wish to become a hairdresser, graphic designer or florist – you have an eye for aesthetics, enjoy artistic creation and are good with your hands. Among your favourite subjects in school are art, crafts and possibly geometry as well.



NORINA BOSSHARD, SWITZERLAND

1ST YEAR

FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME
IN CHIMNEY SWEEPING

A pre-vocational taster made things clear: “First, I thought about training as a waitress. I went for a taster and discovered that I found it hard to interact with my customers. ...

So, I was back to square one.

My mum gave me the chimney sweep idea. She had been talking, by chance, to my instructor who suggested that this might be a good job for me. I went on a one-week trial, passed the aptitude test and was accepted for a proper apprenticeship. I have now realised that it is a very physically demanding job. In the evening

I often feel a twinge in my back or my knees, especially if I have spent hours scraping away soot in a central heating room. Vocational school is tougher than I thought.

Chemistry and physics are essential

In the first year, we concentrate on two of my least favourite subjects: chemistry and physics, which are essential in this line of work. I tend to study at the weekend because I'm usually too tired after work.

In terms of my future career, I can imagine doing several things. Once I pass my final apprenticeship exam, I would like to earn some money and then travel, maybe take an English course. Then again, I could do something totally different, like another apprenticeship or work for a season in a ski resort hotel.”

From lower-secondary school to VET

“I absolutely wanted a job in the business sector: Even back in Kosovo, I wanted to work in a bank. I come from a merchant family. ...

My mother, my cousins and my brother are all interested in this line of work. I came to Switzerland when I was 15 years old. At the time, everyone told me to forget it, that I would never make it because you have to have a perfect command of the local standard language, in my case, German. And I thought to myself that the first step should therefore be to learn an occupation where German was less important and change later. So I did an eight-month traineeship at a hospital but this was simply not the right job for me.

After this traineeship, my mind was made up: I wanted to enrol in a VET programme in commerce. For this I needed to improve my German and learn a foreign language. English was not difficult for me and so I began to attend an intensive course in German.

An attractive résumé

And I was lucky, a mentor helped me with the application process. First I prepared an application and printed out all of the documents on cream-coloured paper. It was a very nice application. Each time I applied for a new apprenticeship position, I printed out all of the documents again and placed them all together in a new folder. And after around twenty applications, I was invited to my first interview. I clearly remember how long I practised with my mentor. How do I present myself? How do I maintain eye contact? How do I shake people's hands? What do I say? How do I say it?

About ten other interested young people were also invited to this interview and we were all vying for the same four apprenticeship positions. All of the others had attended school in Switzerland, but my German was not yet perfect. For this interview, all I had was my motivation, my resolve, and a conviction that I could do this. In order to obtain an apprenticeship position, I had to convince the supervisor that I could successfully complete the apprenticeship for the VET programme in commerce.

In the right occupation

Now I am in the third year of my training and this is indeed the right occupation for me. Over the last two years, I have been working for the City of Zurich, initially at the HR Division and then for the Department of Social Affairs. This year, I am working in the Audit Office. I find the work fun, a blend of working on your own and working with others.

Things are also running smoothly at the vocational school. Just to play it safe, I attend a free remedial course for learners one afternoon per week. There I do some of my homework and if I have any questions, I can always ask a teacher to help me. I am also learning French because I want to attend a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate examination after I complete the VET programme. That way, I'll be able to attend a University of Applied Sciences.”

DAFINA ELMAZI, KOSOVO

3RD YEAR

FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME
IN COMMERCE, PROFILE B (BASIC)





CELIA HALDIMANN, BRAZIL
3RD YEAR

**FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME IN
NURSING: COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE**

*The right set of skills
for the job: “I am
outgoing and like working
on my own. ...*

In my job with the community health-care organisation Spitex, I help the sick and the elderly to continue to live as independently as possible. I visit them at home to provide nursing care, assist them with basic tasks like getting dressed and washing, as well as day-to-day household chores.

My skills are well suited to the demands of such a job: I find it easy to approach people. Given that my clients often live on their own and tend to feel lonely, I treat them with warmth and kindness. I sympathise with them when they tell me about their problems. I found this part of my training straightforward, especially once I had learnt to maintain a necessary degree of emotional detachment.

I also think I am at an advantage when it comes to the specialist medical terminology. From my knowledge of Portuguese (my mother tongue), I can work out what the terms mean and then learn them. German, though, is more problematic. I can get by with my spoken German as I can also use non-verbal communication. This is not the case for my written German. I take ages to write something in German and I am never happy with the result. One year ago, I started to take German lessons with a private tutor, who also helps me with my homework.

I am now studying for my final apprenticeship exam. Thankfully my marks this term have been good. I want to gain more on-the-job experience and improve my German before I start a professional development programme. I am still undecided about what I want to do. I could study health care at a College of Higher Education, or do my professional baccalaureate and go on to a University of Applied Sciences.”



**DIFFICULTIES
ENCOUNTERED
DURING VET**

The transition from compulsory education to VET is also a transition towards greater self-reliance. Not only will you be expected to actively contribute and provide input at the host company, you will also be required to learn and study on your own at the vocational school.

You may find this transition to be difficult and encounter problems at your host company or vocational school. In such cases, you will need to find a solution as quickly as possible:

- Discuss the problem with your teacher at the vocational school. If necessary, you will be able to register for a remedial course or additional language course.
- Talk with your apprenticeship trainer to find solutions to any difficulties that you may experience in the host company.

In some cases, problems cannot be solved. Before you quit your VET programme, you should absolutely contact the official responsible for your apprenticeship in your canton – this person’s name is indicated on the apprenticeship contract. Often, an alternative solution can be found, e.g. reassignment to another host company, transferring from a three- or four-year VET Diploma programme to a less challenging two-year VET Certificate programme or vice versa.

If you are certain that you wish to discontinue your VET programme, then you need to meet with a careers adviser to decide what course of action needs to be taken.

From lower-secondary school to VET

A passion for electrical technology: “For me, there was never any doubt that I wanted to get a proper qualification. ...

If you live in Switzerland and don't have any proper training, then you get nowhere professionally and end up doing the same job for your entire life. I wanted to find a good job, take responsibility at work, pursue a career and constantly improve my knowledge and skills.

At first, I thought that I wanted to become an IT specialist. While attending an integration course, I tried to find an apprenticeship, but I had only been in Switzerland for about a year. My language skills were simply not good enough to do well on the Multicheck test. I therefore decided to do a pre-apprenticeship in electrical

installation at a big company and continue training after that. However, the results of the pre-apprenticeship admission test at the vocational school were so good that we decided that I should try to find an apprenticeship straight away.

Personal initiative and cooperation

Doing an apprenticeship at a large company requires lots of personal initiative. Sometimes I work with a really good fitter from whom I can learn a lot.

But of course, there are also main courses and classes at the vocational school. Through the main courses, I learn all of the basic skills that I need for this occupation. At the vocational school, I learn theory, mainly physics, electrical engineering and mathematics. Vocational instruction is easy for me since I attended university in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, in the first year of training, I considered giving up the apprenticeship. I was already 22 years old at the time and my fellow learners were younger than 18. I felt as if I had ended up in kindergarten. Now things are better. Today, we have a good relationship and I help them with their learning. We meet on Saturdays and I explain physics to them if they haven't quite grasped what we discussed in class.

Knowing precisely how a generator works

In contrast to vocational instruction, I had a really hard time when it came to the “Language, Communication and Society” classes, due to my limited language skills. For this reason, in the first year of training, I attended a voluntary remedial course one evening per week. My partner was also always there to help. She would correct my texts or practise my presentations with me. I enjoy learning and have no problem spending two or three hours doing homework in the evening. For instance, if, at school, we are given a brief introduction into how a generator works, I will then look up additional information at home until I understand exactly how it works. I really enjoy doing this.

For the qualification procedure, I want to obtain good preliminary grades, since I am already thinking about the kind of training I could pursue later on. I would really like to study electrical engineering at a University of Applied Sciences. For the moment, this is my preferred option.”

KHYBER AHMADZY, AFGHANISTAN

4TH YEAR

FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME
IN ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION



A dream job postponed: “I have been living in Switzerland for about three years now. From the very start, I have tried to integrate as quickly and as smoothly as possible. ...

FARHAN ABDI OMAR, SOMALIA

1ST YEAR

FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME IN
BAKING, PASTRYMAKING AND CONFECTIONERY



Not only have I learnt the local language, I also joined a theatre group for migrants. It's been great fun! We have performed in the street as well as in homes for the elderly. It was very rewarding to see people laugh and have a good time. I like it when others around me are happy and enjoying themselves.

Working shifts

Last year, I attended an integration course. I prepared for my career choice. I found out about various jobs in the applied arts, went for a pre-vocational taster in shoemaking and was particularly fascinated by orthopaedics. Unfortunately, there were no available apprenticeships in my canton.

So I went for another trial run, this time in baking, pastry-making and confectioning at a small bakery. This occupation matches my skills and interests. It is an occupation that requires skilled hands and I am very talented in hands-on tasks. I also really enjoy working in shifts. I particularly like working at night and in the early morning because that leaves me with the whole afternoon free. This is important for me because I want to devote my free time to training as an actor.

Living independently on a secure income

I would like to work as an actor. I went to a casting session and was chosen to play in a comedy. We had great fun filming, working, eating and laughing together. However, I know that I will be unable to earn a steady monthly income from acting.

This is why I am doing the apprenticeship. Once I complete my VET programme in baking, pastry-making and confectionery, I will have the technical knowledge needed to confidently look for a job. I will be able to earn money and live on my own. And I will be able to hold my head high, knowing that I have achieved something. For me, this VET programme is the foundation for an independent life.”

VET programmes leading to the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate

A VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma can be combined with preparation for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB) examination. Vocational Baccalaureate Schools provide more extensive coverage of general education topics than standard VET Diploma programmes. The FVB will allow you to enrol in studies at a Swiss University of Applied Sciences. Depending on the degree programme chosen, you will either be directly admitted or have to go through an admission procedure.



WHAT EXACTLY IS THE FEDERAL VOCATIONAL BACCALAUREATE?

During your VET programme, you will spend an additional day attending a preparatory course for the FVB examination, which also means working one day less per week at the host company. The FVB is an optional qualification that you can obtain in addition to the standard Federal VET Diploma.

The Federal Vocational Baccalaureate provides access to the following tertiary-level training options:

You can enrol in a University of Applied Sciences (UAS). Depending on the degree programme you choose, you may or may not be required to take an entrance examination or undergo an admission procedure.

You can attend a preparatory course for the University Aptitude Test. Passing this test enables you to enrol in a cantonal university or Federal Institute of Technology (FIT).

WHAT PREREQUISITES MUST BE MET IN ORDER TO ATTEND THE FVB EXAMINATION?

You are a good student, so you decide to combine VET with studying for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate. This combination is suitable for you if you enjoy learning and intensive studying. To put your plan into practice, you need the approval of your host company.

Choose the profile that is most suited to your chosen occupation and tell the managers at the host company that you would like to attend the preparatory course for the FVB examination.

There are different orientations for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate:

- Engineering, Architecture, Life Sciences
- Nature, Landscape, Food
- Business and Services
- Design and Art
- Health and Social Care

The admission procedure is not regulated in the same way in each canton. In some cantons, learners are required to have a certain grade point average and a recommendation letter from their teacher in the last year of lower-secondary school.

In other cantons, you will need to pass an admission test in order to enrol in the preparatory course for the FVB examination. This test will cover mathematics and languages at the level which is expected of students completing secondary school in the top ability stream.

Tips and suggestions for parents

Act early – in the second half of lower-secondary school – and meet with teachers to find out whether your son or daughter should attend a school offering the preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB) examination.

Attend the orientation events organised by these schools in your canton.

If your son or daughter applies for an apprenticeship vacancy, he/she should state his/her intention to attend this preparatory course. Apprenticeship trainers must first give their consent for learners to take the additional day of classroom instruction to attend the FVB preparatory course.

Admission examinations from previous years are posted on the website of the VET offices in the various cantons (see addresses: www.adressen.sdbb.ch).



PREETHY VADAKKADATH, INDIA
4RD YEAR
FEDERAL VET DPLOMA PROGRAMME IN
AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY WITH FVB



OBTAINING THE FVB AFTER COMPLETION OF THE VET PROGRAMME

You can also first concentrate on obtaining your Federal VET Diploma and then take the preparatory course for the FVB examination (FVB II), instead of obtaining the FVB while you are completing VET. This can be done either on a part-time basis (2 years) or full-time (1 year). For FVB II, candidates are required to undergo an admission test and additional interview. Most schools that prepare learners for the FVB examination also offer preparatory courses for their admission test.

Of course, you can also simply start working after graduation and then enrol in the FVB II course after you have gathered a certain amount of work experience.

Combining theory and practical experience in an ideal way: “Before I came to Switzerland at the age of 18, I had graduated from a technical college in India. ...

So, I opted for a Swiss training programme that would draw on what I had already learnt back in India. The apprenticeship-professional baccalaureate option means that I can combine theory and practice. So, I took intensive French classes and passed the entrance exam.

The first week of my training was spent in an ‘apprenticeship camp’ with 58 men and 2 women – a bit of a shock. Also, at 19, I was older than them. At the beginning I often found it quite boring. But the problems have disappeared –

my colleagues have matured, we work well together and we help each other out. I find the maths and technical aspects of the training quite straightforward thanks to the solid foundation I received during my schooling in India. This allows me to concentrate on other subjects. Extra tuition in French and German has been a great help. German, in particular, is far from easy, as the technical terms used in the text books are not necessarily the ones used in the workshop. My workshop training has been especially useful, as I am not the most skilled mechanic in the world. However, as a process control technician, I will not only be involved in programming processes, I will also have to implement projects.

Once I pass my final apprenticeship exam, I intend to work for a year and earn some money. Then I would like to go on to study technical design at a University of Applied Sciences, if possible on a part-time basis. This would allow me to combine my favourite hobbies – drawing and painting – with my career.”

From lower-secondary school to VET

Baccalaureate School was not for me: “In the third year of lower secondary school, all options were open to me. Within the same week, I found out I had been admitted to both the baccalaureate school and the FVB school. ...

I was certain that I wanted to do an apprenticeship in electronics and at a specific host company. Fortunately, everything worked out as planned. I found the apprenticeship I wanted and was able to undergo very solid initial training.

Classes at the vocational school were not too difficult since I was already keen on learning this occupation. At the host company, I received work-based training, which was different from classroom instruction at the voca-

tional school. And because there were several learners, we learnt not only from the apprenticeship trainers but also from each other. We spent a lot of time talking together, sharing experiences, pursuing our own projects, and often worked longer than we had to. It was an exciting working environment with interesting co-workers and a perfect way to gain initial exposure to working life.

After graduation, my plan was to do mandatory military service and then enrol in a degree programme in electrical engineering at a University of Applied Sciences. Unfortunately, things didn't work out. I fell short by a few points, partly because I had taken too many military refresher courses and partly because the VET programme in electronics had been so easy for me that I realised only too late that I should have studied more. Looking back, I am no longer upset that I didn't get the qualification. After all, I had certainly acquired useful basic knowledge.

Becoming Head of Technology

A good friend of mine created a small company and wanted to offer IT solutions so I began working for him. We had no idea whether the business would get off the ground but we had a backup plan: if the new company failed to pick up steam, we figured that we could always get hired by a bank and earn lots of money.

However, this proved unnecessary. We moved into an office right next to a web agency that was looking for IT specialists. So, both companies merged and I became the Head of Technology. For the past four years, I have been responsible for handling the technical side of the websites that we design. I also develop new solutions and provide employees and trainees with coaching.

Realistic training

While working, I enrolled in and completed a part-time Bachelor's degree programme in information technology at the University of Applied Sciences. These studies were very exciting. During my training, I was able to deepen my theoretical understanding. However, I learnt even more by applying my knowledge in the daily tasks at work and by talking with experts since my workmates come from a wide range of different IT fields.

In recent years, I have been fortunate enough to work with many interesting people. I have always done what I enjoy doing. If what I am working on interests me, if I am able to interact with others and if we are able to assess each other's work critically, then I can achieve a great deal through information technology.”

MARC EGLI, SWITZERLAND
ELECTRONICAL ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN
WITH FVB, COMPUTER SCIENTIST



For some professions, there are full-time-school options for Vocational Education and Training (VET). The Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training, which participants receive upon the completion of these programmes, is the same as for standard VET models featuring on-the-job training. The fully school-based type of apprenticeship is more common in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland than in the German-speaking part.



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School-based options for Vocational Education and Training

School-based options for Vocational Education and Training may be offered by either public or private schools. Practical skills are taught through temporary traineeships, either organised by the schools themselves, or by companies working with them.

While VET options of this kind do not exist for all professions, they do cover a broad range. They are quite common in the field of commerce, where they are offered by commercial schools. They also exist in the arts and in photography, in gastronomy, and in the health care and technology sectors, among others. Some school-based VET programmes are run by upper-secondary Specialised Schools (see page 40). In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, IT schools also play an important role.

Many of these programmes are offered at a regional or cantonal level, with specific criteria defined for admission (e.g., admission tests, requirements for application files and résumés, the completion of a preparatory course or the achievement of grades above passing level for certain school subjects). Participants in school-based VET programmes tend to follow similar schedules and usually have the same school holidays as students at Baccalaureate Schools. Unlike apprentices completing standard VET programmes with on-the-job training at a specific company, participants in school-based VET programmes do not usually receive a salary.

Tips and suggestions for parents

Both training in the VET programme as well as in the Vocational Baccalaureate School lead to the same final qualifications, the Federal Certificate or Federal Diploma of Vocational and

Educational Training (with or without Federal Vocational Baccalaureate). Talk to your son or daughter about whether he or she would like to keep going to school, or whether an apprenticeship at a company seems the better option.

There are both public and private Vocational Baccalaureate Schools. Find out which is on offer in your region and if the costs (course fees/tuition fees) are covered or not.

There is an age limit for enrolment in some Vocational Baccalaureate Schools.

Starting information technology (IT) in school: “I started Baccalaureate School when I was 16. I realised that this wasn’t the right path for me in the very first year. ...

Lessons were dry and science classes were boring. I started looking for an alternative to Baccalaureate School that would enable me to pursue a specialisation that I was interested in. Fortunately, the dean told me that the Baccalaureate School also had an affiliated information technology school. The transfer from Baccalaureate School to IT school was a perfect solution for me and I was really interested in the subject matter.

At IT school, I prepared for the Federal VET Diploma in Information Technology, with a specialisation in software application development. At the same time, I attended a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate examination. After the first three years of

full-time study at the IT school – complemented by a three-week traineeship – I took the final examinations so that I could devote the fourth year of schooling to a one-year traineeship to gain useful work experience. The school provided me with a list of host companies and I quickly found a traineeship position.

Free time devoted to designing websites

However, I didn’t enjoy working for the first host company, so I decided to look beyond the list of host companies and sent out around ten applications to other companies. I found a traineeship position at an advertising agency in Zurich. I most likely got this traineeship because I had designed and programmed websites in my free time during my training. The daily commute from Basel to Zurich and back was three hours! However, it was all worth it to learn exactly what I was interested in.

