



4. Education and universities

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4.1 EDUCATION SYSTEM

The long tradition of decentralized government in Switzerland is reflected in its educational system. The elementary and high schools are the responsibility of the cantons and municipalities, whereas universities and advanced vocational training schools are the joint responsibility of federal and cantonal governments.

Switzerland divides its education system into primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The primary and lower secondary levels last nine years and are compulsory. An upper secondary level is offered after the compulsory schooling is completed. More than 50% of students choose some form of practical vocational training, which lasts up to four years.

The tertiary stage covers universities and higher vocational training. Switzerland has universities providing general education and universities of applied sciences. Higher vocational training is provided by technical and higher technical schools, leading to vocational certificates and higher vocational diplomas.



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1. Primary level

At the age of 4 or 5, children can go to kindergarten free of charge. It is not compulsory but strongly recommended. Elementary school is compulsory for children aged 6 or 7 years old and lasts six years. Children usually attend their local school, though in smaller villages, there might be one school for several municipalities. In such cases, transport to and from school is usually organized.

2. Lower secondary level

Pupils aged between 12 and 16 attend lower secondary schools. In most cantons this level is divided according to ability: while one level offers the more basic schooling to prepare students for entering work life, the other level is more demanding. Some upper secondary level (see 3) training can only be entered after finishing the lower secondary level with the more advanced classes.

Cantons are responsible for setting the curriculum. All of the cantons teach one national language (German, French, Italian or Romansch) and two foreign languages in addition to math, history, geography and science.

3. Upper secondary level

The upper secondary level of schooling in Switzerland is vocational; however, almost all students complete it either in the form of an apprenticeship or further schooling.

Apprenticeships in Switzerland consist of hands-on training in a profession for a period of usually three to four years, depending on the sector. Apprentices work for a company while studying theory in class (one to two days per week) at specialized schools in the same field. This ideal combination of a sound theoretical knowledge with direct experience gives the apprentices the best chance of finding a job when they successfully conclude their apprenticeship. Upon completion of the training program and after passing their exams, the apprentice receives a Federal Certificate of Capability (CFC), confirming their ability to work in the chosen profession, for example, as a mechanic, watchmaker, IT specialist, laboratory assistant, administrative employee or other qualified position. After obtaining a CFC and completing an additional year of study, an individual may take the professional diploma exams. Passing these exams enables the person to attend a university of applied sciences.

Another option is to continue schooling with a specialized middle school. These prepare pupils for higher vocational education in healthcare, social services, teaching, ICT and the arts.

In order to win a place at university, a university of applied sciences or an institute of technology, students must complete grammar school (collège / Gymnasium), which lasts 3 to 4 years depending on the canton, and is full-time. There are various types of grammar schools with different emphasis relating to the subjects taught: languages, math and science, business, economics and law, arts or similar.



4.2 UNIVERSITY-LEVEL EDUCATION

Cantonal universities offer a wide range of courses in such fields as: law and criminology, economics and political science, medicine, chemistry and health, social sciences and social work, linguistics and literature studies, ICT, history and archaeology, humanities and art history, natural sciences and mathematics, computer science and telecommunications, sports science and human movement, and theology and religious studies.

The Federal Institutes of Technology offer courses in mathematics and natural sciences, engineering and architecture, as well as computer science and telecommunications, to name but a few. The GREATER GENEVA BERNE area has one of only two Federal Institutes of Technology in Switzerland; this Lausanne-based institution (www.epfl.ch) enjoys a worldwide reputation and participates in a number of international R&D programs.

The universities of applied sciences provide more practical courses in the areas of engineering and information technology, architecture, building engineering and planning, chemistry and life sciences, agriculture and forestry, business, management and services, health, social work, design, arts, music, theater, applied psychology and applied linguistics.

The GGBa's top-rate universities, universities of applied sciences and institutes of technology, as well as many private companies, are active in cutting-edge research and attract scientists from all over the world. The results are remarkable. In proportion to its population, Switzerland has the highest share of Nobel Prize winners and the greatest number of patents in the world.

Universities

- **Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne (www.epfl.ch)**

EPFL has more than 10,000 students and researchers from around the world, of whom 1,400 are doctoral candidates. There are 250 laboratories and research centers in seven faculties and schools: life sciences, computer sciences, engineering, chemistry, mathematics and physics, humanities and social sciences, management of technology, architecture, civil engineering and the environment.

