



Career and Technical Education in Switzerland

Switzerland's career and technical education (CTE) program is the mainstream upper secondary education program; almost 70 percent of students leaving compulsory education (end of grade 9) take this route. CTE prepares a broad cross-section of students, including high achievers, for careers in a wide range of occupations—high-tech, human service, health, as well as traditional trades and crafts. It enjoys very strong support from Swiss employers, who credit it with being a major contributor to the continuing vitality and strength of the Swiss economy.

The program is a “dual” system, which combines three to four days a week in apprenticeship at a host company with classroom learning at a vocational school. Students and their parents sign an apprenticeship contract with a company. They get help from a local career guidance center if needed in finding apprenticeships, but they learn from 8th grade onward about the labor market during the search. The availability of openings in the apprenticeship market signals which careers are growing and which are stagnant or declining.

About 30 percent of Swiss companies host apprentices. These 16-to-19-year-old apprentices serve customers, work on complex machines, carry out basic medical procedures, and advise investors under the wings of credentialed trainers within the company. They rotate among three learning sites—workplace, intercompany courses, and school—in different proportions over the three- or four-year period of their apprenticeship. Their learning is highly personalized; their interests and talents are at the core of their training. They get paid an average monthly starting wage that ranges from \$400 to \$700 in the first year, rising to around \$1,100 to \$1,200 by the time they are in their third year. The apprenticeship leads to a Federal VET Diploma, a nationally recognized certificate that is portable.

The Swiss system intentionally allows students to move seamlessly between academic and career-focused studies as well as from CTE on to higher education, motivating students to pursue additional qualifications. A growing number of students who start an apprenticeship decide to pursue either simultaneously or with an additional year of study a more applied version of the academic baccalaureate. This diploma entitles students to admission to a University of Applied Sciences (UAS), where students can earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees in such fields as information technology, health care, social work, business, arts, music, and engineering. But students with the Vocational Baccalaureate can also sit for an additional exam that qualifies them to enroll in the more traditional university system if they choose.

For more, see [here](#).