In this year, I developed a better sense of my own preferences, which helped me to determine my next career move: enrolment in a Bachelor’s degree programme in information technology, design and management (iCompetence) at a University of Applied Sciences.

Difficulties with mathematics

The first year of studies was exciting but very challenging. Because the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate was related to commerce, I had to overcome gaps in mathematics. Compared to my classmates, who had attended a VET programme in information technology combined with a federal Vocational Baccalaureate in a technical field, it took me twice as long to study this subject. In contrast, I had an easier time with other subjects because the IT school had placed greater emphasis on general education.

Five years ago, when I started the IT school, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. Now my interests are developing and deepening. I am certain that I will discover a great deal about my future career over the course of this Bachelor’s degree programme.”

MARIUS KÜNG, SWITZERLAND
IT BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL IN BASEL
STUDIES IN I-COMPETENCE (INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY,
DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT) AT A UAS



Commercial school – a springboard for a future career: “For me, my studies at the commercial school in Neuchâtel provided me with a solid basis. ...

I enrolled there after completing lower-secondary school because I wanted to perfect my French and also wanted to have enough free time for sports and entrepreneurial activities.

It all started in the garage

After obtaining a commercial school diploma – the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate did not exist at the time – I began relatively early to expand my own business: as an elite mountain biker and snowboarding enthusiast, I had quite a few connections in the sports world. This gave me the opportunity to take part in the development of a network of winter sporting goods distributors. As with many small-sized companies in the early days, it all started in our parents’ garage.

After working for about eight years as a self-employed entrepreneur in the field of sports and leisure activities, I completed my studies at a College of Higher Education for tourism. Even today, I still take pleasure in marketing the fabulous Swiss landscape. It was mainly thanks to my previous professional experience that I found a managerial position immediately after graduation.

From mountain farmers to association representatives

Between 2007 and 2011, I managed Emmental Tours AG, a subsidiary of BLS AG. Since 2011, I have worked as the CEO of Thun-Lake Thun Tourism. Since 2013 I have also handled product management for Interlaken Tourism.

I really like the diversity of my profession: on any given day, I often meet very different types of people, from mountain farmers (discussing such things as ‘sleeping in the hay’) to association representatives dressed in a suit and tie. In the field of tourism, I place importance on guaranteeing high quality and encouraging innovative ideas.

One highlight for me was certainly the world record obtained by Fredy Nock when he walked a high wire over Lake Thun, covering a distance of over three kilometres.”

MICHAEL ROSCHI, SWITZERLAND
COMMERCIAL SCHOOL DIPLOMA, ADVANCED FEDERAL
DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TOURISM

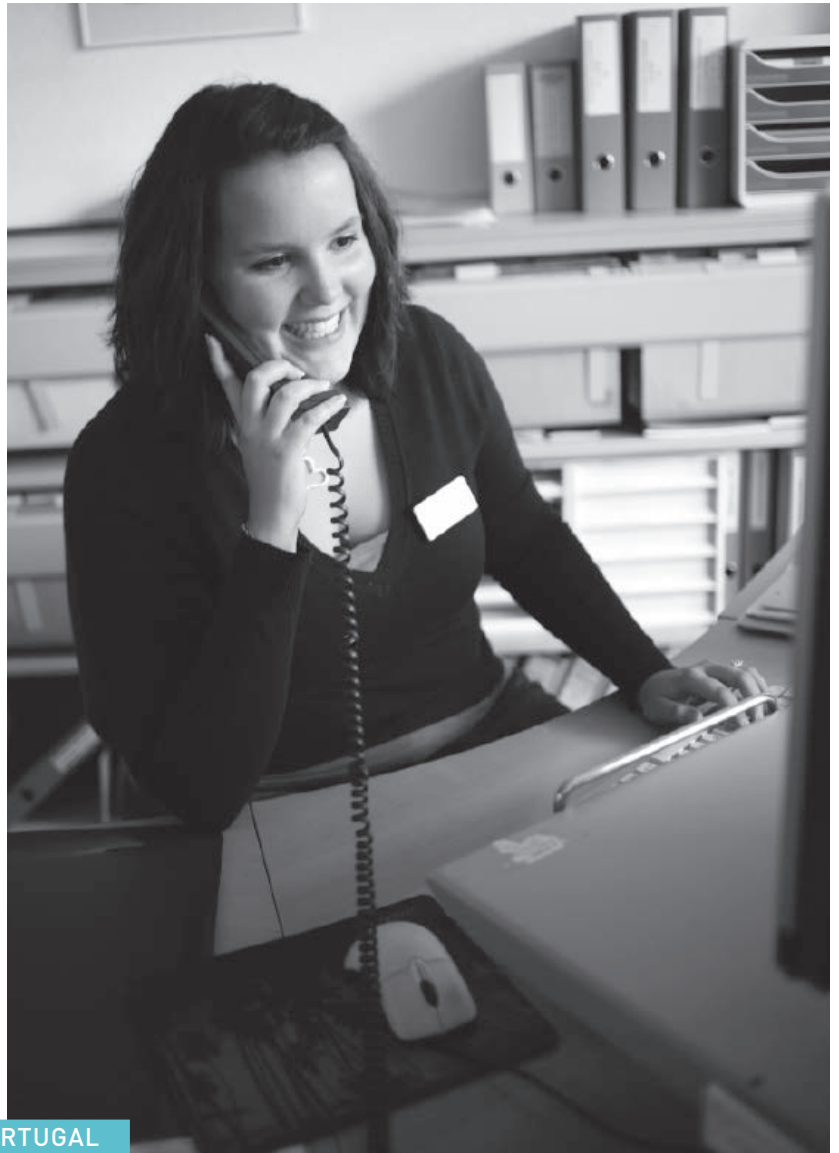




COMMERCIAL SCHOOLS

VET programmes at commercial schools last for three years and lead to a Federal VET Diploma in Commerce. It is also possible to obtain a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate in Commerce by attending a fourth year at the commercial school.

Compared to other vocational schools, commercial schools give greater importance to general education and combine practical exercises with classroom instruction. Learners also do supplemental traineeships to deepen their practical knowledge.



ISABEL SILVA, PORTUGAL
3RD YEAR
COMMERCIAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

A good general education, a good start: "I decided to go to a commercial middle school because I was unsure about what type of career I wanted. ..."

Since my sister had also gone to commercial middle school, I applied to sit the entrance exam in my second-to-last year at lower-secondary school. It will take three years to get a commercial diploma. I am going on to study for the professional baccalaureate, which will take another year (12-month internship and a thesis).

I now have a good foundation in lots of subjects taught at the commercial middle school, especially in languages. The French-

language diploma DELF (Diplôme d'Etudes en Langue Française) is compulsory. I also passed the First Certificate in English and did a one-month temporary traineeship in Vancouver. This was a great chance to practice and perfect my English. The most difficult thing for me was finding a place for my one-month-traineeship. I sent off a total of 35 applications. Some firms did not even send me a rejection letter. Thankfully, things worked out in the end. I will return to the same company for my 12-month traineeship.

I am well-prepared for the workplace. Of course, many people claim that commercial middle school is easier than Baccalaureate School, but you can't compare the two. At Baccalaureate School I would be studying with the intention of going to university, which I don't want. At the commercial middle school, I can specialise in my chosen field. Afterwards, I want to find a job and study part-time at a University of Applied Sciences – this is the ideal way for me to combine theory and practice."

Opting for upper-secondary level general education rather than VET is less definitive in terms of future occupational choices. At Specialised Schools, general-knowledge subjects are combined with a more in-depth focus on subjects relevant for specific occupations. This gives students the option after graduation of pursuing more advanced education and training at the tertiary level. For their part, Baccalaureate Schools generally prepare students for enrolment within the Swiss higher education sector: cantonal universities, Federal Institutes of Technology (two in Switzerland: ETHZ and EPFL), Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) or Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's); occupational objectives can nevertheless be set at a later stage of training. Specialised Schools and Baccalaureate Schools are for those who enjoy studying in a more academic setting.

This chapter is intended for young foreigners (and their parents) with good academic performance who are reaching the end of compulsory education (i.e. the last year of lower-secondary school) and are about to make the transition to upper-secondary level general education. It discusses the demands placed on those wishing to pursue academic pathways in Switzerland and provides information about possible alternative pathways.

Pursuing general education

From lower-secondary school to general education

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Specialised Schools and Specialised Baccalaureate

Specialised Schools provide students with a general education. At the same time, they help them to develop personal and social skills and generally prepare them to work in health care, social services and education. The subjects studied also form a good basis for work in journalism, communication and information, design and art, music and theatre as well as sports.

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Tips and suggestions for parents

Contact the Vocational Information Centre to find out which Specialised Schools are available in your canton.

Attend the orientation events organised by the Specialised School and find out more about admission requirements. Additional information about Specialised Schools can be found on the Internet.



WHAT IS A SPECIALISED SCHOOL?

Specialised Schools combine general education and vocational instruction. In some schools, students choose a specific occupational field completing a basic year. Not all Specialised Schools offer options in all occupational fields. Specialised Schools serve as a springboard for enrolment in Colleges of Higher Education and Universities of Applied Sciences in the following fields:

Health care

Nursing, physiotherapy, ergo-therapy, biomedical analysis, radiologic technology, surgical technology, midwifery

Social care

Social work, social pedagogy, sociocultural animation

Pedagogy

Teaching in pre-school/kin-dergarten, basic and primary school, sports and fitness

Communication and Information

Media, journalism, libraries, tourism and hotel business, translation, interpreting

Design, Art, music and theatre

Teaching art or music, playing music, acting, dancing

Applied psychology

Therapy and consulting in psychology and life counselling

STUDIES AT SPECIALISED SCHOOLS DIVIDED INTO TWO LEVELS

A Specialised School Diploma is awarded upon completion of the first three school years. With this qualification, graduates may enrol in a degree programme at a College of Higher Education in a corresponding occupational field. In most cases, they are required to meet admission criteria (e.g. aptitude assessment, traineeships, etc.).

Those wishing to do so may attend a fourth year to obtain a Specialised Baccalaureate. Students will be asked to do a traineeship (3 to 9 months) in the chosen occupational field and draft an essay for the Specialised Baccalaureate, in which they share their thoughts on the traineeship. This essay is then presented and defended before a panel as part of an examination. The Specialised Baccalaureate entitles the holder to enrol in a degree programme at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) in the corresponding occupational field.

Here, too, additional admission criteria often need to be met. Contact the corresponding education and training institution to find out about the exact admission procedure.

CANTONS REGULATE SPECIALISED SCHOOLS

The cantonal authorities regulate training content at Specialised Schools. They also determine what courses will be offered in the canton. Normally, enrolment in Specialised Schools is open to those who complete compulsory education; in all cases, there is an age limit for admission to a Specialised School. Admission criteria may vary: depending on the canton, young people may enrol in a Specialised School without having to take an admission test. In others, admission tests are mandatory for all or only for those who did not manage to achieve a given grade point average in lower-secondary school.



LAURA VOGELSANG, SWITZERLAND
SPECIALISED BACCALAUREATE
CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN ENVIRONMENTAL
ENGINEERING STUDIES AT A SWISS UAS

“I was a bit lost: since I couldn’t decide on a specific occupation, I decided to attend the Specialised School. ...

I tried out different occupations, mainly in the restaurant and catering business as well as in social services. However, none of the occupations convinced me. In my 10th year of schooling, I re-discovered the joy of learning and decided to pursue social services at the Specialised School. After three years of studies at the Specialised School, I did a traineeship at a home for the disabled and then prepared and presented an essay for the Specialised Baccalaureate. I was quite certain that I wanted to study social pedagogy and therefore decided to spend another year in Emmental. After the home for the disabled confirmed their intention to accept me for a traineeship, I began filling out the registration form to be admitted to the

University of Applied Sciences. But then, all of a sudden, the prospect of spending another five years in Emmental, where social contacts would not be easy at all, seemed very daunting. I therefore decided to take some time off. I spent a year volunteering in Spain on five different organic vegetable farms, which provided me with room and board. This helped me to steer my interests away from social pedagogy towards the environment. In Spain, I began gathering information about training in this field and decided to register for a UAS Bachelor’s degree programme in environmental engineering at the University of Applied Sciences.

A Specialised School certificate in social care was perhaps not the ideal prerequisite. At the start of my studies, I had to attend science courses, especially chemistry and biology, to compensate for gaps in learning. Compared with my fellow classmates, who had obtained their Federal Vocational Baccalaureate in preparation for these studies, I had to invest much more time and energy. I ended up doing the first year in two years and everything worked out fine.”

Baccalaureate Schools offer in-depth and broad general education, but do not provide any training for specific fields or occupations. A Baccalaureate is awarded upon completion of studies at a Baccalaureate School. This qualification entitles the holder to enrol in Swiss higher education institutions.



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Baccalaureate Schools and Baccalaureate



WHAT IS A BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL?

At Baccalaureate School, you will attend seven basic subjects, which are compulsory for everyone. Each student may then choose a primary and a secondary specialisation.

With the primary specialisation, you choose a given profile, i.e. a field of studies that will become your main focus and, hopefully, also your main area of interest.

The following profiles are most frequently found in the German-speaking region of Switzerland:

Classical Languages Profile

(covers Latin and/or Greek; primary specialisation is one of these two languages),

Modern Languages Profile

(only covers modern languages; the primary specialisation is one language)

Mathematics and Natural Sciences Profile (primary specialisation is biology and chemistry or Physics as well as applied mathematics)

Business and Law Profile

(primary specialisation is business and law)

Music Profile (primary specialisation is art or music)

Not all Baccalaureate Schools offer all profiles. And not all cantons work with the profiles indicated here. The choice of profile has no bearing on university studies later on. It only serves as an indicator for ensuing education pathways.

BACCALAUREATES OPEN THE DOOR TO ENROL- MENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

After four years of studies at a Baccalaureate School, students are asked to write a baccalaureate paper and take both an oral and written examination. If successful, students will be awarded a baccalaureate, which is the school-leaving qualification needed to pursue the following:

- studies at a cantonal university or University of Teacher Education (UTE)
- studies at a Federal Institute of Technology (FIT)
- admission to federal aptitude tests for studies in medicine, if you wish to become a doctor, dentist or veterinarian (some higher education institutions in the French-speaking region of Switzerland do not require such aptitude tests for studies in medicine)
- Studies at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) after at least a one-year traineeship
- admission to upper-secondary level VET programmes



OUWEN XU, CHINA
BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL, SPECIALISATION IN
MATHS AND NATURAL SCIENCES

“I want the same things as my parents: My schooling has been anything but straightforward. I started school in China before moving to Germany where I stayed for one year. I have now been living in Switzerland for the last five years. ...”

Initially, I was put in a small class, but after six months I transferred to lower-secondary school, and then I passed the matura school entrance exam that same year.

I was a bit shy initially because I didn't speak German very well. But now my German is much better and I feel more confident. Regardless of whether I speak High German or Swiss German, it is important for me to be open and show an interest in talking to others. Speaking either language allows me to communicate with others and make friends.

Things are going well at school. I find maths-related subjects pretty easy. This means that I can spend more time on my German, English and French lessons. My mum also regularly teaches me Chinese. It is important that I do not lose my mother tongue because we speak a special Shanghai dialect at home.

‘I also want a good education’

With me as their only son, it is understandable that my parents want me to have a good education. And they expect me to work hard. Thankfully, I share my parents' aspirations. I hope to study electronics and IT at the Federal Institute of Technology. This degree is well regarded in China, too, and it will make it easier for me to find a job and lead a successful career.”



WHAT PREREQUISITES APPLY FOR BACCA- LAUREATE SCHOOLS?

Baccalaureate School is intended for students who enjoy learning and have no problem spending hours doing homework each and every day; it is also intended for young people who wish to pursue university studies.

Studies at a Baccalaureate School vary in length from one canton to another. Most last around four years and usually begin after the second year of lower-secondary school.

Some cantons in the German-speaking region of Switzerland also have what is referred to as the six-year Baccalaureate School, which begins immediately after primary school.

CANTONS REGULATE ACCESS TO BACCALAU- REATE SCHOOLS

The cantons are responsible for the admission procedure at Baccalaureate Schools. For this reason, conditions vary:

- Some cantons allow direct access to Baccalaureate School without an admission test for young people who have achieved a certain grade point average in lower-secondary school.
- Some cantons require a recommendation letter from the classroom teacher.
- Other cantons have a transition procedure – tests and interviews.
- Other cantons require young people to take an oral and/or written admission test.

“Learning is easy for me: As early as kindergarten, I was very interested in mathematics. I was able to do simple calculations in my head like this one: if my uncle also comes and sits down at the table, how many of us are there? And if some of my cousins stand up and leave, how many people will still be sitting at the table? ...”

SELINA VALDIVIA, SWITZERLAND AND CUBA
4TH YEAR AT BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL,
SPECIALISATION IN MATHS AND
NATURAL SCIENCES



Everyone used to tell me that I was certainly suited to attend a Baccalaureate School. At the end of primary school, I took the admissions test and passed it. I am the only one in my elementary family who has ever shown an interest in mathematics or biochemistry, although my cousins have chosen the same specialisation as me.

‘My own way of learning’

The Baccalaureate School is the right place for me. When I was 13 years old, I was able to set aside the time to study on my own. And this was important. A teacher teaches a very large number of classes and so does not have much time to give personalised attention to each and every student. No one corrects our homework. You have to decide for yourself how much you wanted to learn and when.

However, attending a large school also has its benefits. Where I live, there are around 1,500 young people who attend the Baccalaureate School. I was therefore able to meet a lot of people, and made many good friends.

And I have developed my own method of learning. I actively take part in classroom activities and try to get involved as much as I can during lessons. Of course, I also have to do things like study vocabulary for French or English. However, it is not that difficult since I have a very good memory. After the summer holidays, I am still able to recall what we covered before the summer holidays.

‘I like learning’

I do not need a tremendous amount of time to do my homework. If no tests are given during the week, I may not do any homework at all. And if there are three or four tests planned for that week, then I will spend a few hours studying. And I really enjoy studying. This is very important for studies at the Baccalaureate School. If you aren’t interested in the subjects taught, if you don’t enjoy attending classes, then it is better to avoid Baccalaureate School.

I still do not know what I intend to study later on, maybe mathematics, history or German. I’m also considering journalism because I am interested in current events and regularly read the newspaper.”



PRISKA KRIEG, SWITZERLAND
1ST YEAR
FEDERAL VET PROGRAMME IN COMMERCE,
PROFILE M (EXTENDED WITH FVB)

“Baccalaureate School was not right for me: When I passed the entrance examination for Baccalaureate School, it was like a dream come true. The reality of studies was less rosy. ...

I had a really hard time, for instance, with the fact that I had to stay in school all day long, even at noon. I eventually got used to it. However, what I found even worse was the fact that I went from being a very good student in lower-secondary school to an average or below average student. I noticed that there were lots of gaps in my learning, especially in mathematics and French.

In the beginning, I was overwhelmed in class. With time, I eventually caught up, in part with the help of a French tutor. However, this was a stressful time for me because my test results were never as good as I wanted them to be.

Applying in secret

By chance, I saw an advertisement for a vacant apprenticeship position with Swiss state TV, in the field of commerce. Both the occupation and the host company had always appealed to me. So, I applied without telling anyone. And I got the apprenticeship.

