

# EDUCATION SYSTEM: SWITZERLAND AS ONE OF THE GLOBAL LEADERS

## EDUCATIONNEWSTOP STORIES

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Education is one of the most important pillars of each society. Switzerland, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, managed to secure its spot in the top 10 ranking for the best education systems of the globe. With a well established and highly functional system of delegated accountability and vast support from administration, the basis for educational development in this country are huge.

Most of the regulations regarding Swiss education system are done by regional cantonal governments, obliged to follow the framework set by the federal government. Each canton sets their own independent calendar, curriculum and criteria, however all of this is overseen by the federal organization State Secretariat of Education, Research and Innovation (SERI).

There is also a distinctive characteristic of the Swiss education system, called accounting for wishes and the abilities of students. This mechanism allows diversifying the system through establishment of different directions. All of this is offered to students after their primary education. Each student is then allowed to focus primarily on the subject or field they are most interested in. Through this programme, students become more specialized and focused on their work, which allows Switzerland to produce more experts.

When a child is born, parents usually enrol them in one of the local kindergartens. There, children are offered a basis in regards to different languages and Swiss culture. Besides these aspects, all kindergartens focus on developing social skills and basic mannerism, which is taught through play-based learning.

Primary education is compulsory for all children in Switzerland. They start their education process when they reach four or six years, depending on the canton. This part is finished by the time they reach 15 years old.

There are some variations, especially in German-speaking cantons, where two first years of primary schools are combined with kindergarten. This makes classes filled with students from 4 to 8 years. They are called Grundstufe or Basisstufe.

In the French-speaking cantons there is also this combination, but classes are divided by years, while in Italian-speaking there is separate kindergarten from primary school.

Secondary education is non-compulsory and it is divided into two parts, called lower and upper. Lower one is equivalent to secondary schools in other countries, while upper is equivalent to high-schools.

Lower secondary education is offered in institutions called Gymnasiums or Kantonsschule. The biggest emphasis is put on development of language skills, since three languages are being learned during this stage. First one is children's mother language, second one is one of the languages spoken in Switzerland and the third one is English.

Besides this sphere, there are basic classes regarding natural and social sciences, such as biology, history, mathematics and others.

At the end of each school year there are a series of tests, which if passed enables students to continue their further education. If not, the student is obliged to repeat that year.

Upper secondary education is also non-compulsory and it is rather unique. There are three types of studies students can pursue.

First category is called Vocational education and training. This is a choice most of the students make, since it offers a plethora of benefits. These schools are places where young people are taught through first-hand experience in companies, which often provide apprenticeships and cooperation with other firms. These programs last from 2 to 4 years, which allow students to develop their technical and practical knowledge. At the end of their education, students are presented with a federal VET diploma or certificate, which enables them to continue their education.

Second category is Baccalaureate school, which is a choice of  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the students. It is often characterized as continuation of lower secondary school, with similar subjects. Two new ones are law and economics. To enrol in these schools, students usually need to have great performance during lower secondary education, because many of these schools have high criteria.

These programs last from 3 to 6 years and at the end a student needs to present its baccalaureate essay and pass the test. If the student is successful in these fields, they will receive Mature and are eligible to enrol into canton universities, institutes of technology and teacher-training universities.

Third category is Specialized schools, which provide education in one special field, such as healthcare, social work and other. The grading system is the same as for other two categories, but offers more in depth education in specific studies. In this type of education, grades are most important, since they determine if the student can pass the year. This program duration is three years and in the end students are obliged to take the final test in six subjects. If they pass these tests they are offered a certificate and are eligible for continuation of their education in PET colleges.

Tertiary education, which is the highest category of basic education, is divided into two categories. Universities are often the first choice for people that gained Matura certificate, while the students with a VET diploma are eligible for Fachhochschule.

There are 12 Universities around the country, with 10 of them run and regulated by cantons. These institutions offer theory-oriented studies, with a wide range of subjects to choose from. With excellent scores and BBA and MBA partnerships and rewards, these institutions are always in the top rankings in the world.

For people that have achieved a VET diploma, Fachhochschule is the best option, since it offers higher education in engineering, technology and business. There is however, only one public school of this type, while the other eight are privately owned. This type of education also does not offer further development, such as a doctoral degree. Primary reason for this is their practical approach to learning, while Universities tend to focus more on the theoretical sphere.