- **University of Berne (www.unibe.ch)**

The University of Berne enjoys special recognition in leading-edge disciplines. The university's comprehensive offering includes eight faculties and some 160 institutes that date back to the 16th century. With 13,700 students, it is a middle-sized Swiss university. Its academic and research organization prides itself on its inter-disciplinary approach, exemplified by its three National Centers of Competence in Research (NCCR): "Climate", "North-South" and "Trade Regulation". The university is actively involved in a wide range of European and worldwide research projects, notably in space research.

- **University of Fribourg (www.unifr.ch)**

More than 10,000 students and 200 professors from almost 100 countries are involved in study and research at the university's five faculties: science, law, economics, business and social studies, literature and theology. The University of Fribourg is the only bilingual university in Europe, with all courses offered in both French and German.

- **University of Geneva (www.unige.ch)**

Since its foundation in 1559, the University of Geneva has pushed for ever higher ethical standards, quality and innovation. Today, the University of Geneva is one of Europe's leading universities and home to 13,300 students. More than one-third of students come from abroad. Renowned for its high level of excellence, the university offers a wide spectrum of academic courses in diverse fields of study, such as exact and natural sciences, medicine, social sciences and the arts. The University of Geneva is also considered a leading research institution, in particular in the fields of molecular biology, astrophysics, social sciences and economics.

- **University of Neuchâtel (www.unine.ch)**



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The University of Neuchâtel has the following faculties: arts and social sciences, science, law, economics and theology. The Faculty of Science is particularly renowned for its achievements in materials sciences and micro-technology. The student population is close to 3,800, with an additional 800 academic personnel, scientists and administrative staff, and an annual budget of approximately SFr 120 million.

- **University of Lausanne (www.unil.ch)**

The University of Lausanne was founded in 1537 and has seven faculties: biology and medicine, geosciences and the environment, business and economics, social and political sciences, law and criminal justice, the arts, theology and religious studies. Its Faculty of Biology and Medicine is particularly strong, and its business and economics program has an excellent international reputation. The university has approximately 10,700 students and 2,200 researchers. Emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach, with close cooperation between students, professors and teaching staff.

Universities of applied sciences

Switzerland's universities of applied sciences were established in 1993 to provide higher-level vocational training in specific disciplines, primarily in the technical and business sectors. Their mission is to develop expertise in applications and to train professionals to use them. They are also centers of recruitment for industry.

- **University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland (www.hes-so.ch)**

The universities of applied sciences in Western Switzerland are a network of 19 educational institutes throughout the GGBa. For example, the engineering school of the Greater Jura Area is in Le Locle (canton of Neuchâtel) and in Saint-Imier (canton of Berne). The main universities of applied science in the GGBa are the following:

- Hotel School Lausanne (hotel and hospitality management) / www.ehl.ch
- University of Applied Sciences in Fribourg (engineering, architecture, management, healthcare, social studies) / www.hes-so-fr.ch
- University of Applied Sciences in Geneva (engineering, management, arts and design, healthcare, social studies, music) / www.hesge.ch
- University of Applied Sciences in the Greater Jura Area (management, engineering, healthcare, arts and design) / www.he-arc.ch
- University of Applied Sciences in Valais (management, engineering, tourism, healthcare, social studies) / www.hevs.ch
- University of Applied Sciences in Vaud (management, engineering, healthcare, social studies, arts and design) / www.hesso-vaud.ch
- Engineering School of Changins (tree cultivation, wine growing) / www.eichangins.ch
- Hotel Management School Geneva (hotel and hospitality management) / www.ehg.ch



- **Berne University of Applied Sciences (www.bfh.ch)**

Berne University of Applied Sciences has six departments: engineering and information technology, architecture, wood and civil engineering, business and administration, health, social work, University of the Arts, Swiss College of Agriculture SHL, and the Swiss Federal Institute of Sports Magglingen SFISM. The university is based in Berne, Burgdorf, Biel/Bienne, Zollikofen and Magglingen. About 5,000 students are enrolled in 27 bachelor degree programs, 17 masters programs and a variety of executive master, diploma and certificate of advanced studies programs and seminars. Most of the programs are taught in German, while others are conducted in both French and German. An increasing number of courses or modules within these programs are delivered in English.

- **Les Roches-Gruyère University of Applied Sciences (www.lrguas.ch)**

Les Roches-Gruyère University of Applied Sciences with campuses in Bulle and Bluche is the first private university of applied sciences in Switzerland in the field of hospitality management. It is fully authorized by the Swiss federal authorities. The Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management, launched in 2009, is a 4 year degree program. Students can choose between two different specializations: the first is in international hospitality management, the second is in food, beverages and operations management.