My parents nevertheless wanted me to finish the year at Baccalaureate School so that I would be able to attend a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB). I wondered why I should subject myself to this stress for another semester. I convinced my parents and returned to lower-secondary school. This was the right decision for me. I was back in school with my former classmates and had more free time. However, I still wanted to prepare myself for the FVB classes I would attend later on and worked especially on my French skills. I studied hard and was very happy when I passed the entrance test for the school that would prepare me for the FVB examination.

Combining theory and practice

Now I am doing an apprenticeship, gaining work experience for the first time. I like the host company and find the work exciting. Nevertheless, I look forward to the two days per week when I can attend classes. Combining theory and practice is the right approach for me.

It wasn't an easy decision to drop out of Baccalaureate School. However, the path to university education is still open. The first step is to take the FVB examination and then prepare for and pass the Bridge-to-university Examination.”

Tips and suggestions for parents

If your child mentions that they want to attend the Bacca-laureate School, you have to talk about this with their teacher early enough to find out if your child's performance and engagement are sufficient:

- For the longer Bacca-laureate School, this needs to be at the end of the primary school.
- For the shorter Bacca-laureate School, this needs to be at the end of the first year of lower-secondary school.

Clarify the following with your son and daughter at the Vocational Information Centre:

- what the entrance procedure is in your canton;
- which Bacca-laureate Schools offer which specific profiles in your region (as not every school offers every profile).

Even though you have decided to go the Bacca-laureate School route, you should still discuss alternatives:

- Your child has to be prepared for the admissions exam. If they don't pass, the exam can be taken one more time.
- Learn about the other possibilities in your region: if your child is not accepted into the GYMI the first time, the exam can be repeated a year later, but you should know what to do during this year.
- Alternatives are also necessary. Ideally, your child has enough energy and can combine applying to the Bacca-laureate School with searching for an apprenticeship at the same time.

The choice of occupation is important during the transition from lower-secondary level to upper-secondary level Vocational Education and Training (VET). It is an individual process. Although everyone goes through the same steps, it takes some students longer to choose an occupation than others. Some may find an apprenticeship position right away whereas others still have to think about what occupation they wish to learn. You can also wait a year before making the choice. In such a case, there are transitional options for a tenth school year (bridge year) between lower-secondary and upper-secondary level where young people can either attend classes or develop practical skills.

This chapter is intended for young foreigners (and their parents). It shows the best way to prepare for and choose an occupation, how to find an apprenticeship position. It also includes information concerning transitional options if the transition to upper-secondary level is not immediately successful.

First steps in working life

Preparing for your career choice

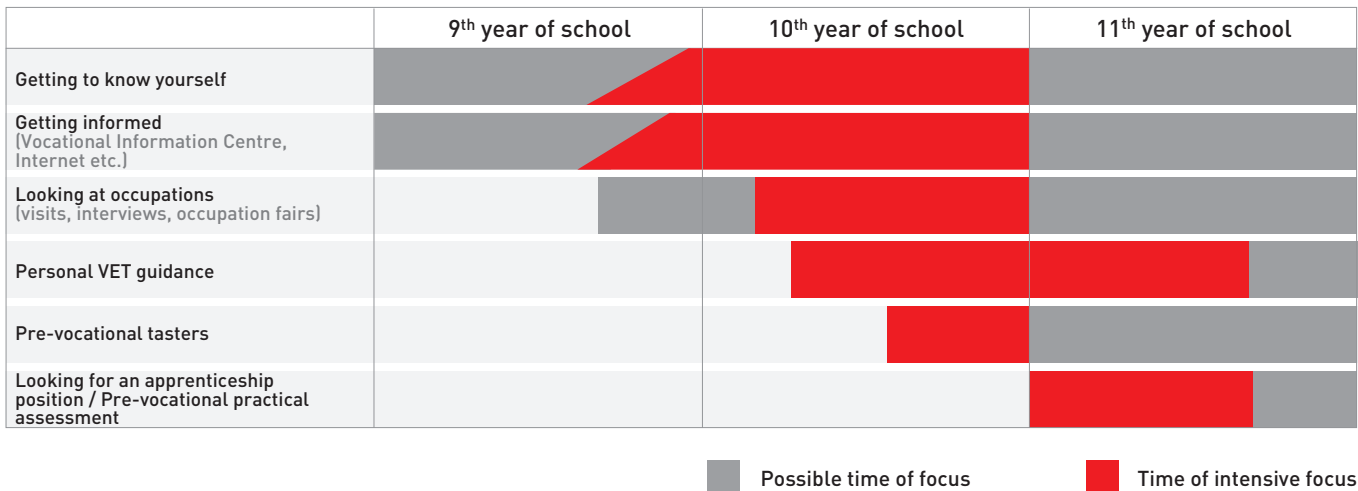
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In Switzerland, you will be asked to make an occupational choice very early on, namely in the last two years of compulsory education, i.e. at the age of 15 or 16.

Overview of the career choice process

The steps in the occupation selection process are the same for everyone. Nevertheless, some young people take longer than others in deciding which occupation they wish to pursue. There are many steps in the process: you decide on what you want, you choose an occupation, submit an application to various companies, you take an aptitude test, try out a few occupations, go through interviews, and secure an apprenticeship contract.

Stages of the career choice process





AROUND 200 OCCUPATIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

Individual occupations have different requirements in terms of prior scholastic performance and personal development:

- most of the 200 or so VET programmes may be embarked on directly after compulsory education.
- for other occupations, you must first follow a general education pathway, i.e. Specialised School or Baccalaureate School.

OCCUPATIONAL FIELDS AND BRANCHES

Working life is subdivided into occupational fields and branches. This makes it easier for you to gain an overview when selecting a desired occupation. It will also provide you with an initial view of different fields and areas of interest.

Knowing what you want

VET programmes are available for around 200 occupations. In each occupational field, you will find VET programmes that are more or less challenging in terms of academic and personal abilities required. You may find the range of occupations and training pathways to be overwhelming, particularly at the beginning of the occupation selection process. Vocational Information Centres can provide you with access to information resources and targeted support from careers advisers. Both are free of charge for students.

Vocational Information Centres

You may visit a local Vocational Information Centre during opening hours and seek assistance from the staff. The Vocational Information Centre can provide you with all of the information that you need in order to select an occupation. Occupational brochures or brief films will provide you with an initial overview of a given occupation. You can also obtain additional information in files or web sites.

Vocational, educational and career guidance

If you are overwhelmed by all of the information available or if you are unable to figure out which occupation is best for you, schedule a meeting with a careers adviser or take tests to find out more about yourself and different occupations. After consultation, you can then compare the various occupations and choose one that is right for you.

Frequently chosen occupational fields and branches

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| – Nature, agriculture, gardening, animal keeping/animal breeding, forestry | – Printing, graphic arts, print processing | – Metalworking, mechanical engineering, die casting, metal forging, watchmaking | – Information technology, mediamatics, multimedia |
| – Nutrition, housekeeping/facility management | – Construction engineering, civil engineering (above-ground), civil engineering (underground), stone working, timber production, glassmaking, floors and carpentry | – Chemistry, physics, biology, laboratory work | – Culture, media and communication (radio, TV, films), stage/performing arts, music, cultural conservation |
| – Catering/restaurants, hotel industry, tourism | – Building services technology (sanitation, heating, ventilation) | – Environment, environmentalism | – Health care, medicine, nursing, rescue work |
| – Textiles, clothing, leather processing, beauty, personal hygiene | – Vehicles, vehicle engineering and maintenance, body-work | – Planning, construction | – Sports and exercise |
| – Design, art, handicrafts, instrument making, visual arts | – Electrical engineering, electrical installation, electronics | – Sales, purchasing, wholesale and retail | – Training, childrearing and teaching |
| | | – Business, public administration | – Social services, counselling |
| | | – Transport (railways, aviation, roadways, shipping), logistics, law enforcement, security, recycling | |

With a pre-vocational taster, you are given the opportunity to familiarise yourself with the given occupation. With a pre-vocational practical assessment, it is the host company that decides whether you are suited for the occupation in question.



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Getting initial exposure to the world of work

There are many opportunities for young people to gain initial exposure to daily working realities before choosing an occupation. In addition to information media and films, there are information events at companies and occupational orientation meetings and job fairs. These are wonderful opportunities to observe professionals at work and talk with them about their daily routines.

Pre-vocational taster or practical assessment

The best way to become familiar with daily routines in a given occupation is to do a pre-vocational taster or pre-vocational practical assessment. Most of these last two to five days, and you will be asked to perform tasks at a host company. Pre-vocational tasters and practical assessments generally unfold in the same manner but the host company's objectives are different:

- With a pre-vocational taster, the aim is for you to get to know the company, occupation and daily routine. You find out whether your initial assumptions about the work and daily routine are correct.
- With a pre-vocational practical assessment, the host company also wishes to know if you are the most suitable person for the given occupation and apprenticeship. In addition, the host company may invite two or three candidates to do a pre-vocational practical assessment. However, only one person will get the apprenticeship position.

Your objectives for a pre-vocational taster or practical assessment

If you do a pre-vocational taster or a pre-vocational assessment, the main objective should be to get an apprenticeship. However, the time spent at the host company can also be used to clarify unanswered questions, for example:

- Are your initial assumptions about the occupation, about the host company accurate?
- Do you like the work?
- Are you suited for the occupation?
- Do you feel content at the host company? Are you pleased with the atmosphere?
- Could you imagine learning and working at this host company over the next three or four years?

Tips and suggestions for parents

Mothers and fathers often think they know what is best for their child. However, in the phase of career choice, it is extremely important to remain objective!

Try to:

- Listen to what your child says.
- Realistically interpret dreams and desires – look at what is actually possible.
- Support your child, but don't be patronizing.

Possible outcomes of a pre-vocational taster or practical assessment

A pre-vocational taster or practical assessment can lead to different outcomes:

- You and the people in charge at the host company are convinced that the occupation and host company are right for you. You show interest in an apprenticeship.
- The people in charge at the host company are unsure whether you are suited for the occupation. You disagree. You try your luck at another company. If nothing works out, then contact your careers adviser.
- Your assumptions about the occupation were wrong. You will need to go back to looking at different occupations.



PREPARATION

For you, receiving an invitation to do a pre-vocational taster or practical assessment is an important achievement. The host company would like to meet you and find out whether you are suited for the host company and occupation:

- Do you blend in well with the team?
- Are you curious? Do you ask questions?
- Are you motivated? Do you show enthusiasm at work?
- Are you suited to the occupation?

You know where the host company is, who to report to and what you need to bring with you. You arrive on time and are prepared for the pre-vocational taster or practical assessment:

- What do you know about the occupation?
- Why do you want to learn it?
- What do you know about the company?
- Why would you like to do an apprenticeship at this host company?
- What are your strong points?
- What are your weak points? How do you handle them?

“And if you are interested in an apprenticeship position at a large company, then you need to register early for information events or trial days. Pre-vocational tasters are rare.” Sina



TEST CONDITIONS

Generally speaking, the content covered up until the second-to-last school year as well as general skills will be tested. The websites for the basic check (www.basic-check.ch) and multi check (www.multicheck.org) will provide you with information about registration, the duration of the test, what reference materials you may bring with you, and testing locations; these websites also indicate the price and payment terms for the test. If the test is given by host companies or trade associations, then this will be stated in the letter inviting you to take the test.

TEST RESULTS

You will receive the test results either immediately after the test or later on by postal mail:

- If you obtain good test results, include these in your application file.
- If you obtain poor or unsatisfactory test results, speak to a VET guidance counsellor about what alternatives there may be to your dream job.



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The aptitude test – also a matter of testing your nerves

Most host companies require the results of an aptitude test to be included in your application. You can find out what aptitude test you need to take by consulting the websites of the companies you want to apply to.

“I was so nervous at the start of the aptitude test. My mind went completely blank. I had to wait two or three minutes, taking slow breaths in order to recover my focus. Then things went a bit better.” Wafa

Basic check

As an aptitude test, the basic check draws a distinction between

- Basic check of practical skills (for all VET programmes for the Federal VET Certificate and a few VET programmes for the Federal VET Diploma)
- Basic check of standard skills (for all challenging VET programmes for the Federal VET Diploma)

The basic check requires cognitive and linguistic skills (grammar, reading comprehension, terms, meaning of words), mathematical skills (algebra, arithmetic, geometry), 2D and 3D visualisation (rows of figures, spatial perception) and foreign languages (German, English, French).

Multi check

The multi check offers a range of aptitude tests for individual occupational fields (commercial or technical occupations, occupations in retail, trade, health care and social care, information technology, beauty or design) as well as an aptitude test for all VET programmes for the Federal VET Certificate.

For individual occupational fields, the tests will apply different weights and priorities: for commercial workers or retail clerks, emphasis is placed on languages; for technical or information technology occupations, emphasis is placed on mathematics and one's visual imagination; for health care occupations, emphasis is placed on communication and natural sciences.

For all occupational fields, the test covers general skills such as logic, retentiveness, short-term memory, concentration or organisational skills.

Aptitude tests from host companies or trade associations

In some cases, host companies, host company networks with many learners, individual branches and trade associations have developed their own tests. Different aspects will be tested depending on the occupation or company.



PERSEVERANCE

In the occupational selection course, you will learn exactly what is to be included in an application.

As a rule, all young people looking for an apprenticeship send out over ten different applications and also prepare their cover letters at home. Your parents can help you with this.

Preparing applications – lots of hard work

You have chosen an occupation and may have already tried it out for a few days and taken an aptitude test. You would now like to apply for a vacant apprenticeship position. For this, you will need to prepare an application for each and every apprenticeship position that you apply for.

Individual companies may require different documents. In order to be sure that you have gathered all of the required documents for the application file, check the website of the company that you wish to apply for to find out what the managers expect from you.

Generally speaking:

- The cover or motivation letter should catch the managers' attention. You should explain why you have chosen this particular occupation and this particular host company.
- Your curriculum vitae should list your personal details, prior education, language skills, leisure activities and references.
- Your prior education is shown by including copies of your report cards over the last three school years.
- For most occupations, special aptitude tests are expected. Include the results in your application.
- Reports from previously completed pre-vocational taster or practical assessment show that you have taken the time and effort to find out more about the occupation.
- Larger companies often require you to fill out a personal information sheet by hand.
- In some instances, you will be asked to provide a copy of your residence permit. B or C permits are no problem. If you hold another type of permit, contact the migration office of your canton to find out whether you can apply for apprenticeship positions.

Tips and suggestions for parents

You certainly want to be helpful and use all your connections. Inform all your relatives and acquaintances, your employer, your workmates, members of associations and clubs you belong to and even your doctor and dentist that your child is looking for an apprenticeship. Networking through personal connections often leads to apprenticeships.

With the application, you should give the company a positive first impression. Your application should be free of errors, clean and well presented.

Looking for apprenticeship positions – the first contact with a company

On the whole, the search for an apprenticeship position is very similar to the search for employment. You need to be both patient and determined.



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HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR AN APPRENTICESHIP POSITION?

Open apprenticeship positions can be found in daily newspapers or on company websites. Starting in September of each year, careers advisers also post the list of apprenticeship positions at www.berufsberatung.ch/lehrstellen, www.orientation.ch/apprentissage, www.orientamento.ch/tirocinio. This list shows all of the vacant apprenticeship positions available in your region.

Call the company to find out if the apprenticeship position is still available and whether you can apply for it. This will enable you to send your cover letter and full application file either by postal mail or online directly to the person in charge.

WHAT REACTIONS CAN YOU EXPECT?

The company may have received so many applications that it will first send you confirmation of receipt, asking you to wait for a more concrete reply.

The company may invite you to take an internal aptitude test. If you get a good score, then you will go on to the next round of the application process. Otherwise, you will receive a letter informing you that you have not been selected.

The company may want to meet you and invites you to do a pre-vocational taster or practical assessment.

The company may want to meet you and invites you to an interview.

The company may not react at all. Sometimes dozens of young people apply for the same apprenticeship position. Companies do not always reply to all applicants.

The company will inform you that you have not been selected.

“Sometimes it stressed me out. I would prepare a CV, put a lot of time and energy into it and I wouldn’t even get a single reply. Nothing at all.”
Wafa



“I almost didn’t send the first CV at all. I kept checking it over and over again to make sure that everything was correct and looked nice.”
Maida



EMANUEL TANNER, SWITZERLAND
MASTER CHIMNEY SWEEP

“What do I expect of my apprentices? Every year I receive about 15 applications from young people interested in this profession. I hold interviews to check their motivation and their abilities in this field. ...

The job itself

It is always an advantage if you help around the house and are able to see what needs to be done and do it. You also have to be friendly – you are working in many different people’s houses after all! You also need to be conscientious in your work – this job helps people to avoid fires.

If these points sound interesting to you, then you can take the aptitude test that the Swiss Chimney Sweep Association has created. If you can pass this test, then you meet all the requirements to start your training.

The Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education has prepared me to work with trainees and it was always clear to me that I would do this. Chimney sweeps can start up their own business if they are licensed by a town or village. And to be licensed, the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education is necessary.

Consistent preparations

I prepared myself for this career move: after the final exams, I began my year of travel. I started in Geneva and worked all over Switzerland. Stove setters construct various types of fireplaces and I wanted to learn about these different construction techniques.

The Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education tests both theory and practice. I took the practical part of the master exams in Zurich. I was assessed on how I planned work for my employees and apprentices and how I assigned different people different tasks.”

The pre-apprenticeship or pre-vocational practical assessment will give you a few days' time to demonstrate your knowledge and motivation. Interviews generally last for about an hour and normally do not include practical work.



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Preparation is key to successful interviews

If you have been invited to an interview, you have every reason to be optimistic. However, this may be the first time you find yourself in this situation and you don't really know what to expect. For this reason, you should prepare specifically for this interview. Friends and family can help you. Your parents will certainly be able to share their own experiences with you and explain how the interview will be conducted. You can even practice doing the interview over and over again, playing the role of the apprenticeship trainer, for example.



“If you want to get an apprenticeship position, you need to be truly interested in the occupation. If you are invited to a personal interview, your outer appearance needs to fit the occupation and the company.” Deborah

Tips and suggestions for parents

You certainly have your own experiences with the professional world. You know how an interview works and what

matters most. Talk with your child about this and share your experiences – both good and bad!

Do mock interviews with your child – you should both take on both roles!



PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

People develop their own ways to relieve tension – a cup of tea, a deep breath, relaxation exercises... Find the approach that suits you best. There is nothing wrong with feeling nervous, and you can even state that you are nervous during the interview.

Your clothes should be clean and comfortable and suited to the working environment and the interview situation. You need to feel comfortable and confident.

HOW TO HANDLE INTERVIEWS

- The first impression is always important: smile when you meet people.
- Use the person's name when speaking to him/her.
- Wait until asked to sit down.
- Sit straight and try to relax. Keep both feet on the floor.
- Breathe in and out calmly.
- Maintain direct eye contact.
- Listen carefully and answer questions honestly.
- Do not interrupt people when they are talking.
- Be neither impertinent nor overly humble.
- Take notes.
- Ask questions.

HOW TO END THE INTERVIEW

The final impression is also one that people recall.