With most of the Universities ranked in the global top 100, Switzerland's education system is one of the most developed and complex in the world. It focuses on maximizing the effects of education and specializing its students in different fields from a younger age than in other countries. (photo credit: Jorg Mader/Pxhere)

## Types of Higher Education Institutions in Switzerland

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The Higher Education is the tertiary level in Switzerland that includes Tertiary level A Institutions and tertiary level B professional education and training. The Tertiary level A Institutions comprises of the universities that focuses mainly on basic research, the universities of applied sciences which are inclined towards professional practice-oriented studies and carry out applied research and development. The Tertiary level B professional education and training is carried out in the non-university sector and provides training courses for demanding professional activities. Tertiary level B professional education and training includes training courses at colleges of professional education and training (PET colleges) and Federal and Advanced Federal PET Diploma Examinations.

Switzerland has 12 Universities, 8 Universities of Applied Sciences, and 15 Universities of teacher training and is also home to a number of excellent institutes in the fields of international affairs, public governance and hotel management. Undergraduate program in Switzerland is generally in the national language, i.e. German, Italian, or French, and many graduate programs are provided in English language.

# Higher Education Institutions

## Tertiary Level A Institutions

### Universities

The cantons administer and supervise the universities. Under the legal framework the universities have broad academic, financial and organizational autonomy with the Swiss University Conference (SUC) being responsible for coordination at the national level. The Universities govern and administer their own affairs and have academic freedom and freedom of research. The Universities includes the cantonal universities and the federal institute of technology.

- **Federal Institute of Technology:** Switzerland has two federal institutes of technology (ETH): one in German-speaking Zurich and other in French-speaking Lausanne. The ETH focuses on delivering high-quality education, research, technological advancement and societal development activities. Science and Engineering and architecture are the basic subjects taught at the ETH.
- **Cantonal Universities:** Switzerland has 10 cantonal universities. Five are located in German-speaking Switzerland: in Basel, Bern, Lucerne, St Gallen and Zurich. The Universities of Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchatel are situated in the French portion of Switzerland. The University of Italian-speaking Switzerland is situated in Lugano and there is a bilingual university at Fribourg (German and French). Most of the cantonal universities offer majors in law, mathematics, humanities and sciences, and majority of the universities have their own faculty of medicine.

### University of Applied Sciences

The Confederation and the cantons jointly manage and govern the universities of applied sciences. The University of Applied Sciences emphasizes on the practice-oriented and application-oriented education, thereby preparing students for employment requiring the application of scientific findings and applied arts.

On a national level there are seven public University of Applied Sciences (UAS). Four are situated in German-speaking Switzerland- UAS of Central Switzerland, UAS of Eastern Switzerland, UAS of Northwestern Switzerland, UAS of Zurich, one in Western Switzerland- Haute Ecole Specialisee de Suisse occidentale, one in Italian-speaking Switzerland- Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera italiana and one in Bern, which is bilingual- UAS of Bern: German and French. The universities of applied sciences offers courses in the

following areas of study: information technology, general technology, architecture, life sciences, agronomy and forestry, economics, designing, public health, social work, drama and music, the performing arts, applied psychology, applied linguistics and sports.

Universities of applied sciences offer degree programs which lead to professional qualifications. They offer degree programs at Bachelor level and Master level, and a wide range of continuing education and training programs.

## University of Teacher Education

The University of Teacher Education provides training of teaching staff for the primary and secondary levels, Baccalaureate schools and Special needs education. The degree programs provide professional qualifications and include scientific, teaching-specific, educational and practical training components. They combine theory and practical study and teachings. University of teacher education offer teacher education and training at Bachelor's and Master's level. The results and performances are given in ECTS credits and the duration of studies depends on the selected degree program.

## Tertiary Level B Professional Education and Training

Tertiary level B professional Education and Training includes the vocational and professional non-university sector and is managed federally jointly by the Confederation, cantons and the professional organisation (OdA). Tertiary level B professional education and training enables professionals who have completed vocational education and training (VET) to specialise and enhance their skills and knowledge. The courses of education and training are diverse.

Tertiary level B professional education and training is split into the two areas: Federal and Advanced Federal PET Diploma Examinations and Colleges of professional education and training (PET colleges).

- College of Professional Education and Training (PET Colleges): The Colleges of professional Education and Training teach students the skills and abilities required to independently presume the professional and management responsibilities in their field. The Colleges of Professional Education and Training offer federally recognised education and training programs in the areas of Engineering, Hotel, restaurant and catering, tourism and hospitality services, Economics, Agriculture and forestry, Healthcare, Social care and adult education and training, Art and design and Traffic and transport. The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is in charge for the acknowledgement of the education and training programs of PET Colleges.

- Federal and Advanced Federal PET Diploma Examinations: The Federal PET Diploma Examinations and Advanced Federal PET Diploma Examinations are for professionals who desire to heighten their knowledge or prepare for higher management roles. The Confederation, via the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), recognises the examination regulations which are made by professional governing bodies.