4.3 POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION

The GGBa has a number of prestigious post-graduate institutions offering masters programs in a wide range of fields. In addition, the cantonal universities and universities of applied sciences offer outstanding masters programs in both scientific and business-related fields.

- Boston University's Geneva Internship Program (www.bu.edu)
- Business & Management University (www.bmuniversity.com)
- EML Geneva (www.em-lyon.com)
- European University (<http://switzerland.euruni.edu>)
- Swiss Finance Institute - Geneva (www.swissfinanceinstitute.ch)
- Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations (www.genevadiplomacy.com)
- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva (www.graduateinstitute.ch)
- Institute for Higher Studies in Public Administration (IDHEAP) (www.idheap.ch)
- Institute for Management Development (IMD) (www.imd.ch)
- International Academy of Sports Science and Technology (AISTS) (www.aists.org)
- International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) (www.cies.ch)
- International University in Geneva (www.iun.ch)
- Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe (www.jean-monnet.ch)
- iimt - international institute of management in technology (www.iimt.ch)
- Lomonosov Moscow University, Faculties of Law and Geography (www.uni-lomonosov.ch)
- Open University (www.open.edu)
- Thunderbird School of Global Management (www.thunderbird.edu)
- UBIS - University of Business and International Studies (www.ubis-geneva.ch)
- University IFM-Institute of Finance and Management (www.ifm.ch)
- Webster University (www.webster.ch)
- The Rochester-Bern Executive MBA Program (www.executive-mba.ch)



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4.4 ADULT EDUCATION

In Switzerland, adult education attracts people of all ages who wish to continue and improve their education. A large variety of possibilities is offered by private schools and institutes in a wide range of languages, commercial skills, computer and internet-related programs, among many others. These courses frequently take place in the evening so that full-time workers can participate.

4.5 INTERNATIONAL AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

There are more than 400 private schools and institutes in Switzerland, of which almost 100 are in the GGBa. Some of them are quite popular with foreign nationals for several reasons:

- (1) Teaching programs that meet the US, British, French or international requirements and standards;
- (2) Low teacher-student ratio, which allows students to receive more attention than in public schools;
- (3) Private schools are quite often small institutions where students can board and participate in a wide variety of cultural and sports activities.

The GGBa is home to a large number of private schools. These schools offer educational programs in French, German, English, Italian and Spanish. Foreigners who are considering placing their children in one of the many private schools in Switzerland will find plenty of useful details about their teaching programs, admission criteria and languages in the "Private schools in Switzerland" directory, published by the Swiss Federation of Private Schools in Switzerland (www.swiss-schools.ch).

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GREATER GENEVA BERNE area is an initiative of the cantons of Berne, Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Geneva and Valais

Schools in the area include (please note that this list is not exhaustive):

- Aiglon Collège (www.aiglon.ch)
- British School of Berne (www.britishschool.ch)
- Business School Lausanne (www.bsl-lausanne.ch)
- Collège du Léman (www.cdl.ch)
- Deutsche Schule Genf (www.dsgenf.ch)
- Ecole Française de Berne (www.ecole-francaise-de-berne.ch)
- Ecole Montani (www.ecolemontani.ch)
- Ecole Montessori-Nations (www.montessori-nations.ch)
- Ecole Libre Publique de Fribourg (www.fosf.ch)
- Feusi School (www.feusi.ch)
- Foundation International School Geneva (www.ecolint.ch)
- Fribourg International School (www.international-school.org)
- Geneva English School (www.geneva-english-school.ch)
- Geneva Secondary School (www.gsschool.ch)
- Gstaad International School (www.gstaadschool.ch)
- Haut-Lac International Bilingual School (www.haut-lac.ch)
- Institut La Gruyère (www.institutlagruyere.ch)
- Institut Le Rosey (www.rosey.ch)
- Institut Florimont (www.florimont.ch)
- Institut International de Lancy (www.iil.ch)
- International School of Lausanne (www.isl.ch)
- International School of Berne (www.isberne.ch)
- Kurt Bösch Institute (www.iukb.ch)
- Lemania College (www.lemania.ch)
- Leysin American School (www.las.ch)
- Moser School (www.ecole-moser.ch)
- Neuchâtel Junior College (www.njc.ch)
- Rudolf Steiner School (www.steinerschule.ch)
- St. George's School (www.st-georges.ch)
- Tagesschule Sesam (www.tagesschule-sesam.ch)
- Valmont French School (www.ecole-valmont.org)