Ideally you should ask a question at the end of the interview such as:

- "I don't have any other questions right now but can I call you if there is anything that I would like to know?"
- "What happens next?"

It is also very important to thank the interviewers for their time.

"It was a great success for me to be invited to a personal interview. I practiced for it with my teacher and then with my family. That helped me. Even if I felt nervous, I did well and was accepted for a trial period which eventually led to my being accepted as an apprentice." Güler



You put in the time and effort – and yet you still don't seem to be getting anywhere: You receive rejection letters. These are difficult moments. You can speak about this with your parents, teachers or careers advisers to find out possible reasons why you have not been selected. At the same time, you have to keep at it.



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Don't get discouraged by rejections

It is entirely normal for you to receive rejection letters while searching for an apprenticeship position. Most young people receive one or more such letters. Competition for individual apprenticeship positions can be very tough indeed. If you receive a rejection letter after having done a pre-vocational practical assessment or after an interview, it is disappointing but you have also received important input. You know that you are on the right path. You were invited because:

- your cover or motivation letter was convincing,
- your grade point average is high enough for this occupation, or
- the results of your aptitude test are good enough.

However, you were a bit unlucky since another applicant was considered even more suitable than you. If you receive a rejection letter each time you apply for an apprenticeship position, perhaps it would be a good idea to reconsider your choice of occupation and look for alternatives. A careers adviser can help you.



Tips and suggestions for parents

Rejection undermines self-confidence. Your child now needs encouragement and support.

Make sure that the résumé submitted for each apprenticeship position is free of errors, is well presented and com-

plete. The company website will indicate what supporting documents should be included.

Make sure that your child takes the time needed to apply for apprenticeship positions. Each motivation letter or cover letter should show that the applicant is familiar with the company and should state why your child wants to do an

apprenticeship with this company in particular. Help your son or daughter to prepare for each personal interview.

If your child receives many rejections, you should discuss with him or her whether:

- your child's grades are high enough for the desired occupation.

- the requirements for the desired occupation are met.
- the results of the aptitude test are high enough for the chosen occupation.
- there are any alternative occupations that may be interesting.
- there is a need for to talk to with a careers adviser.

“I was turned down countless times. It felt awful. I had the impression that nobody wanted me. If my teacher had not continued to encourage me, then I would have given up. Fortunately, I kept at it and now have an apprenticeship position.” Ruth



POSSIBLE REASONS WHY YOU WERE NOT SELECTED AFTER SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

In some cases, dozens of other young people applied for the same apprenticeship position. You were simply not short-listed.

Your application was not complete, had errors, was sloppy or carelessly compiled.

The arguments in your cover letter and application were not convincing enough for this occupation or company.

The grades on your report cards were not very good and did not match requirements.

The results of the aptitude test were not high enough for the occupation.

You applied too late and the apprenticeship position had already been filled.

POSSIBLE REASONS WHY YOU WERE NOT SELECTED AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Very little time is allotted for an interview. Perhaps this is the first time that you had to introduce yourself to a group of adults and this made you nervous. You found it difficult to present yourself properly despite having prepared well for the interview.

Other young people were also interviewed and they may have performed better. If your application has been rejected, you should definitely call the company and ask why you were not selected. The insight gained can be helpful for your next interview.

With each interview, you acquire experience that can be put to good use in the application process. The important thing is to keep going.



You have received written or verbal confirmation from the company that you have been selected for the apprenticeship position. The manager at the company, you or your parents as your legal guardians will then be asked to sign the apprenticeship contract. Once signed by all parties, the apprenticeship contract will be approved by the cantonal VET office.

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Apprenticeship contract in hand

The apprenticeship contract lays out all important aspects applicable to the entire duration of the apprenticeship:

- your personal details and those of your parents or legal guardians
- the exact title of the occupation
- the duration of the apprenticeship and trial period
- information about the host company, in particular the VET trainers
- information about the vocational school you will attend during the apprenticeship
- attendance of preparatory course for FVB examination (yes or no)
- salary
- number of working hours
- paid holiday time
- who is responsible for purchasing work clothes and tools
- insurance
- any other special rules



Tips and suggestions for parents

The road to adulthood begins on the first day of an apprenticeship. Smaller and larger problems can always arise with such transitions. Initially, your child will try to solve these problems on his/her own.

If your child is unsuccessful, his/her behaviour may change in many respects. The first indications of this will be a lack of motivation. Your son or daughter will not feel like getting up in the morning, will skip school, will not enjoy going to work, will often complain of headaches and stomach aches.

As a mother, as a father, respond quickly and discuss matters whenever you notice these signs.

“When I saw the apprenticeship contract in the mailbox, I was overjoyed. But then I thought, now I have to do the same thing for the next four years. I couldn’t imagine that something like that could even be possible. And now I’ve made it halfway through the apprenticeship.”

Syssa



WRONG OCCUPATION? WRONG HOST COMPANY?

Things do not always go as expected. In order to succeed in an apprenticeship, it is important that all parties involved first try to resolve problems through discussion:

- for personal or job-related problems at the host company, talk with VET trainers at the host company as soon as possible to work out a solution together.
- for personal or scholastic problems at the vocational school, talk with your teacher to see if you can attend a remedial course or additional language courses.

During the apprenticeship, you may come to realise that you have chosen the wrong occupation and therefore wish to terminate the apprenticeship early. In some cases, work at the host company is so bad that you are no longer willing or able to complete your training at this host company. You need to first discuss this situation with the VET trainers at the host company and the teachers at the vocational school.

If no solution can be found, then talk with the person in charge at the cantonal VET office. You may be able to transfer to another company. If you decide to take a break in your apprenticeship, talk with a careers adviser to plan your next steps.



“Of course I worked hard to get good grades. But at the same time, I made sure to adopt good working habits. This is very important for many host companies. Have I always been punctual? Have I ever skipped work without reason? Have I always acted properly? Such discipline is also important at school. It is a key factor in successfully finding an apprenticeship.”

Priska

Bridge-year options are intended to build a bridge between lower-secondary and upper-secondary level, whether the aim is to enrol in a vocational school, Specialised School or Baccalaureate School. Bridge-year options after compulsory education include an optional additional year of schooling, a pre-apprenticeship or a traineeship to prepare learners for enrolment in a specific VET programme.

School-based bridge-year options

Each canton has developed its own system of bridge-year options. As a result, the occupation selection year in Bern may have an entirely different focus from the one in Zurich, Lausanne or Lugano. In addition, there is a wide range of private bridge-year options. Visit a local Vocational Information Centre or talk with a teacher at lower-secondary school to find out which bridge-year option in your canton suits your needs best.

“I spent an interim year attending an occupational preparatory course. I finally had the time I needed to explore many different occupations.”
Simon



Most bridge-year options cost money. How much will depend on various factors: what options are available in your area or canton? What type of bridge-year option are you considering? Is it offered by a public or private school?

Depending on which bridge-year option you choose, the price tag can be steep: as high as CHF 14,000 for the entire year. Find out the various prices from a Vocational Information Centre and ask about the possibility of grants and scholarships.



VINNHY TAYELE, CONGO
BRIDGE-YEAR STUDENT

“I needed more time to decide: Ever since I was in secondary school, there were only two possible careers for me: the practical option – a career in commerce – or the ideal, a job in social work or health care. ...

During my bridge year, I am investing a lot of time in looking for an apprenticeship. Apart from that, I keep myself busy with other things as well. In my free time I organise dance classes and events for young people at a community centre. This is my contribution to society. I also write and perform rap songs, which makes me feel good. I still intend to find an apprenticeship, hopefully by the summer.

It has been frustrating so far. Initially I applied for commercial apprenticeships. I hoped that things would work out given that French is my mother tongue. Although I have been in Switzer-

land for three years, I’m still not fully fluent in German. Maybe that was the reason my applications were turned down. No-one believed that I was a quick learner.

Rejection is hard to handle

I find rejections hurtful. I have the feeling that no-one wants me. So, I lose the motivation to keep trying. This is made more difficult by the fact that my parents cannot help, as they don’t know how the Swiss system works.

I have now decided to broaden my search to cover apprenticeships in social work or health care. This will allow me to improve my German and at the same time find out whether I am suited to a career in one of these fields. At some point I would like to qualify as a youth worker. Best of all, I’d like to work with young immigrants, as I know from my own experience the kind of problems they face.”



WHEN DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO ATTEND BRIDGE-YEAR COURSES?

Bridge-year courses take place during a transitional year between lower- and upper-secondary level. The occupation selection process and the search for apprenticeship positions already begin in the first weeks. You should talk with your teacher and parents to find out whether you should take this extra year and, if so, which bridge-year option is right for you. It might make sense to consider a bridge-year option for one of the following reasons:

- You are unsure what you would like to do after completing lower-secondary school. Attending a bridge-year course to select an occupation will give you the chance to focus your attention intensively on the choice of occupation and decide which path to pursue.

- You know exactly what occupation you want to learn but have not found an apprenticeship position. Attending a bridge-year course relating to a specific occupational field will allow you to become more familiar with your desired occupation and become aware of possible alternatives.

- You wish to attend a Baccalaureate School or a Specialised School. However, you lack the required knowledge. Attending a bridge-year course in these subjects can help you fill gaps in your knowledge and prepare you specifically for admission tests. Ideally, you can also combine this with the process of choosing an occupation. That way, if you do not pass the admission test, you can then apply for apprenticeship positions.

- You would like to learn an artistic occupation. Most training in the arts, whether at upper-secondary level (i.e. vocational school) or tertiary level (higher education institution or College of Higher Education for design) require prospective candidates to attend a preliminary course.

- You know exactly what you want to do after completing lower-secondary school. However, your language skills are not yet good enough. In a bridge-year course, you will be able to improve your language skills and at the same time take a remedial course to refresh and to deepen your knowledge in other subjects.



Tips and suggestions for parents

If you feel that your child – for whatever reason – is not yet ready to choose an occupation, contact his/her teachers or careers advisers to find out

whether a 10th year transitional solution could be a better option.

If so, register your child for the corresponding bridge year courses early. If another solution comes up, you can always cancel registration.



VANESSA LOPEZ, SWITZERLAND AND CANADA
1ST YEAR
FEDERAL VET PROGRAMME IN COMMERCE,
PROFILE B (BASIC)

“I wanted to improve myself in general: In lower-secondary school, I was a good student, and had a grade point average of over 5 out of 6. ...”

I started out looking for an apprenticeship in the hotel industry thinking that this occupation mostly involved work at the reception desk. I did a pre-vocational taster and only then learnt about all of the things that hotel employees actually have to do. I decided, very late in the year, to look for an apprenticeship in commerce. However, because I was in the basic performance group of students in lower-secondary school, the chances of being accepted for a profile E (extended)

VET programme in commerce were rather slim. So I decided to do another year of school. As the youngest student in my class, I had started school at a very early age. I therefore still had some time. I took an aptitude test at the vocational guidance school and was assigned to the “challenge” class. This was a school year for students who did not yet know what occupation they wanted to learn. For me, the 10th school year was perfect, even though it was more difficult than lower-secondary school.

Goal-oriented approach

The aim of the vocational guidance school is very clear: every single student must find a suitable apprenticeship position. In the first week, we learnt how to apply for an apprenticeship. In the second week, we were expected to prepare and send out at least three applications per week. This goal-oriented approach suited me and I very quickly – already in September – found an apprenticeship with a bank for the profile B (basic) VET programme in commerce.

With an apprenticeship contract in hand, I was now able to focus my attention on attending classes and learning. We repeated certain subjects attended in lower-secondary school and I greatly improved my understanding of mathematics. Then I took and passed the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) examination. I am now the only learner in the B profile group who is able to prepare for the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) examination.

Taking responsibility

However, I didn’t merely make progress on an academic level. Today, I am also much more mature. I have learnt how to be more open, self-confident and to interact more with others. I have also learnt how to effectively plan my time and work on my own. I react to new developments with less anxiety. This has been very helpful in my current apprenticeship.

The branch courses for apprentices at the bank are structured in a somewhat unusual manner. We attend 30 days of training at the Centre for Young Professionals in Banking. As learners, we decide on our own when to register for individual training days. If I wait too long before registering, I may end up having to do the training in Geneva, Basel or Lucerne, because Zurich books out quickly. Of course, I can always discuss any difficulties with my apprenticeship trainer. However, I feel good about the fact that I am able to take responsibility for my own learning.”

There are various bridge-year options (e.g. pre-apprenticeships or temporary traineeships) that enable young people to prepare for enrolment in a VET programme.



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Bridge-year options to develop practical skills

Pre-apprenticeship

Pre-apprenticeships combine theory and practice. At the host company, you can get a first peek into the work life. At the vocational school you will mainly improve your language skills or retake the same mathematics course you had in lower-secondary school. During the pre-apprenticeship, keep in mind that your aim is to find an apprenticeship position. You may be able to get an apprenticeship position at the same host company after finishing the pre-apprenticeship, but it is also possible that you will need to find a new host company for your apprenticeship.

Temporary traineeship

With temporary traineeships, you become quite familiar with work in the given occupation. At the same time, you improve your language skills and pick up the language and local expressions from co-workers.

If after a few months of a traineeship you are certain that this occupation is right for you, then you should start looking for an apprenticeship position. You may be able to stay with the same host company but may need to look elsewhere for your apprenticeship.



“For me, the pre-apprenticeship is perfect: I can improve my German, retake mathematics and see what work is like.” Robullab



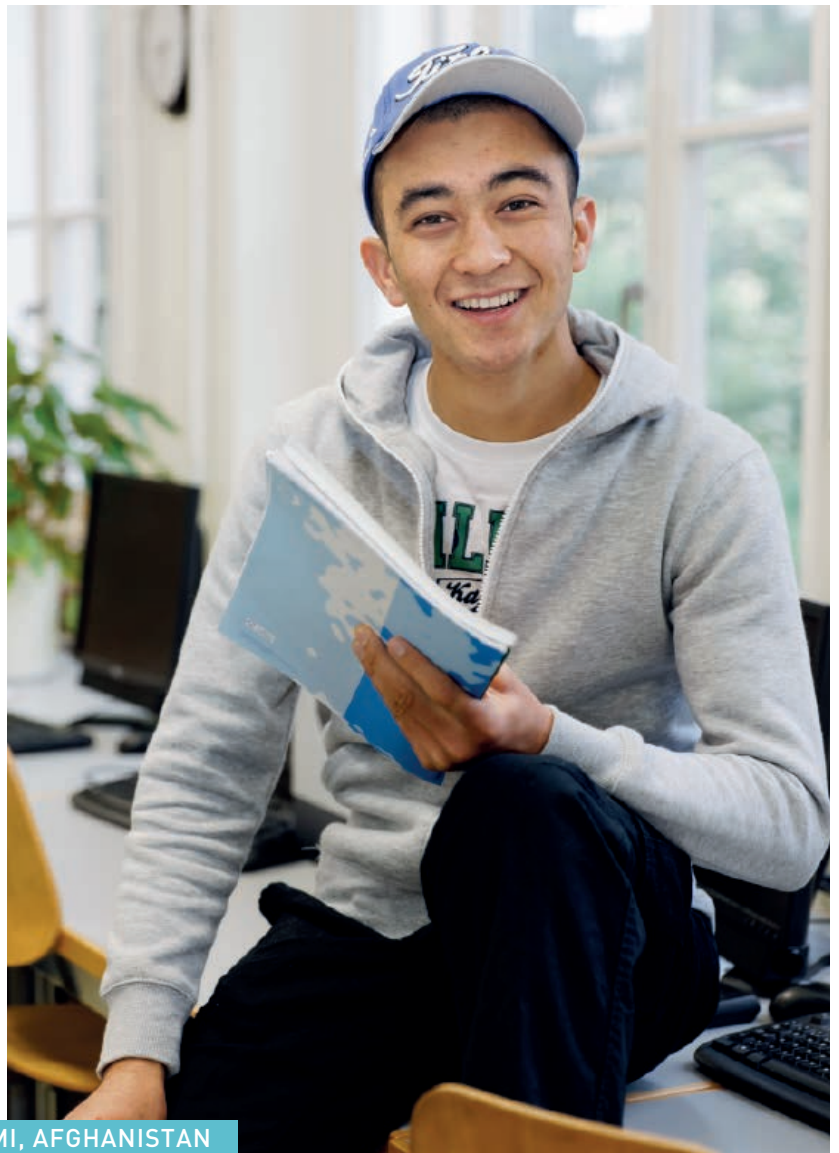
PRE-APPRENTICESHIP

A pre-apprenticeship lasts for one year, allowing you to develop the practical and academic skills you need for enrolment in a VET programme. You will work between 3½ and 4 days a week at a host company and attend vocational school for 1 to 1½ days. You will be paid a salary for the work you do at the host company. At the vocational school, you will only have to pay for materials and possibly trips. Each semester, your performance will be graded.

You look for pre-apprenticeship positions in exactly the same way as for apprenticeship positions. Career advisers can help you look for a suitable host company. Once you have found a pre-apprenticeship position, they contact the person in charge at the vocational school. He/she will be able to tell you if you meet the prerequisites for the pre-apprenticeship. If so, sign a pre-apprenticeship contract with the host company.

If your pre-apprenticeship goes well, you may be able to do an apprenticeship in the same host company or find an apprenticeship position with another host company.

Good to know: Pre-apprenticeships are organised differently in different parts of Switzerland. In the French-speaking part and in Ticino, they are usually school-based, with short practice stints at companies.



ROHULLAH RAHIMI, AFGHANISTAN
PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AS A MOTOR VEHICLE
TECHNICIAN (VET DIPLOMA)

Learning one step at a time: “Although I have only been living in Switzerland for just over two years, I have been fortunate: I am able to learn my dream occupation. ...

I find motor vehicle technology to be interesting because I like cars. I did a pre-vocational taster in a repair shop and everyone was so nice to me. Of course, I didn't get to do all that much but I have checked the air in tyres and changed brake pads and oil.

The apprenticeship trainer suggested that I do a pre-apprenticeship so that later I will be able to successfully complete a VET programme. I also took a test at the vocational school: mathematics, logical thinking, and

language skills. I had to write a letter, answer a few grammatical questions and read/understand a text. I did well in German and less well in mathematics, but I passed. As part of my pre-apprenticeship, I attend classes once per week at the vocational school. I'll have to study hard because the subjects may be rather difficult to learn. Fortunately, I have a mentor who can assist me with my homework.

‘Fulfilling my life’s dream’

This pre-apprenticeship is helping me to pursue my life's dream. In Afghanistan, there aren't as many automobile brands as there are here. For this reason, I am not familiar with many of them. However, I like Mercedes-Benz, particularly sedans. I am also glad to know that I'll be able to learn how to drive during my training. If I manage to complete the apprenticeship and pass the final examination, then I would like to work, make money and maybe buy my own car or apartment. For the moment, I am doing things one step at a time.”

“Language skills – my stumbling block: I grew up in Eritrea and attended school there for eleven years. ...”

We have a different system in Eritrea: all students have to do compulsory military service in their twelfth year of schooling. During that first year of military service, we are able to take the entrance examination for university. And only the best students manage to pass that entrance examination for admission. However, they are unable to choose the branch of studies themselves. They are assigned to one. All of the others have to remain in the military, where they will spend their entire lives earning very little money and never becoming financially independent.

I couldn't imagine such a life and absolutely wanted to choose for myself. For this reason, I fled to Switzerland, alone. My father, my mother and my

brother all remained in Eritrea. It hasn't been easy. I miss them and feel very much on my own. Fortunately, I have made friends, in refugee camps, in residences for asylum seekers, in language courses and in the integration course.

I want to become assimilated in Swiss life as quickly as possible, both on a personal and professional level. I have learnt the local language and attended an intensive integration course. During this school year, I considered and compared different occupations. Each time I came back to the one that interests me the most: nursing.

I actually wanted to look for an apprenticeship but I would have had to pass the aptitude test first. And I think that although I have made considerable progress in my language skills over these past two years, my level of mastery is not enough to pass the test.

Goal-orientated preparation

I have therefore decided to do a traineeship that will enable me to prepare for the VET programme in nursing. I can imagine that this year I will be able to learn a lot more of the local language on the job. However, I still want to attend a language course and possibly obtain a language certificate.

For me, this is a good option, and not only because of the language. In the traineeship, I see what working in Switzerland is like, what you need to know in order to work with others, and how to integrate in the workplace. I am certain that I will be able to meet lots of people and speak with my fellow workers. All of this will help me later to successfully plan for my VET programme in nursing. Even if it takes a bit longer, I will eventually be able to work in my dream occupation.”

RUTH GIRMAY, ERITREA
CURRENTLY DOING A TRAINEESHIP IN PREPARATION
FOR A VET PROGRAMME IN NURSING





TRAINEESHIPS TO PREPARE FOR ENROLMENT IN VET PROGRAMMES

As a general rule, VET programmes start after the completion of lower-secondary school (i.e. the end of compulsory education). If you meet the requirements for the chosen occupation, there is no need for a bridge year or traineeship. In some cases, however, a traineeship may be a good idea:

– You would like to learn an occupation in the field of health care or social care but are unsure whether you are suited for it. A pre-vocational taster would be too short to determine your suitability. A traineeship gives you a year to bring your knowledge and skills up to speed for the chosen occupational field.

– You have not lived long in Switzerland. Your language skills are not yet up to par. A traineeship or a pre-apprenticeship will enable you to improve your language skills.



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Successful completion of upper-secondary level Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the first major stepping stone in your professional career. It marks the transition from education and training to working life. You can now work and pursue higher-level training in your field.

There are many different options available after graduation: working while undergoing higher-level training on a part-time basis; pursuing higher-level training on a full-time basis; and pursuing tertiary-level professional education; pursuing tertiary-level studies at a Swiss University of Applied Sciences (UAS, an option open to holders of the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate).

This chapter is intended for young foreigners who are currently enrolled in a VET programme and who wish to know what further training options are available to them after completion of their VET programme. The information in this chapter is also useful for students at lower-secondary school who have not yet chosen an occupation (and their parents).

Planning for a professional career

What options after Vocational and Educational Training?

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"Studies at Federal Institute of Technology, a logical consequence"

After obtaining a Federal VET Certificate or Federal VET Diploma, several different options open up: you may find work, enrol in a second VET programme, attend a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, or you may enrol in a degree programme at a College of Higher Education or a University of Applied Sciences (UAS).

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Finding work or continuing training?



GAINING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

With the current education system, the most important thing is not which education and training pathway or even which occupation you choose but how you take advantage of the opportunities presented to you. The better trained you are, the greater the likelihood of becoming financially independent, and thus the easier it will be to strike an optimal work-life balance and make it through difficult periods in your life such as illness, unemployment or divorce.

Maybe you wish to work after completing your first VET programme. You would like to earn enough money to live on your own and pay your own bills. Maybe you no longer want – at least for the time being – to attend school anymore. Instead, you may want to gather practical experience and prepare your career in this manner.

APPLYING FOR A JOB

There is no universally applicable recipe when it comes to applying for a job. Talk with friends and acquaintances and tell them what type of job you are looking for and what your plans are. Use your networks. Very many jobs are filled in this manner, so personal contacts are helpful in this regard. On the Internet, you will find lots of useful tips on how to find work as well as information about the labour market and the application process.

UNDERGOING FURTHER TRAINING WITHIN THE COMPANY

After completing your VET programme, you may decide to work, particularly if you feel very comfortable at your company, enjoy working with your colleagues and find your work interesting. You may want to take on more responsibility but for the moment lack any qualifications for this.

Larger companies in particular tend to offer in-house continuing training courses. Ask at the company whether you can attend a continuing training course or whether the company offers on-the-job certification.

COMPANY-SPONSORED ENROLMENT IN CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

If you wish to pursue continuing education and training to deepen or broaden your professional competences, your employer also stands to benefit. Find out whether the company where you work is willing to provide you with support either in the form of funding or time off work for training purposes.

Learning yes – school no: “Although I didn’t have a very clear idea of what to expect, I enrolled in the intermediate-level (E profile) VET programme in commerce. ...

I did my apprenticeship with a social services firm that helps to reintegrate people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. My apprenticeship was great fun. There was a broad range of very interesting content and I felt that my host company was doing something very meaningful. After my apprenticeship, it took me considerable time and effort to find a company that was willing to give a chance to a former apprentice who lacked work experience.

I worked full-time and every Saturday attended classes for eight hours until I obtained a qualification in nutrition counselling. I then spent about six months travelling through Asia to give myself the time I needed to think about my future career. I very much wanted to work as

a nutritionist in the area of prevention or as a mentor for young adults. That was how I imagined my future job. While in Asia, I thought about taking a part-time job upon my return – after all, I would need a secure income to cover basic living expenses. At the same time, I would register as a self-employed nutritionist.

After my return to Switzerland, I found a job working 90% as a clerk responsible for processing supplementary benefits to elderly and survivors’ insurance (OSI) and disability insurance (DI). It is an interesting field to be working in, but I had to spend a lot of time studying legislation and learning about eligibility requirements in this area. It was really a difficult period. I didn’t have any free time or energy for anything else.

However, I am still keeping my dream alive. I want to invest in people’s future, whether it be providing advice on nutrition or guiding young people on their path to becoming adults. The quickest way to achieve this goal would be to enrol at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS). However, I really do not like attending classes. I suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and have considerable difficulty concentrating on academic material. This path would be a major challenge for me and I wouldn’t look forward to it at all.

Volunteer work as a stepping stone

There may be a more practical way to reach my objectives. I am therefore doing volunteer work for various organisations: I work as a mentor and training coach; I provide budgetary advice to a church group; as a private individual, I give young people advice on how to become more independent adults. I spend my free time attaining specific expertise so that I can learn on my own in a practical manner. At the same time, I really enjoy doing what I do.

I hope that the labour market will eventually recognise this form of continuing education and training, allowing me to obtain a formal qualification through the validation of prior learning. There is a need for people who like working and are good at what they do. And that’s me.”

ROSWITHA BURRI, SWITZERLAND
VET PROGRAMME IN COMMERCE, PROFILE E (EXTENDED),
CLERK SPECIALISED IN SOCIAL SECURITY
(PENSIONS AND BENEFITS)



It is possible to build a career step-by-step starting with the Federal VET Certificate. Upon completion of a two-year VET programme, you may want to continue learning. In such cases, the next step is enrolment in a fast-track three-year or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma.

Fast-track VET programme for holders of Federal VET Certificate

“I always knew that I would continue my training after the completion of the two-year VET programme. I needed that two-year period to ease into working life and it was definitely the right decision for me.” Sonja



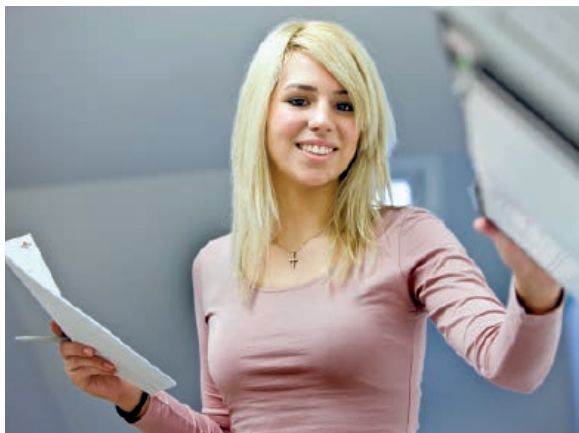
FAST-TRACK VET PROGRAMME

Generally speaking, all learners who complete a two-year VET programme for the Federal VET Certificate (e.g. Federal VET Certificate in cooking) may enrol in a three-year or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma in the same occupational field (e.g. Federal VET Diploma in cooking). In such cases, you will be admitted directly into the second year of the three- or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma. There are no specific requirements nor are there any guidelines on fast-track VET programmes for the Federal VET Diploma. This option tends to be a good choice for learners who progress well in their training. At the same time, fast-track VET programmes are not available for certain occupations.

In the 4th semester of your apprenticeship, talk with the VET trainer of the host company and your teacher at the vocational school. If they also feel that you are suited to continue your training, then take steps to obtain a new apprenticeship contract before the completion of your two-year VET programme.

The cantonal VET office will approve the new apprenticeship contract on the condition that you pass the qualification procedure for the two-year VET programme and obtain your Federal VET Certificate.





Aleksandra Nikic, holder of Federal VET Diploma in commerce

Deepening my subject knowledge: “After obtaining my Federal VET Certificate as an assistant clerk, I was able to complete a fast-track VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma in commerce. I currently work for a health insurance company. ...

With this supplemental training in commerce, I was able to deepen my understanding of economics, accounting, English and French. I now have better job prospects and many different further training possibilities. I intend to take my training to a higher level.”



Luca Gallo, holder of Federal VET Diploma in commerce

Contact with clients: “After my training as an assistant clerk and commercial school, I worked in the field of customs clearance at a freight forwarding and customs clearance company. ...

I fill out customs declaration forms for imported and exported goods, handle temporary customs clearance if documents are missing, answer questions from customers and process cash-on-delivery consignments. I really like the fact that my work is so diversified and changes all the time. And I interact a lot with customers.”



Stephanie Hess, holder of Federal VET Diploma in retail sales

Changing sectors: “When I was younger, I found school rather difficult. However, my training for the Federal VET Certificate in retail sales was easier than I had expected. ...

And so I immediately enrolled in the VET programmes for the Federal VET Diploma in Retail. At the time, I was working in floristry for a major distributor. After completing the second level of training, I was given responsibility for all sorts of different products: cosmetics, clothing, toys – it was great.”



Nathalie Laub, holder of Federal VET Diploma in retail sales

Two qualifications: “After obtaining my Federal VET Certificate in retail sales, I immediately enrolled in a VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma in retail sales. ...

I now have two qualifications under my belt, which is something that employers appreciate. After graduation, I worked for a stationery shop. In the hand-crafts section, I provided creative suggestions to customers and I really enjoyed doing this. Later I wanted to do something entirely different and started working at a butcher’s shop.”

Maybe you realised during your VET programme that you chose the wrong occupation. Maybe your dream occupation was not quite clear to you back when you were sixteen. And maybe your interests have changed so much that you would like to pursue an entirely different path. All of these would be good reasons to enrol in a second VET programme.

Enrolment in a second VET programme



ENROLMENT IN A SECOND VET PROGRAMME

In order to enrol in a second VET programme, you first need to pass the final examination for the Federal VET Diploma (or obtain a General Baccalaureate or a Specialised Baccalaureate). At this point, you may choose any VET programme that you like. You can enrol in a VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma in hairstyling, for example, or something entirely different such as nursing or information and communication technology. All you need to do is find a host company willing to train you.

Once you find a host company, you can talk with all those in charge (at the host company and at the cantonal VET office) to find out whether you can obtain fast track in this second VET programme, enabling you to speed up the programme by up to one year. During your first VET programme, you already attended courses in language, communication and society so you will not have to repeat these. Nevertheless, you will

still have to attend subjects at the vocational school one day per week. If you are able to cut the VET programme from six to four semesters, you will attend some of your classes in vocational subjects (normally given in two different semesters) at the same time. Alternatively, you can decide not to attend classes at the vocational school and study vocational subjects on your own. This option may be quite advantageous since by working in a normal job you will earn more than learners do in their apprenticeships.

If you are considering this option, you may contact any vocational school to find out more about the various textbooks and documents.

“On the first day of my apprenticeship already I realised that this wasn’t the occupation for me but I kept at it. In the last year of my VET programme, I looked for, and found, an apprenticeship in the occupation I really wanted.”

Willi

First occupation – not quite the right one: “Towards the end of lower-secondary school, I wanted to earn money to buy a new bicycle. I found holiday work for a tinsmithing company owned by my best school friend’s father. ...

Over a period of two weeks, I not only earned money but also found an occupation that matched my skills and interests. However, I didn’t dare enrol in a VET programme in tinsmithery because at the time it meant that I would have been the only girl in the group of learners. So, I registered for a VET programme in retail. However, as soon as I finished the final examination, I enrolled in a second VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma in tinsmithery.

I was actually the first girl ever to attend that particular vocational school. Since I was already a bit older and had a certain amount of work experience in retail, I was able to handle it. Even the rather rough language used on the construction site didn’t faze me. I was so

happy to finally be able to do what I liked doing, working with metal and stepping back at the end of the day to admire my own handiwork.

‘The right job for me’

Being a tinner was the right occupation for me. I eventually felt ready to take on more responsibility and soon after I took my final examination, I began supervising small construction sites. Later – with a bit more work experience – I began training learners myself and managed an assembly team. And the more experience I gained in tinsmithery, the more I wanted to learn.

After working a few more years, I enrolled in a two-year preparatory course for the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in tinsmithery. I continued to work full-time, attended the one-to three-week block courses and spent hours of intensive self-study poring through classroom materials. For every hour spent in the classroom, I devoted two hours at home to self-study.

Time management was a challenge

I memorised the complex rules and regulations of the branch, absorbed basic principles for calculations and accounting and used computer-aided design tools to create intricate plans. In other words, I learnt everything I needed to know to run my own company. Of course, time management was not always easy. My responsibilities at work were growing and I still had to find time to study.

Today, I am an all-rounder. I handle administrative tasks, prepare price estimates and submit bids with detailed specifications for contracts. I am responsible for accounting, payroll, accounts receivable and payable, advertising and internal safety. When I train learners, I make sure that these budding tinner receive solid work-based training at our company. In my free time, I also participate in a local trade association.”

NICOLE FANKHAUSER, SWITZERLAND
HOLDER OF AN ADVANCED FEDERAL DIPLOMA OF
HIGHER EDUCATION IN TINSMITHERY



You set your mind on completing the VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma. After graduation, you may now want to continue learning and work towards a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate so you can enrol in a University of Applied Sciences (UAS).

Obtaining a baccalaureate after VET



FEDERAL VOCATIONAL BACCALAUREATE FOR ADULTS

You decide to focus on getting your Federal VET Diploma, after which you start preparing for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB2).

With the FVB2 option, you study part-time (4 to 6 semesters) while you work or attend classes full-time (1 year). Admission criteria for the preparatory course vary considerably. Some cantons require a minimum grade point average from prior education and training. Other cantons require an admission test (mostly in languages and mathematics) as well as an interview.

Most schools that prepare learners for the FVB examination also offer a preparatory course for the admission test.

GENERAL BACCALAUREATE FOR ADULTS

A general baccalaureate is also obtainable for adults. The requirements are similar to the ones described above for the Vocational Baccalaureate.

COSTS FOR FVB2 AND A BACCALAUREATE

As an adult, you may attend a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate or the General Baccalaureate on either a full-time or part-time basis. Both paths are challenging and require considerable determination.

There are public and private providers of baccalaureate studies. Public providers require you to go through an admissions procedure. The course is generally free of charge for those who have lived in the canton for at least two years. For those living outside the canton as well as those who wish to pursue baccalaureate studies at a private school, the tuition fee varies from CHF 10,000 to CHF 20,000 per year.

In all cases, it is worth taking the time to find out what options are available to you. The Vocational Information Centre in your region can provide you with information about the Federal Baccalaureate for adults. They can also tell you which schools prepare learners for the FVB examination (FVB2) and whether there are other preparatory schools in your area.

Always keen on learning more: “At the start of my career, most of my work was sports-related because I had attended the United School of Sports in Zurich. ...

In the first two years of my training for the Federal VET Diploma in commerce, I was able to optimally combine classroom instruction with sports. In the last two years, I added a 60% temporary traineeship on top of that. It was an intensive period because I went from a third-league sports club to national league B and so my training regimen became incredibly demanding. At age 18, I left my very supportive family to move in with a group of fellow volleyball players. I had to fend for myself. After the first two years of training, I wanted to do a traineeship with a television channel, a daily newspaper or the maga-

zine ‘Annabelle’. Unfortunately, all of my applications were turned down. My instructors at the United School of Sports suggested that I try to do a traineeship at a bank. For me, this was a challenge since at the time I had very little interest in economics. However, it was a good decision. I learnt a great deal and received outstanding support.

I worked 60% at the bank, was a member of the Women’s Volleyball Club, trained ten times per week and shared my professional athlete’s life with my fellow volleyball teammates. I managed my own schedule, juggling between work, sports and private life. Of course, that left very little room for family and friends.

After taking the final examination, I took stock of my situation. Sports had given me so much. I was socially competent, knew how to organise and manage my time. I was able to relax under stress and learnt a lot about nutrition and my own body. With the team, I learnt how to set goals and reach them together, achieve success, and play in front of excited and supportive fans. These are some of the nicest experiences that I have had. And yet: the reality of professional sports – the constant shift between intensive training and regeneration phases – didn’t fit my lifestyle. The knowledge that I could injure myself at any time also influenced my decision.

Open to new pathways

I therefore chose to pursue a professional career outside sports and wanted to prepare for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB). Since I had gotten good grades on the final examination for the Federal VET Diploma, I was admitted to the preparatory course without having to take any other examination. At the same time, the bank offered me a permanent contract.

It took me only two months after signing the new contract to realise that I was in the wrong place. I started looking for a job in journalism and this time was more fortunate. I found a 60% position, which allowed me to attend school two days per week. Once again, my interests developed and changed. Perhaps it was also sports that helped me to always remain open to new options. I am a lateral thinker and do not always have to stay on the same track. I am nonetheless goal-oriented and can commit myself earnestly to my endeavours.

I would now like to study architecture, design or international communication and design, which is not possible to do with an FVB in commerce. For this reason, I took the entrance examination for admission to an arts school that also prepares learners for the FVB. I’ll be starting this training this summer.”

KIM LANG, SWITZERLAND

**HOLDER OF A FEDERAL VOCATIONAL BACCALAUREATE
AND OF A VET DIPLOMA IN COMMERCE**



Upon completion of a VET programme – either the Federal VET Diploma or the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate – a range of different education and training options are open to you. After a few years of work experience, if you meet certain prerequisites, you may pursue further education and training.

Professional development and university courses

Professional development and university course offerings include the following:

Federal Diploma of Higher Education

Deepen your knowledge in the chosen profession and prepare for managerial tasks.

Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education

Gain the knowledge and skills needed to become a manager in your field or run your own company.

Colleges of Higher Education

Acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for low- or mid-level management positions.

Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's)

Obtain a Bachelor's degree (after 3 years) or Master's degree (additional 2 years)

Cantonal universities, Federal Institutes of Technology FIT's

Obtain a Bachelor's degree (after 3 years) or Master's degree (additional 2 years)



HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT PLANNING?

Take the time that you need to decide what path you want to take for initial and ensuing training and prepare for it:

- Carefully read through the brochures, documentation and website of the programme you are looking at.
- Attend information events
- Attend trial lessons. This will give you the chance to meet one of the teachers and find out more about his/her credentials, and to talk with students to find out whether documentation and facilities are adequate.
- Ask friends and acquaintances whether they are familiar with these institutions and what they think about them.
- Ask the institutions for references. Call former students who have already attended preparatory courses: did the initial or further training help them in their career and personal development? Would they choose the same study programme or course if they had to do it again?
- Find out whether you can qualify for a grant.

Preparing for federal examinations of higher education

Over 400 different examinations exist for the Federal Diploma or the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education.



WHY WORK TOWARDS A FEDERAL DIPLOMA OR AN ADVANCED FEDERAL DIPLOMA?

The examination for the Federal Diploma of Higher Education combines solid practical experience with theoretical knowledge. This qualification has an excellent reputation on the labour market. Of course, your time and effort are rewarded financially: those who pass the examination may expect a higher salary since with this qualification they are now able to handle challenging tasks requiring greater levels of responsibility. For example:

- supervising employees,
- training apprentices,
- company management tasks.

If you wish to take things further, then you can prepare for the examination for the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education. In order to be admitted to this examination, you must first have a few years of work experience. This examination is sometimes referred to, particularly in the crafts, as a "Master examination" and also leads to higher levels of income to those who pass it.

The competences acquired when preparing for the Advanced Federal Diploma will enable you to do the following:

- run your own company,
- train apprentices on your own,
- hold mid-level management positions in larger companies.

PREREQUISITES FOR ADMISSION TO THE EXAMINATIONS

Normally, part-time preparatory courses are offered by professional organisations, vocational schools or other education and training institutions. You are under no obligation to attend such courses in order to be admitted to the federal examination. However, doing so greatly increases your chances of success.

Admission to federal examinations is generally open to holders of a Federal VET Diploma. Holders of a baccalaureate from a general education school or comparable qualification may also be admitted if they have also obtained a specified amount of work experience.

Examinations for the Federal Diploma and Advanced Federal Diploma are very popular: each year around 14,000 Federal Diplomas and 3,000 Advanced Federal Diplomas are awarded.

Managing my own company: "It was my father who showed me the importance of getting an education. He arrived in Switzerland in the early 1960s and worked as a labourer. ..."

He didn't like his job and always said to me: 'Do better than me, be your own boss!' That left a lasting impression on me.

My job satisfaction improved as my experience grew. The more I learnt, the more I wanted to know about market gardening. Once I had my final apprenticeship exam out of the way, I worked as a gardener for four years before studying part-time for two years to get the Federal Diploma of Higher Education. I worked four days a week, and attended classes every Friday and Saturday. On Sundays, my colleagues and I would study the 3,000 plants in the nursery which we needed to know for our exams. I actually found this part really enjoyable.

Becoming independent

This advanced training course cost me a total of around CHF 12,000. I was also earning less because I was only working four days a week. There are firms who will cover part of the costs if their employees want to do this type of advanced training, but only if they stay with the firm after they qualify. I did not want to do that, for two reasons. First, it would put me under additional pressure (in my year alone, 59% failed the exam). Second, I wanted to be free to determine my future once I would have the Diploma.

As my specialist knowledge grows, so does my job satisfaction. I have also lived my dream of running my own business. Of course, I work more – usually 50 to 60 hours a week. But my work is pretty creative. I am always designing, developing and implementing new garden landscaping projects."

MARIUS PINSINI, ITALY
FEDERAL DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN HORTICULTURE,
SELF-EMPLOYED WITH 8 EMPLOYEES AND 2 APPRENTICES





**GENDRIM ELMAZI, KOSOVO
ACCOUNTANCY CLERK**

A focus on practical training: “My dream job has always been in business management. As a youth, I was also fascinated by finance and accounting. After completing my upper-secondary baccalaureate in Kosovo, my family moved to Switzerland. ...

It was a difficult transition for me that would not have been possible without the help of my family. In Kosovo, I was a good student. In Switzerland, I couldn't even speak the language.

I studied the local language, first in courses and then more intensively in an integration course, where I passed the examination for a language certificate, level C1. I also gathered information about how to pursue my dream: studies in business management.

High admission requirements

The admission requirements for the School of Management and Law in Winterthur were high: a baccalaureate and enrolment in university studies in Kosovo, level C1 for a national language of Switzerland, B2 for English, a one-year traineeship in the field of commerce as well as a basic knowledge of accounting.

With the help of my mentor, I prepared a timetable. I had my documents from Kosovo translated and obtained the C1 certificate. For accounting, I attended a course at a vocational school.

The biggest obstacle was the one-year traineeship. I was turned down many times until my mentor helped me to find one. It was even harder to obtain my B2 certificate for English, since intensive courses were cancelled time and again because there weren't enough students registered. I eventually spent some time in London, which enabled me to overcome this final obstacle.

Preparing for a national examination

I have been working for my host company for nearly three years now. Since I also completed a continuing education and training course in accountancy, I have been given responsibility for bookkeeping entries, accounts receivable, accounts payable and contracts. This autumn, I will start preparing for the Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Finance and Accounting. My accountancy training and work experience are sufficient to meet the prerequisites for this examination.

Although I now meet the requirements for admission to the UAS, I am no longer certain that this is the right path for me. My next step could also be the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Accounting and Controlling.”

Degree programmes at Colleges of Higher Education are intended mainly for holders of a Federal VET Diploma. At Colleges of Higher Education, young professionals will be able to expand their general education, refresh their expertise and obtain the knowledge and skills needed to handle organisational and managerial tasks. Colleges of Higher Education impart both theory and practical training for professionals wishing to specialise in their field and/or become mid-level managers.

Enrolment at a College of Higher Education



PREREQUISITES FOR ADMISSION TO A COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Generally speaking, a Federal VET Diploma in a related field or a comparable qualification (e.g. General Baccalaureate or Specialised Baccalaureate) is needed in order to enrol in a College of Higher Education. Various study programmes, mainly in health care, also require prospective students to take an admission test and/or undergo an aptitude assessment.

Full-time studies at a College of Higher Education last for at least 2 to 3 years (incl. traineeship), and part-time studies last 3 to 4 years.

In order to enrol part-time, students need to be employed part-time in the corresponding occupation.

Study programmes exist for the following fields:

- Technical fields (construction, electrical engineering, wood and carpentry, information technology, food processing, machine manufacturing, media, microtechnology, textile)
- Hotels, tourism and house-keeping
- Transport and traffic
- Economics
- Agriculture and forestry
- Health care
- Social care and adult education
- Art and design

WHAT CAN YOU ACHIEVE WITH A COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE?

Each degree programme focuses on specific issues relating to the corresponding occupational field. Graduates of Colleges of Higher Education are able to perceive complex correlations, work under pressure, handle conflicting objectives and reach important decisions affecting company activities. Colleges of Higher Education provide students with in-depth professional competences and prepare them for more specialised and managerial tasks.

As a qualified, action-minded professional, you will be able to take on greater responsibility in your company and expect a correspondingly higher salary.



EVGENIYA SCHNIDRIG, RUSSIA
PREPARATORY TRAINEESHIP - HOTEL
MANAGEMENT SCHOOL, ZURICH

I looked at a number of schools and colleges, attended open houses, and spoke to those in charge. In the end, I applied to the Hotel Management School, Zurich. I took my time coming to this decision. My studies will cost me around CHF 32,000.

Working with different types of people

My baccalaureate means that I have no basic hotel management and catering training. So, the school told me that I had to undertake a 10-month preparatory traineeship, which I am currently serving in a 5-star hotel. I have learnt a great deal during this time. I saw how a hotel functions, what it is like to work with so many different people, and how hectic and stressful being employed in a hotel can be. However, I also learnt that this is exactly the kind of career I want.

Besides the preparatory traineeship, the school required me to sit an entrance exam in German. It was pretty difficult. For example, I had to understand and explain what various colloquial phrases meant. Now I can properly start school – the first step on the career ladder. After I finish my studies, I would like to work as a guest relations manager, preferably in a spa hotel where guests come to relax.”

“I want to take on professional responsibilities: I want to have a career which puts me into contact with other people. Tourism and the hotel business were the two fields that interested me the most. ...

Taking the long way around:

“In Cuba, I studied dance pedagogy and also taught dance classes in primary school. When I arrived in Switzerland, I had to start everything almost from scratch. ...

The first thing I had to do was learn the local language. For two years, I attended language and integration courses. During this time, I also thought about my possible job prospects. I began familiarising myself with the Swiss education system and the wide range of different pathways. I eventually came across the profession of activation therapist. Although my personality type and previous training as a dance instructor would have been very well-suited to this profession, I did not make it past the first interview. One of the reasons was certainly the fact that I am always very nervous whenever I have to take an examination and the other reason was the fact that my language skills were not good enough.

So, I went back to attending language courses. And during this break, I worked as a waiter and once again considered my job options, the different professions and training programmes and whether I should take advantage of a second opportunity for an interview. I gathered information, talked extensively with my partner and worked with my mentor to overcome my test anxiety. I learnt how to speak more slowly, to organise my thoughts better.

Combining interests and skills

During this phase, I returned to my roots. I had always been interested in psychology and am very much interested in practical work with people. This led me to the psychiatric nursing profession. The training and type of work were very much aligned with my interests and skills. I can still clearly recall how hard I prepared for the interview, how well I was able to express my motivation for the profession, and how excited I when I was accepted.

Seeking help

The theory portion of my training takes place at the training centre “Zentrum für Ausbildung im Gesundheitswesen”, the practical portion at the Psychiatric University Hospital of Zurich. Of course, the language skills required at this level are very high, which is still a major challenge.

However, with the help of teachers, friends and my partner, I have thus far managed to overcome each obstacle. In recent years, I have noticed that every time I have asked for help, I have always received it. I would now like to use this opportunity to apply myself and learn. If things don't work out, there is always consolation in knowing that you did your best.”

FRANK VEGA BONNE, CUBA
COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR NURSING, MAJORING IN PSYCHIATRY



Enrolment at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) or University of Teacher Education (UTE)

“Equivalent but different” – under this motto, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and Universities of Teacher Education (UTE’s) offer practical training within the higher education sector. Full-time studies for the Bachelor’s degree take 3 years and part-time studies take about 4 or 5 years. For those wishing to obtain a Master’s degree afterwards, an additional 2 years are required.



DEGREE PROGRAMMES WITH A PRACTICAL FOCUS

Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and Universities of Teacher Education (UTE’s) offer practical training within the higher education sector either in the form of Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programmes or in the form of advanced studies programmes (CAS/DAS/MAS), which are a form of university-level continuing education and training (CET). There are over 200 different Bachelor’s degree programmes. Professionals holding a Bachelor’s degree from a UAS are very highly qualified and sought after as specialists in their field. They work at all managerial levels. There are also around 80 different Master’s degree programmes at UAS. A Master’s degree is required, for example, in order to teach at lower-secondary school. In public UAS, tuition fee ranges from CHF 500 to CHF 1,500 per semester. At private universities, the tuition fee runs from CHF 3,500 to CHF 5,000.

PREREQUISITES

In addition to prior levels of training, aptitude assessments, admission tests or interviews may be required for individual fields of study.

Holder of both the Federal VET Diploma and the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate:

If you obtained both the Federal VET Diploma and a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, you are generally able to enrol in a Bachelor’s degree programme at a UAS. If you meet this pre-

requisite but wish to change your field of study, then you will be accepted if you can demonstrate a certain amount of work experience in the desired field.

Holders of both the Specialised School Diploma and the Specialised Baccalaureate:

Generally speaking, your specialised baccalaureate will allow you to enrol in a Bachelor’s degree programme at a UAS in the following fields: health care, pedagogy, social care, communication and psychology, depending on the specialisation that you obtained at the specific school. To pursue studies in a different field, you will need to do a pre-traineeship. You can also attend a preparatory course for studies in mathematics and natural sciences. These courses are offered by the UAS themselves.

Holders of a General Baccalaureate:

If you have a General Baccalaureate, then you may enrol in a UAS if you can demonstrate at least one year of work experience, preferably in the chosen field of studies.

Holders of other qualifications:

UAS and UTE’s also admit students holding other qualifications. In such cases, the UAS or UTE will examine the application and either conduct a specific aptitude assessment or have prospective students take an admission test.

Work-study: "I have always wanted to pursue some sort of career in a medical field. In Tunisia I passed my natural sciences matura and started a medical technology degree. ..."

KAOUTHER MRAIHI, TUNISIA
INTERNSHIP IN PREPARATION FOR A
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
COURSE OF STUDY



After I married two years ago, I came to Switzerland where my daughter was later born. This experience influenced my choice of career. I would now like to qualify as a midwife. I am convinced that I could help women from the same cultural background feel more at ease during labour.

While childbirth is a natural process, there are always moments when a woman may feel anxious. From my own experience, I know how important it is to be able to express your feelings in your mother tongue at such moments. This helps make you feel more comfortable with the situation.

Maintaining one's mother tongue

Continuing to use my mother tongue is very important to me. So, in my spare time I run Arabic classes for kids and teenagers. To pursue my dream, I successfully applied for national recognition of my matura and further education qualifications from Tunisia. I am now gaining practical work experience in a hospital and taking extra language classes to prepare for the University of Applied Sciences admission procedure."



ALICIA LEDERGERBER
SWISS NATIONAL WHO GREW UP IN SPAIN
RESTORATION STUDIES AT THE SCHOOL OF ART (UAS)

Essential combination of theory and practice: “After obtaining my upper-secondary baccalaureate, with a specialisation in art, I studied visual communication at a University of Applied Sciences in Spain. However, I quickly realised that this was not the right path for me. ...

I am not the type who always wants to be creative and didn't want to spend my entire time in the classroom studying theory. I absolutely needed to work with my hands. I realised this when I was working on a stage design project. So, I had to change direction.

My mother, and especially my sister who has been living in Switzerland for years, suggested that I also move to Switzerland. I always knew that I didn't want to live in Spain for my entire life. I enjoyed learning foreign languages and exploring new horizons. So, I took advantage of this opportunity. I moved to Switzerland and quickly learnt German, perhaps because I have always worked. My work in a restaurant enabled me

to meet lots of people and improve my mastery of both standard German and Swiss German.

‘Something was missing’

At the same time, I attended an integration course, considered many different occupations and even tried out a few (cabinetmaking, gardening, stage-set designing). However, none of these ever worked out. There was always something missing. Landscape architecture could have been a good option for me but the school I contacted did not recognise my Spanish baccalaureate.

Of course I was disappointed. However, I constantly spoke to lots of people, friends and relatives, about my various education and training options. I gathered ideas, considered the advantages and disadvantages, and discarded many until I came across a training programme in restoration, which was the one that I ultimately chose. This time, luck was on my side, the School of Art recognised my baccalaureate and I passed the admission procedure to test my aptitude for this profession.

‘My interests change and evolve constantly’

I'm taking my time, however. I would like to spend a year doing traineeships in as many different areas of restoration as possible to become familiar with this line of work. For the moment, I only know that I do not want to restore paintings since it requires fine motor skills. Restoration of furniture would be one option but so too would be stone work, restoration of national heritage sites, maybe even restoration of books, documentation and photographs.

I find it very difficult to reach a decision on which training programme to pursue since my interests change and evolve constantly. What I do know is that the University of Applied Sciences will provide me with good-quality training and is a good place to start my future career, regardless of where these studies take me.”

Once you successfully complete your VET programme and pass the examination for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, you may wish to attend a cantonal university or Federal Institute of Technology (FIT). To do so, you will need to attend a preparatory course for the Bridge-to-university Examination. If you pass this examination, then you may enrol in all cantonal universities and FITs. Alternatively, you may use your FVB to obtain a Bachelor's or Master's degree from a UAS and then enrol in a cantonal university.

Enrolment at a cantonal university or Federal Institute of Technology (FIT)



BRIDGE-TO-UNIVERSITY EXAMINATION

If you complete your VET programme with the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, you are entitled to attend a preparatory course for the Bridge-to-university Examination as per the guidelines established by the Swiss Baccalaureate Commission (SBC).

Lasting 30 weeks (2 semesters), the preparatory course for the bridge-to-university examination entails self-study and classroom instruction. It covers the following subjects: the local national language plus another national language or English, mathematics, natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics), humanities and social sciences, geography and history. If you pass the bridge-to-university examination, then you may enrol in an FIT, take federal aptitude tests for studies in medicine, or enrol in cantonal universities and in Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's).

Depending on the branch of studies, you will either be admitted without having to take an entrance examination or will have to undergo an admission procedure. After completing a three-year Bachelor's degree programme, you may pursue similar studies in the same or in a related field of studies at a cantonal university or FIT. While an equivalency list (see www.swissuniversities.ch) can provide you with an indication of the various pathways available, admission is ultimately decided by the corresponding higher education institution itself.

STUDIES AT A UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES (UAS)

If you complete your VET programme with the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, then you may enrol in a Bachelor's degree programme at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS).

Studies at Federal Institute of Technology, a logical consequence: “At sixteen, I wasn’t the most diligent student. I enrolled in a dual-track VET programme to obtain a Federal VET Diploma in Geomatics with FVB. ...

At the time, it wasn’t the worst choice that I could make. The training was not too difficult for me and I managed to complete it without too much effort.

After I passed my final examination for the Federal VET Diploma in Geomatics, I did my mandatory military service and then enrolled in a degree programme in information technology at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS). I was able to study full-time because I had saved up some money from the apprenticeship salary I had earned over the course of the VET programme. I also lived at home and didn’t have to contribute financially to the household. In addition, I was always very careful with my money, never spending more than I had to. I had no car at the time and did not need much money in my leisure time.

During my studies at the UAS, I began to take an active interest in physics, most likely because we had a fantastic teacher. I decided to enrol in the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETHZ) after completing my UAS Bachelor’s degree in information technology. At the FIT, I once again started in the first semester. The studies were very demanding, particularly in the area of mathematics and it would have been unreasonable to enrol directly in the second year of studies.

Exposure to working life

Of course, I could have reached my occupational goals more easily and, above all, in a shorter period of time had I simply attended a Baccalaureate School and then enrolled at the ETHZ. However, my specific trajectory was beneficial since my VET programme in geomatics had exposed me to work life early on. I knew what it was like to have to work hard. At the same time, my UAS studies provided me with a solid foundation in information technology, which I am able to put to good use both in my personal and working life.

Keeping up the joy of learning

Despite all the twists and turns, I never lost my enthusiasm for learning. And it is this enthusiasm that I try to convey to my students. Now I teach physics at a Baccalaureate School in Winterthur. I obtained my teacher’s certification while working. Looking back at my days as a learner in the VET programme, I see how much I enjoyed sharing my knowledge with my fellow learners and I still enjoy teaching today.

Physics is not an easy subject, particularly because of the many different formulas. Nevertheless, by finding everyday examples of how physics affects nature and technology, students can develop a keen interest in it.”

ROGER HERRIGEL, SWITZERLAND
FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA IN GEOMATICS, FVB,
COMPUTER SCIENTIST UAS, PHYSICIST FIT



Obtaining a Specialised School diploma, a Specialised Baccalaureate or a General Baccalaureate is the first important step in one's educational career and marks the transition point from a general education school to Switzerland's higher education sector or to its professional education sector. Holders of these qualifications who wish to pursue studies within the higher education sector may enrol at a College of Higher Education, a cantonal university, a Federal Institute of Technology (there are two: ETHZ and EPFL), a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) or a University of Teacher Education (UTE). It is important to prepare well for this transition.

This chapter is intended for foreign students currently attending an upper-secondary school (and their parents) or considering such a pathway for themselves or their children. It provides information on the transition from Switzerland's upper-secondary level general education sector to the higher education sector. It also explains what branches of study are available at Swiss higher education institutions.

Planning for studies

What options are there after general education?

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What options are there after general education?

The Swiss higher education sector is divided into 11 branches and over 120 fields of study (see table on pages 98/99). Higher education studies may be pursued at 10 cantonal universities, 2 Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT's), 9 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and 16 Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's). In addition, there are higher education institutions that provide only distance learning and other institutions that provide pedagogical training.

Higher education

Study programmes at cantonal universities and Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT's) are mainly academic and oriented towards fundamental research. In contrast, study programmes at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are oriented more towards acquiring the practical knowledge and skills needed to work in a given occupational field. Full-time study programmes at universities and FIT's generally last from 4½ to 5 years. At Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), the duration is 3 years.

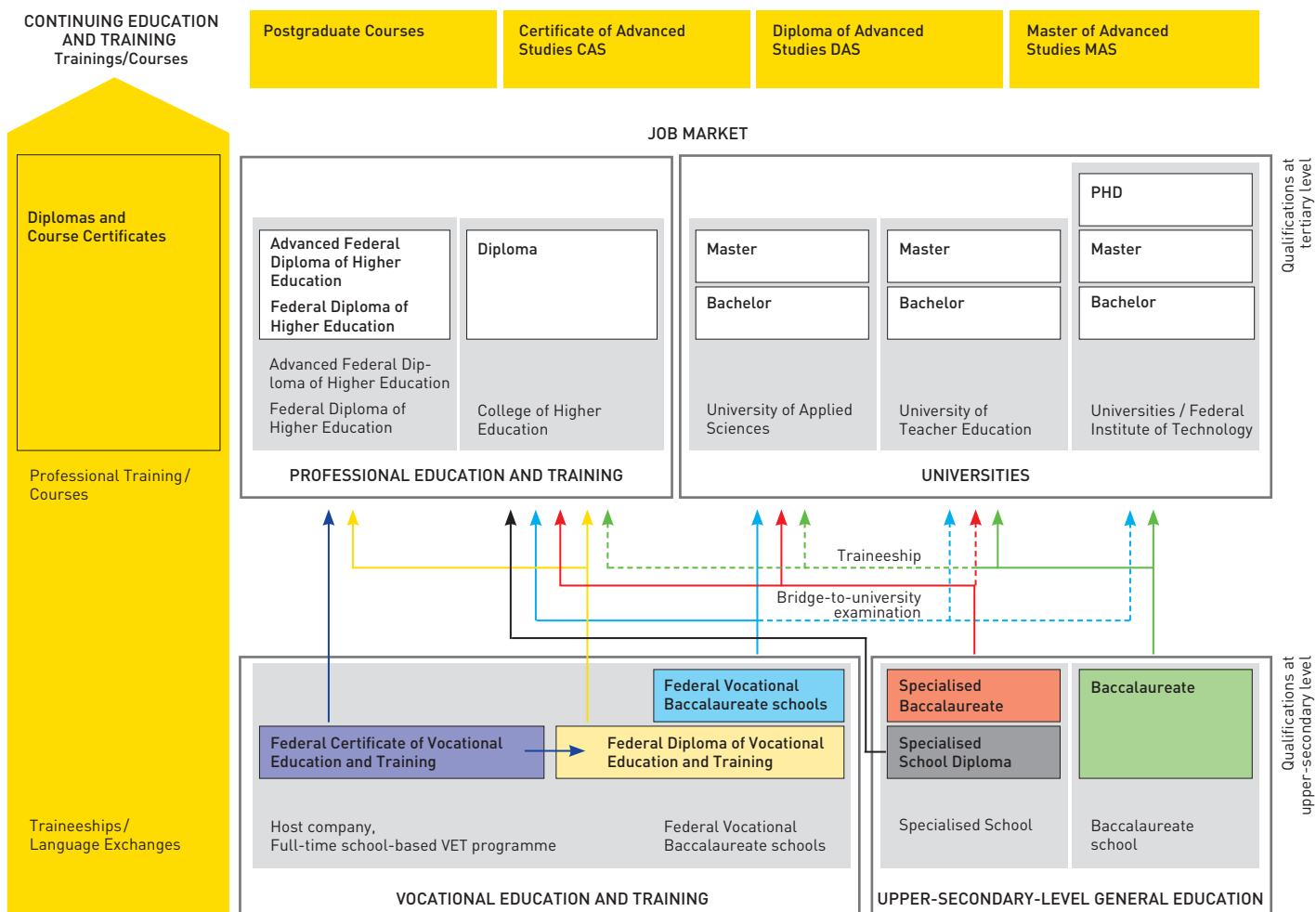
At Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), the standard qualification issued upon completion of studies is a Bachelor's degree (after 3 years). In some fields, it is also possible to continue studies to obtain a Master's degree (after an additional 2 years).

Depending on the level at which you wish to teach later on, you can obtain a Bachelor's degree at a University of Teacher Education (UTE) after 3 years of study. You may continue your studies to obtain a Master's degree after 2 more years of study.

Likewise, students enrolled in cantonal universities and Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT's) obtain a Bachelor's degree after completion of their studies (after 3 years); however, the standard qualification is actually a Master's degree (after an additional 2 years). Students also have the option of continuing their studies for an additional 3 years to obtain a PhD (doctorate) or even strive for a tenured professorship position at a university.



Overview



Options for tertiary-level education

All education and training options at upper-secondary school offer the possibility of continuing at tertiary level

What options are there after general education?

Fields of study

Subject categories	Fields of study Universities and FIT's	Fields of study Universities of Applied Sciences UAS
Theology and Religious Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theology - Religious Studies 	
Law, Economics, Business Administration/Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economics - Law - Forensic Science, Criminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Administration - Tourism, Hotel Management - Facility Management
Medicine, Health, Sports Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human Medicine/Chiropractic - Nursing Sciences - Dentistry - Veterinary Medicine - Human Movement and Sports Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nursing - Medical Therapy - Medical Technology - Human Movement and Sports Sciences
Social Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sociology - Political Science, International Studies - Psychology - Education - Social Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychology - Education (UTE) - Social Work
Linguistics and Literary Studies, Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classical Philology - German/English/Romance languages - Other languages - Comparative Literature - Applied Linguistics/Translation/Interpreting - Communication Sciences and Media Studies (Journalism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation/Interpreting - Communication Sciences and Media Studies, Journalism - Information and Documentation
Historical and Cultural Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Philosophy - History - Ancient History and Antiquity - Ethnology/Cultural Anthropology - Eastern Europe Studies - Islamic Studies 	
Art, Music, Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Musicology - Theatre, Dance - Film - Art History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Music - Theatre, Dance - Film - Visual Communication - Product and Industrial Design - Interior Architecture - Conservation/Restoration - Visual Art - Literary Writing

Subject categories	Fields of study Universities and FIT's	Fields of study Universities of Applied Sciences UAS
Mathematics, Computer Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mathematics - Computer Science - Computational Science and Engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Computer Science
Natural Sciences and Environmental Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physics - Chemistry/Chemical Engineering - Biochemistry - Biology, Biotechnology - Life Sciences/Interdisciplinary Science - Pharmaceutical Sciences - Environmental Sciences - Earth Sciences/Geology - Geography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chemistry/Chemical Engineering - Life Sciences/Interdisciplinary Science - Environmental and Geomatic Engineering
Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Architecture - Civil Engineering, Geomatics and Planning - Mechanical Engineering/Interdisciplinary Engineering Technology - Micro and Nano Engineering - Electrical Engineering and Information Technology - Materials Science and Engineering - Agriculture Science, Food Science, Forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Architecture, Landscape Architecture - Civil Engineering, Geomatics and Planning - Mechanical Engineering/Interdisciplinary Engineering Technology - Micro and Nano Engineering - Electrical Engineering and Information Technology - Agriculture Science, Food Technology, Forestry

Subject categories	Fields of study Universities and FIT's	Fields of study Universities of Applied Sciences UAS
Educational Science, Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Education - Secondary I Education, Secondary II Education - Special Needs Education - Speech and Language Therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Education - Secondary I Education, Secondary II Education - Art and Crafts - Music and Dance, Music Education, School Music - Special Needs Education - Speech and Language Therapy - Psychomotor Therapy

The Specialised School Diploma and Specialised Baccalaureate open up various training options at Colleges of Higher Education, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's).

Options for holders of a Specialised Baccalaureate



COLLEGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

With a Specialised School diploma, you are generally entitled to enrol at a College of Higher Education (in the fields of health, pedagogy and social work) or at a University of Applied Sciences (in artistic fields) if you have gained a certain amount of work experience in a field pertinent to your studies. Various Colleges of Higher Education also require you to undergo an aptitude assessment or take an aptitude test.

UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES (UAS)

With a Specialised Baccalaureate in health care and social care, you may apply for enrolment in a corresponding degree programme at a University of Applied Sciences provided that you have had at least one year of work experience in that field. If you wish to pursue studies that are not directly related to your Specialised Baccalaureate, you may be able to prepare specifically to meet prerequisites.

UNIVERSITIES OF TEACHER EDUCATION (UTE'S)

With a Specialised Baccalaureate in education, you are generally entitled to enrol in a University of Teacher Education without having to take an entrance exam for two degree programmes: the combined kindergarten-lower primary and the lower-primary teacher education programmes. For the single-track kindergarten programme, the Specialised School Diploma is often sufficient in the German-speaking part of the country. During the admissions process, reviewers will seek to determine whether you have the general education required to pursue the desired studies. Some Universities of Teacher Education (UTE's) require prospective students to take an admission test and/or offer preparatory courses in which you can acquire the knowledge you need.



ROBIN STAUFER, SWITZERLAND
SPECIALISED BACCALAUREATE, BACHELOR'S
DEGREE IN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Preparing for social care: "As a fourteen-year-old walking into a vocational, educational and career guidance office for the first time, I didn't have any real plans for the future. ..."

I took several aptitude tests, but all the occupations that matched my profile required attendance of an upper-secondary school. However, I had no interest in school and did not want to spend the next four years at Baccalaureate School. When the careers adviser suggested that I attend a Specialised School, which lasted one year less, I took and passed the entrance examination, which was similar to the one that you have to take for enrolment in a Baccalaureate School but with somewhat lower requirements.

I was fairly satisfied with the Specialised School I attended. It was cosy and very similar in approach to the nearby Baccalaureate School. We even had some of the same teachers. There were, however, no electives and unfortunately no opportunities to travel abroad to learn a foreign language. For me, the three specialisations offered were enough though; the one I chose, social care, placed considerable emphasis on economic aspects. At the Specialised School, I was finally able to study something that interested me.

First practical experience

When I obtained my Specialised School diploma three years later, I was glad that I no longer had to attend classes at school. In order to qualify for the Specialised Baccalaureate, I had to gain one year of work experience. I worked with schoolchildren at a special needs institution and enjoyed it much more than school. I found my work towards the Specialised Baccalaureate to be relatively painless.

During this fourth year of Specialised School, I began seriously considering studying psychology, an idea I had had since since primary school. I could see myself working as a therapist. So I decided to undergo the selection process at the University of Applied Science in Zurich. 45 prospective candidates took part, and I was one of the youngest. There were only 25 slots available and I ended up in the 30th slot. I figured that it was all over. However, five days before the degree programme was scheduled to start, I received a call from the admissions office telling me that there was one slot available if I was still interested. I was taken aback but since I didn't have a "Plan B", I accepted.

I completed my Bachelor's degree with good grades but became increasingly aware that you don't get very far with a Bachelor's degree in applied psychology. To become a therapist, you need a Master's degree and specialised training in therapy. That would have meant another four to six years of study and working part-time with a low salary. I felt that I couldn't afford it and I could not imagine this.

A fresh start

I then began to consider the possibility of venturing into tourism and the hotel business. After all, I had been working in this field since my school days and had managed to acquire various skills. Then, I saw a job posting involving work with children and teenagers. I applied and was surprised to actually get the job. So much the better, I thought. I need a fresh start and I intend to give it a try. "

With a General Baccalaureate, many different options open up for you: enrolment at a cantonal university, enrolment at a Federal Institute of Technology (FIT), admission to the federal aptitude test for studies in medicine, and enrolment at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) for those who have completed a one-year traineeship or post-baccalaureate training in economics.

Options for holders of a General Baccalaureate



STUDIES AT A CANTONAL UNIVERSITY OR AN FIT

With a federally recognised Baccalaureate, you may enrol without having to take an entrance examination. If you have a foreign baccalaureate, consult www.swissuniversities.ch to find out whether your qualification is recognised by Swiss cantonal universities and FIT's or whether you have to take an admission test.

Generally speaking, Swiss cantonal universities do not limit admission. A few examples include medical studies and certain sports sciences: depending on the number of students enrolled, prospective students holding Swiss citizenship may have to take an admission test. Foreigners may also take this admission test if they hold a Swiss settlement permit.

University studies are broken down into two cycles: the first cycle leads to a Bachelor's degree – you will need to earn 180 credits, which amounts to 3 years of full-time study; the second cycle leads to a Master's degree – you will need to earn an additional 90-120 credits, which takes approximately 2 years. You must first get a Bachelor's degree in order to enrol in a Master's degree programme.

Tuition for one year of studies at a Swiss cantonal university or FIT may vary considerably. Depending on the institution, the tuition fee for a full academic year for Swiss citizens

can be between CHF 1,000 and CHF 4,000, and foreign students are often charged more.

After completing your Master's degree, a wide range of possibilities will open up: you may pursue a PhD or conduct post-doctoral research at a cantonal university or Federal Institute of Technology (FIT); or you may enrol in a number of advanced studies programmes of varying lengths at these same institutions, such as a Certificate of Advances Studies (CAS), a Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS), or Master of Advanced Studies (MAS). You may even consider pursuing further qualifications in order to teach at Baccalaureate Schools.

STUDIES AT A UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES (UAS)

With a baccalaureate, you can also enrol in a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) if you have worked for at least one year, thereby gaining the requisite exposure to the world of work.

For those holding a foreign baccalaureate, UAS use the same official equivalency lists as those used by Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT's) and cantonal universities.

Depending on the branch of studies, tuition fees at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) will be around CHF 1,000 to CHF 2,000 per year for Swiss citizens and often higher for foreign students.

An almost typical path – from baccalaureate to university:

“At the Baccalaureate School I started the full programme with a specialisation in ancient languages, but things did not always go smoothly. After the second year, I was only allowed to progress to the third year on certain conditions. ...

My teacher suggested that I do my third school year in Geneva instead of repeating the second year in Zurich. This was certainly not an easy choice. The language of instruction was French and I had to live away from my family for the first time. However,

MARC MORAN, SWITZERLAND
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER



I was able to stay with my aunt who lives in Geneva, and this made things easier. Once back in Zurich, I took the entrance examination for the remaining baccalaureate years, this time with a specialisation in German, English, French and Spanish. This specialisation was much better for me since my parents come from Spain and Italy and we speak Catalan at home.

Lack of social contact

At the age of twelve/thirteen, I was certain that I wanted to work as a teacher. After completing my baccalaureate, I decided to enrol in a degree programme in materials sciences at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETHZ) for various reasons. It was a small class of only about 60 students, and half of the studies were devoted to mathematics. I soon realised that the other students were much better at this than I was. I quickly fell behind and was unable to keep up. Although I found the subject matter very interesting – e.g., one professor had spent the past ten years conducting research on how to optimise the materials used to bore tunnels – research and laboratory work did not involve much social contact.

So, I quit these studies. Before taking up studies again, I did odd jobs working in restaurants in the mountains and later in Zurich. I not only improved my mental math skills, I also learnt how to deal with many different types of people.

I eventually went back to my original plan, enrolment at a University of Teacher Education (UTE). At an Open House, I realised that I would most likely lack the patience to work with very young children at lower primary school level, so I decided to focus on the middle primary school level. And our class was fortunate. Due to a lack of teaching staff, we began teaching after our third year of training. I learnt a great deal and was able to apply theory directly in my work. And this work allowed me to earn enough money for a long trip that I had planned.

Fascinating development

After graduating and taking this trip, I began teaching. I find the development of students at this stage of their learning to be fascinating. In grade 4, children tend to be a bit lost but then find their own way. They learn how to solve problems on their own or ask others for solutions. They form their own opinions and think for themselves.

With my work, I try to convey enthusiasm for learning. I show the children, for example, how they can learn a little at a time. I explain that they do not need to learn everything in one day or cram things in at the last minute. This makes the learning process all the more enjoyable to them.”



GUL AFROZ HAIDARI, AFGHANISTAN
PLANNING TO PURSUE A DEGREE AS RADIOGRAPHER
AT A COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

An Open House set me on my path: "I am originally from Afghanistan but lived my entire life with my family in Iran. It was there that I obtained my baccalaureate with a specialisation in mathematics and physics. My plan was to become an electrical engineer. ..."

My father would have preferred for me to choose biology and chemistry instead, followed by studies in medicine. I didn't finish my studies because I got married about three years ago and now live with my husband in Switzerland. It was really hard in the beginning, but I quickly and intensively learnt the language while giving some thought to my future

career plans. For a Muslim woman, it is very important to be able to show that you work and are able to earn your own living. I didn't want to simply stay at home and take care of the household. I considered enrolling at a university or a Federal Institute of Technology but realised that I wouldn't have enjoyed it very much since I prefer to apply theory in practice.

Combination of classroom instruction and apprenticeship training

For this reason, I found the dual-track approach to Vocational Education and Training (VET) – which combines classroom instruction at a vocational school with apprenticeship training at a host company – to be an appealing option. I first tried enrolling in a VET programme in mechanical engineering, which was an ideal blend of practical work and theory and a field that required the ability to think in abstract technical terms.

I did a pre-vocational taster and enjoyed it very much. Unfortunately, my supervisor felt that I was not physically strong enough to do this type of job. I was very disappointed. And sometimes I wonder if the real reason I was turned down was that they didn't want a Muslim woman with a headscarf working at the company. I have worn a headscarf since I was little girl. It is part of our traditional culture. However, it is much more for me. It is part of my religion. If I were to walk around without a headscarf, I would feel as if I were a sinner. So I can't just take it off for no particular reason.

A suitable occupation

I reconsidered my options, read a great deal and watched lots of films of different occupations and professions. It wasn't until I went to an Open House that I decided to pursue training in radiologic technology, which closely matches my skills and interests.

I am currently doing a traineeship at a rehabilitation clinic, which allows me to prepare for enrolment in a degree programme at a College of Higher Education. I am working at the monitoring station, which is where patients go for rehabilitation after their hospital stay. Of course, there are very stringent rules designed to preserve a sterile environment. Microorganisms can be deadly for sick or severely injured patients. If I were to wear my headscarf just like I do in the street, then all sorts of bacteria would invariably be released into this environment. For this reason, I do not wear a headscarf while working in this ward. As soon as I get off work, I put it back on."

What options are there after general education?

Post-baccalaureate training in economics, the perfect solution: “Sports, tennis, squash and my work as a volleyball coach were always an important part of my life. ...

After completing Baccalaureate School with a specialisation in music, I wanted to study sports. I decided to enrol in a degree programme in sports biomechanics at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. Curiously enough, the main subjects were mathematics, physics and chemistry, which had very little to do with sports. After attending classes for seven semesters, I failed one of the courses for the second time. Of course I was sad, but I also felt I had to take stock of the situation. I had prepared for this examination intensively for

NICOLAS EGLI, SWITZERLAND
FIDUCIARY, CURRENTLY PREPARING FOR
A FEDERAL DIPLOMA OF
HIGHER EDUCATION IN FIDUCIARY SERVICES



seven weeks straight and had still failed. Something just wasn't right and I felt that I had to look in another direction. I chose to study economics, a subject that I had very much liked at Baccalaureate School.

However, after what turned out to be a very boring university semester, I decided to work for half a year as a trainee with an electrician. It was physically demanding, I met new people, earned an income and had time to think about my future. The result? I decided to pursue a 6-month post-baccalaureate training (PBT) course in economics. This course provided me with the basic skills needed to pass the examinations and was followed by an 18-month traineeship.

It did not take me long to find the right host company where I could specialise in fiduciary services. The PBT model was perfectly suited to my host company. It decided to continue to take on PBT trainees, who tend to be older than learners in upper-secondary level VET programmes. PBT trainees are also more self-sufficient and self-confident, and they tend to handle calls more professionally on the phone.

This PBT training model was absolutely the right choice for me. We prepare tax returns and handle complex cases for wealthy customers, involving such things as real estate or securities, heavily indebted clients or tax evaders who wish to voluntarily report themselves to the tax authorities. For established companies, we handle bookkeeping, payroll and administrative tasks from recruitment to retirement. We also help entrepreneurs to set up their own business and guide them through the first two years, which may be a time of initial losses. As independent fiduciaries, we handle mandatory annual corporate auditing.

Regular contact with customers

At first glance, one would imagine that we spend all day in front of the computer and calculator. Nothing could be further from the truth. I maintain regular contact with my customers, discuss matters with them and give them advice. Since around 50% of our clients are foreigners, I am able to use my foreign language skills and regularly contact the tax authorities in other countries (e.g. the United Kingdom or France). And I work in an international team. None of us comes from a purely Swiss background. In addition to German and English, we also speak French, Italian, Portuguese, Croatian or Spanish. This is also very enriching.

My training and daily work for a fiduciary services firm have opened up an exciting world for me. I take pleasure in seeing how economic aspects tie together. At the same time, I enjoy working directly with people."



POST-BACCALAUREATE TRAINING IN ECONOMICS

Those holding a baccalaureate may wish to pursue post-baccalaureate training in economics instead of enrolling in university studies. This training is divided into two phases:

- 6-month initial training, leading to the issuance of a certificate.
- 18-month traineeship at a company, which enables “quick” entry into the chosen branch.

Depending on the host company, graduates of post-baccalaureate training in economics will be paid a traineeship salary of around CHF 2,000 per month starting in the classroom instruction phase.

Post-baccalaureate training in economics is sponsored by a consortium of over 30 companies, including banks, insurance companies, and companies offering fiduciary services. Interested parties should contact the training managers of these companies, which offer around 100 traineeship positions each year.

The classroom instruction phase costs around CHF 10,000 and is generally paid for by the company that you sign the traineeship contract with.

What options are there after general education?

Not all training pathways are linear. In some cases, a student is unable to transition directly to a VET programme after the completion of compulsory education or did not pass the final apprenticeship examination the first time around. It is possible to go through catch-up training. Switzerland offers many initial and continuing training options to workers, enabling them to get their skills certified and improve their prospects on the labour market.

This chapter is intended for foreigners who already work in Switzerland. It provides information on how to improve their chances on the labour market by obtaining a vocational qualification, thereby having their professional skills officially recognised.

Better job prospects

VET qualifications for adults

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VET qualifications for adults

Not everyone's education and training follows a smooth, linear path. If you find yourself without a vocational qualification or any other kind of secondary education certificate as an adult, there is still a chance for you to undergo catch-up training.



ALAITTIN KOCAHAL, TURKEY
HOLDER OF FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA IN COOKING

First the VET Certificate, then the VET Diploma: “When I first arrived in Switzerland, I found work straight away, having already worked in the hotel and restaurant industry. ...

Then I became unemployed. With support from the Regional Employment Centre (REC), I was able to complete training for the Federal VET Certificate in Cooking. The REC found me an apprenticeship position at a labour market integration institution and provided financial support. Both the work-based training at this host company and the classroom instruction at the vocational school were easy enough. However, I had a hard time with language, communi-

cation and society subjects. My co-workers and supervisor helped me to overcome communication difficulties while I attended language courses. As the only adult at the vocational school, I was very warmly accepted by the young people. I still keep in touch with some of them. As a child, I didn't like going to school but here, I looked forward to each and every day of school. The fact that I stood out from the rest had its positive sides: after I completed my training, one of the teachers offered me a job at his company, a nursing home. I quickly realised that I now had a higher position, and I earned more money. Completing my training also brought me personal benefits. I was no longer afraid of not succeeding and knew that I could change jobs if I wanted to.

After a year of work, I decided to obtain a Federal VET Diploma in cooking. I spent two years attending a special course for adults and took the same final examination as the other learners.”

An apprenticeship, all the same: “I grew up in a small town in the south of Portugal with around 100 inhabitants. I attended primary school there. ...

I spent the next six school years in a larger town. After compulsory education, I had no idea what I wanted to study. I spent the next two years in upper-secondary school where I focused on mathematics and science. Afterwards I enrolled in a vocational school where I was able to attend the very first vocational training programme in commerce in Portugal. I had never worked in this occupation and I found the job really boring. A few of my classmates passed the entrance exam to attend university but I had no desire to follow suit. I wanted to work and earn enough money to live in my own flat. I found work but did not earn nearly enough money to live on my own.

Finally independent

During this period, I visited my aunt in Switzerland. She asked me if I would consider living in Switzerland. Of course! Within a short period, she found me a job and I spent the next four years in Switzer-

land. I was finally earning a decent income. I could afford to live in my own flat without any outside support. I worked for a horticulturalist and found the work very interesting. However, I was working so hard that I had little time to ask questions or learn much else. I realised that if I wanted to stay in Switzerland and did not obtain a recognised qualification, I would spend the rest of my life doing hard labour, earning less than others and perhaps find myself regularly unemployed. It had already happened to me on two occasions, when the company did not have enough business.

So I decided to pursue training. Of course I was nervous, particularly because I knew that I would be earning less money. I had been taking care of myself financially for a long time and lived with my partner. I could also have taken advantage of the opportunity given to adults to prepare for the qualification procedure directly. However, that would have meant studying all of the theory on my own, which would have been too difficult for me. So, I looked for an apprenticeship in bricklaying/masonry and quickly found one.

‘I also wanted to reach this level’

Prior to enrolling in the VET programme, I had done a traineeship at a host company. I noticed how a few of the workers on the construction site had undergone training, and they were doing interesting jobs, working as foremen. For them, work was not physically demanding. I also wanted to reach this level. I like bricklaying as an occupation. I am able to move while working, am constantly active, and can learn a lot.

I also enjoy studying at the vocational school. I’ve gone back to mathematics and am learning how to read and understand blueprints, how a building is erected and what important aspects need to be considered. I know that with a VET Diploma I am laying a good foundation for the next forty years. With this training from Switzerland, if I ever do return to Portugal, I will be able to work as a foreman.”

LUIS NETO, PORTUGAL

1ST YEAR

FEDERAL VET DIPLOMA PROGRAMME IN
BRICKLAYING/MASONRY





MARCUS SCHMID, SWITZERLAND
OCCUPATION INSPECTOR

Obtaining VET qualification – it’s never too late: “As a VET inspector, I frequently come across adults who ask me whether it is possible for them to obtain VET qualifications. These adults have been working for many years in a given occupational field but are not yet certified; I am also approached by learners who failed to pass the final apprenticeship examination and need or want to retake this examination. ...

Experienced adults who lack a VET qualification

Of course, nothing prevents an adult from looking for a suitable apprenticeship position and completing a formal VET programme. However, many adults rule out this option because their current level of income is needed to support their family.

Art. 32 of the Ordinance on Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act offers the possibility of obtaining VET qualifications as an adult with on-the-job experience. The practical portion of the qualification procedure should be no problem for experienced adults. In order to take this portion of the examination, the person needs to have worked in the occupation for at least five years. The theory portion of the examination is more challenging. The person needs to possess the same methodological and technical knowledge as those graduating from VET programmes. Since the adults in question did not attend a vocational school for three or four years in preparation for the qualification procedure, success or failure is determined solely on the basis of the examination results (i.e. there are no course grades that could help to average out examination results).

For this reason, preparation is key. The training plan for the given occupation clearly shows what needs to be learnt. Adults may either study this information on their own or attend a preparatory course for the theory portion of the final examination. In order to pass, they need to have good language skills. They need to be able to understand questions, interpret them properly and write down their responses.

Learners who failed to pass the final apprenticeship examination

If you fail to pass the qualification procedure (the final apprenticeship examination), speak to contact the VET inspector in charge. He/she will schedule an appointment to discuss the examination results. The chief examiner, and ideally also the apprenticeship trainer, can explain to you why you failed to pass. If you disagree with the assessments, then you may formally challenge them.

Of course, knowing why you didn't pass the examination does not make the situation any easier. If you are willing to work hard, then your second attempt is usually successful.

Several options

There are several options available to you if you fail to pass the qualification procedure:

- You may do an additional year of training. However, it is often not possible to extend your apprenticeship at the same host company, it is likely to have already filled all its available apprenticeship positions for that year. It can also be difficult to quickly find another host company since there are not many apprenticeship vacancies during the summer.
- You may look for an 80 % position in your occupation and attend the last year of classes at the vocational school again in preparation for the final examination. Even if you do not have an apprenticeship, this option is free of charge to you.
- You may look for a temporary traineeship in your occupation. You will certainly earn less but you can reach an agreement with the host company to allow you to occasionally attend training courses during the year.

The Canton's Offices for Upper-Secondary Education and Training offer support to learners who find themselves in this situation. If you wish, technical coaching can be arranged. They can also help you to organise an interim examination at a new company to analyse the situation. This will allow you to assess your strengths and weaknesses and decide how best to prepare for the next examination."

Marcus Schmid works as an occupation inspector for the Canton of Zurich's Office for Upper-Secondary Education and Training. He is responsible for occupations relating to hotels, restaurants and catering as well as food production.



MANY OPTIONS

Many education and training pathways in Switzerland, normally intended for young people, also exist for experienced adults. Both public and private schools offer classes leading to a Specialised Baccalaureate or a General Baccalaureate for adults (duration: 3–4 years). Under certain conditions, adults may also qualify for fast-track completion of a VET programme (in most cases, the VET programme will be shortened by 1 year; see page 110). They may also attend a preparatory course for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate after having obtained a Federal VET Diploma (duration: 1–2 years; see page 80).

VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

If you have at least five years of work experience, preferably at least three years in the occupation for which you wish to obtain a Federal VET Diploma, then a VPL procedure may be the right option for you. Through a specific procedure validating your prior learning, you will demonstrate the knowledge and know-how that you already possess. You will document your professional skills in a validation portfolio. A specialist will help you prepare this portfolio, which presents all the theoretical knowledge that you have gained in relation to the given occupation and how you have applied this knowledge in practice.

CANTONAL SUPPORT

Cantonal VET offices can provide you with assistance for any supplemental training that you need to fill gaps in your knowledge and skills. Contact your local VET office for more information on supplemental training or the option of retaking a final examination for the Federal VET Diploma.

Glossary

Glossar

Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education	Höhere Fachprüfung HFP, eidgenössisches Diplom
Advanced studies programmes	Diplomstudiengänge
Application file	Bewerbungsdossier
Apprenticeship	Lehrstelle
Apprenticeship contract	Lehrvertrag
Aptitude test	Eignungstest
Art. 32 of the Ordinance on Vocational and Professional Education and Training	Artikel 32 der Berufsbildungsverordnung
Baccalaureate	Gymnasiale Maturität
Baccalaureate School	Gymnasium, Gymnasiale Maturitätsschule
Branch courses	Überbetriebliche Kurse
Bridge-to-university examination	Passerelle
Bridge-year options	Brückenangebote
College of Higher Education	Höhere Fachschule HF
Commercial school	Handelsmittelschule HMS
Compulsory education	Obligatorische Schule
Continuing education and training	Weiterbildung
Core occupations	Grundberufe
Distance teaching university	Fernuniversität
Distance university of applied sciences	Fernfachhochschule
Fast-track VET programme	Verkürzte Lehre
Federal Certificate of Vocational Education and Training	Eidgenössisches Berufsattest EBA
Federal Diploma of Higher Education	Berufsprüfung BP, eidgenössischer Fachausweis
Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training	Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis EFZ
Federal Institute of Technology FIT	Eidg. Technische Hochschule ETH
Federal Vocational Baccalaureate FVB	Berufsmaturität
Final Apprenticeship Examination	Lehrabschlussprüfung LAP
First learning cycle, kindergarten	Eingangsstufe, Kindergarten
Full-time school-based VET programme	Vollzeitschule
General education	Allgemeinbildung
Grants	Stipendien
Higher education sector	Hochschulsystem
Host company	Lehrbetrieb
Instruction in language, communication and society	Allgemeinbildender Unterricht ABU
Job interviews	Vorstellungsgespräch
Looking for apprenticeship positions	Lehrstellensuche
Lower-secondary level	Sekundarstufe I
Occupational field	Berufsfeld
Overview of occupation selection process	Berufswahlfahrplan
Post-baccalaureate training in economics	Postmaturitäre Wirtschaftsausbildung PWA
Pre-apprenticeship	Vorlehre
Preparing for the choice of occupation	Berufswahlvorbereitung
Pre-vocational practical assessment	Selektionspraktikum
Pre-vocational taster	Schnupperlehre
Primary school	Primarstufe
Procedure of transition	Übertrittsverfahren
Rejections	Absagen
Remedial courses	Stützkurse
Second VET programme	Zweitlehre
Specialised Baccalaureate	Fachmaturität
Specialised School	Fachmittelschule FMS
Specialised School Diploma	Fachmittelschulausweis
Swiss education system	Bildungssystem der Schweiz
Tertiary level	Tertiärstufe
Traineeship	Praktikum
Tuition of studies	Studiengebühren
University	Universität
University of Applied Sciences UAS	Fachhochschule FH
University of Teacher Education UTE	Pädagogische Hochschule
Upper-secondary level	Sekundarstufe II
Validation of prior learning	Validierung von Bildungsleistungen
VET office	Amt für Berufsbildung
VET qualifications for adults	Berufsabschluss für Erwachsene
VET school	Berufsfachschule
Vocational and professional education and training	Berufsbildung
Vocational Education and Training (VET), apprenticeship	Berufliche Grundbildung, Lehre
Vocational Information Centre	Berufsinformationszentrum BIZ
Vocational, educational and career guidance	Berufsberatung

Glossaire

Glossario

Examen professionnel supérieur, diplôme fédéral DF	Esame professionale superiore EPS, diploma federale
Diplômes postgrades	Formazioni post-diploma
Dossier de candidature	Dossier di candidatura
Place d'apprentissage	Posto di tirocinio
Contrat d'apprentissage	Contratto di tirocinio
Test d'aptitudes	Test attitudinale
Article 32 de l'Ordonnance sur la formation professionnelle	Art. 32 dell'Ordinanza sulla formazione professionale
Maturité gymnasiale	Maturità liceale
Ecole de maturité gymnasiale (gymnase, lycée, collège)	Liceo, scuola di maturità
Cours interentreprises	Corsi interaziendali
Passerelle	Passerella
Filières, mesures de transition	Soluzioni transitorie, formazioni transitorie
Ecole supérieure ES	Scuola specializzata superiore SSS
Ecole de commerce	Scuola media di commercio
Ecole obligatoire	Scuola dell'obbligo
Formation continue, perfectionnement	Formazione continua, perfezionamento
Métiers CFC ou AFP	Professioni con AFC o CFP
Université à distance	Università a distanza
Haute école spécialisée à distance	Scuola universitaria professionale a distanza
Apprentissage de durée réduite	Formazione professionale di base ridotta
Attestation fédérale de formation professionnelle AFP	Certificato federale di formazione pratica CFP
Examen professionnel, brevet fédéral BF	Esame di professione, attestato professionale federale APF
Certificat fédéral de capacité CFC	Attestato federale di capacità AFC
Ecole polytechnique fédérale EPF	Politecnico federale
Maturité professionnelle	Maturità professionale
Examen de fin d'apprentissage	Esame di fine tirocinio
Premier cycle de l'école primaire, école enfantine	Scuola dell'infanzia
Ecole à plein temps	Scuola a tempo pieno
Enseignement général	Formazione generale
Bourse d'études	Borse di studio
Système des hautes écoles	Sistema universitario
Entreprise formatrice	Azienda formatrice
Enseignement de la culture générale	Insegnamento della cultura generale ICG
Entretien d'embauche	Colloquio di presentazione
Recherche d'une place d'apprentissage	Ricerca di un posto di tirocinio
Secondaire I	Livello secondario I
Champ professionnel	Settore professionale
Processus du choix professionnel	Processo di scelta professionale
Formation commerciale pour titulaires de maturité	Formazione economica post-maturità
Préapprentissage	Pre-tirocinio
Préparation au choix professionnel	Preparazione alla scelta professionale
Stage de sélection	Stage di selezione
Stage d'orientation	Stage d'orientamento
Ecole primaire	Livello primario, scuola elementare
Procédure de transition	Procedura di transizione
Réponses négatives	Risposte negative
Cours de soutien	Corsi di sostegno
Deuxième apprentissage	Seconda formazione professionale di base
Maturité spécialisée	Maturità specializzata
Ecole de culture générale ECG	Scuola specializzata
Certificat de culture générale	Certificato di scuola specializzata
Système suisse de formation	Sistema educativo svizzero
Degré tertiaire	Livello terziario
Stage	Stage
Taxes d'études	Tasse scolastiche
Université	Università
Haute école spécialisée HES	Scuola universitaria professionale SUP
Haute école pédagogique HEP	Alta scuola pedagogica ASP
Secondaire II	Livello secondario II
Validation des acquis de l'expérience	Validazione degli apprendimenti acquisiti
Office de la formation professionnelle	Divisione della formazione professionale
Certification professionnelle pour adultes	Qualifica professionale per adulti
Ecole professionnelle	Scuola professionale
Formation professionnelle	Formazione professionale
Formation professionnelle initiale, apprentissage	Formazione professionale di base, tirocinio
Centre d'information sur les professions	Centro di informazione sulle professioni (Ufficio d'orientamento)
Orientation professionnelle	Orientamento professionale

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