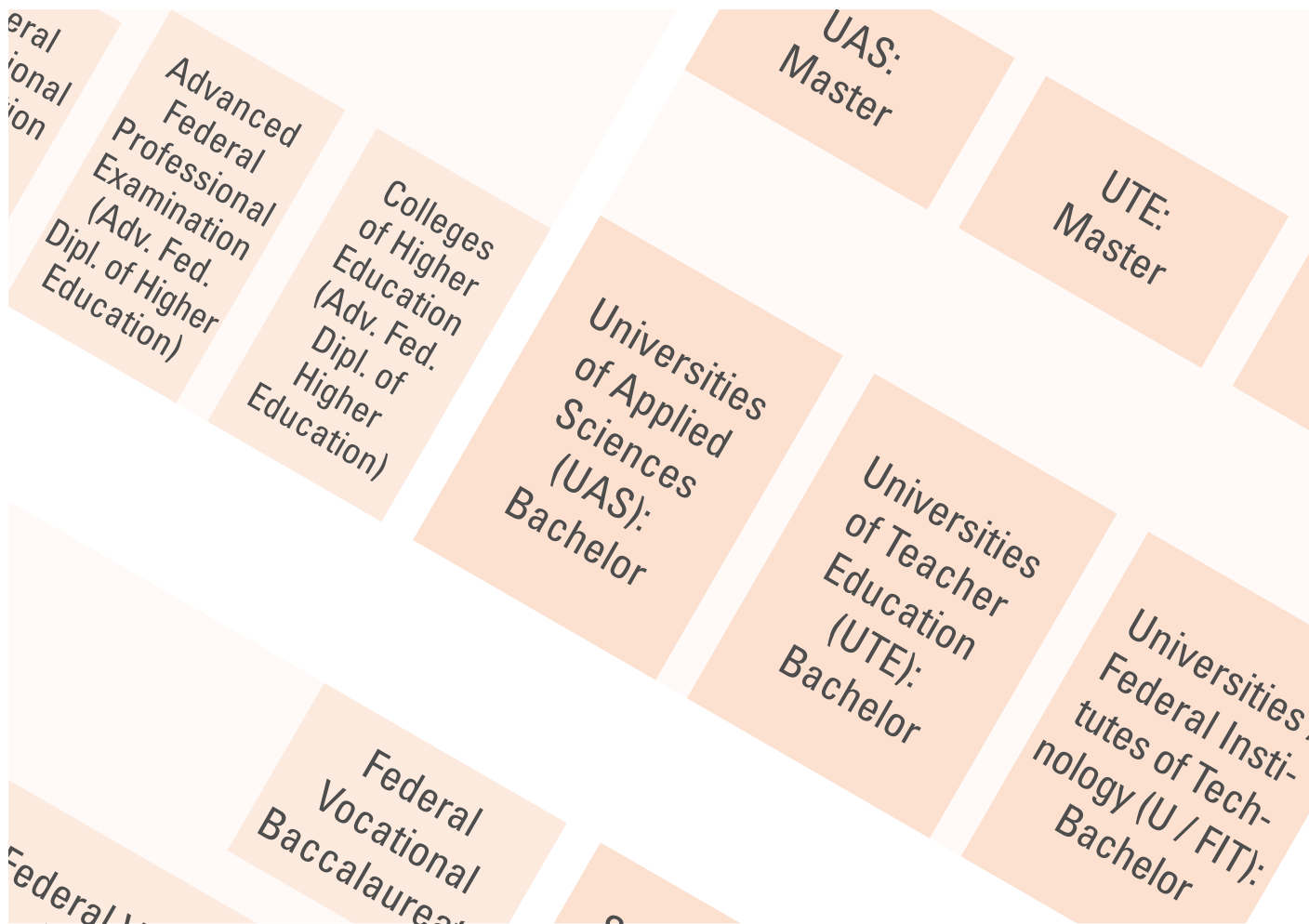


# Education and Training

## The Swiss Education System at a Glance

This guide provides you with an overview of the Swiss education system (education sectors and levels, admission requirements, recognition of diplomas, etc.)



## Inhaltsverzeichnis

1.	The Swiss education system .....	4
1.1.	Subject matter and players .....	4
1.2.	Educational levels and areas .....	4
1.2.1.	Primary and lower-secondary level .....	6
1.2.2.	Upper-secondary level (vocational education and training VET, general education schools) .....	6
1.2.3.	Tertiary level and continuing non-formal vocational training .....	6
1.3.	Recognition of degrees and titles .....	7
1.3.1.	Federally recognized qualifications and their characteristics .....	7
1.3.2.	Degrees with institutional recognition, association recognition, or without recognition .....	7
1.4.	Connectable, permeable, and integrative .....	7
1.5.	Link to further information .....	8
2.	Adult education at lower- and upper-secondary level .....	10
2.1.	Catch up on regular school-leaving qualifications .....	10
2.1.1.	Secondary school leaving certificate .....	10
2.1.2.	Baccalaureate or Federal Vocational Baccalaureate .....	10
2.2.	Catch up on a Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training (VET) .....	11
2.2.1.	Straight to the final exam .....	11
2.2.2.	Validation of educational achievements .....	11
2.2.3.	Shortened VET .....	11
2.2.4.	School-based VET .....	11
3.	Tertiary level and non-formal continuing education: Degrees and admission requirements .....	12
3.1.	Non-formal continuing education .....	12
3.2.	Formal continuing education: Professional education .....	12
3.2.1.	Federal Professional Examination (FPE) and Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE) .....	12
3.2.2.	Colleges of Higher Education .....	14
3.2.3.	Differences between examinations FPE / AFPE and Colleges of Higher Education courses .....	15
3.3.	Universities .....	15
3.3.1.	The Swiss universities .....	15
3.3.2.	Bachelor's and Master's degree programs .....	15
3.3.3.	PhD (doctorate) .....	17
3.3.4.	Differences between Colleges of Higher Education and Universities of Applied Sciences .....	17
3.3.5.	Differences between Universities of Applied Sciences and universities .....	17
3.3.6.	Postgraduate degree programs: MAS, DAS, CAS .....	18

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Last update: April 2024



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## 1. The Swiss education system

### 1.1. Subject matter and players

The official, so-called formal Swiss education system comprises all initial and continuing education and training as well as degree courses from federally recognized schools. They are regulated at cantonal or federal level and lead to a recognized qualification. Each qualification has its defined place in this system with predefined admission requirements, titles, and possible follow-up trainings.

The formal education system is supported by a large number of different players: public authorities, private professional and interest groups, business representatives as well as public (i.e. state-controlled) and private schools and educational institutions. This cooperation has developed historically over more than a century and works well thanks to mutual trust and good understanding between the state, politics, business and society.

The State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation SERI ([www.sbfi.admin.ch](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch)) is responsible for the overall supervision of the education, training, and study programs.

### 1.2. Educational levels and areas

The Swiss education system consists of successive levels:

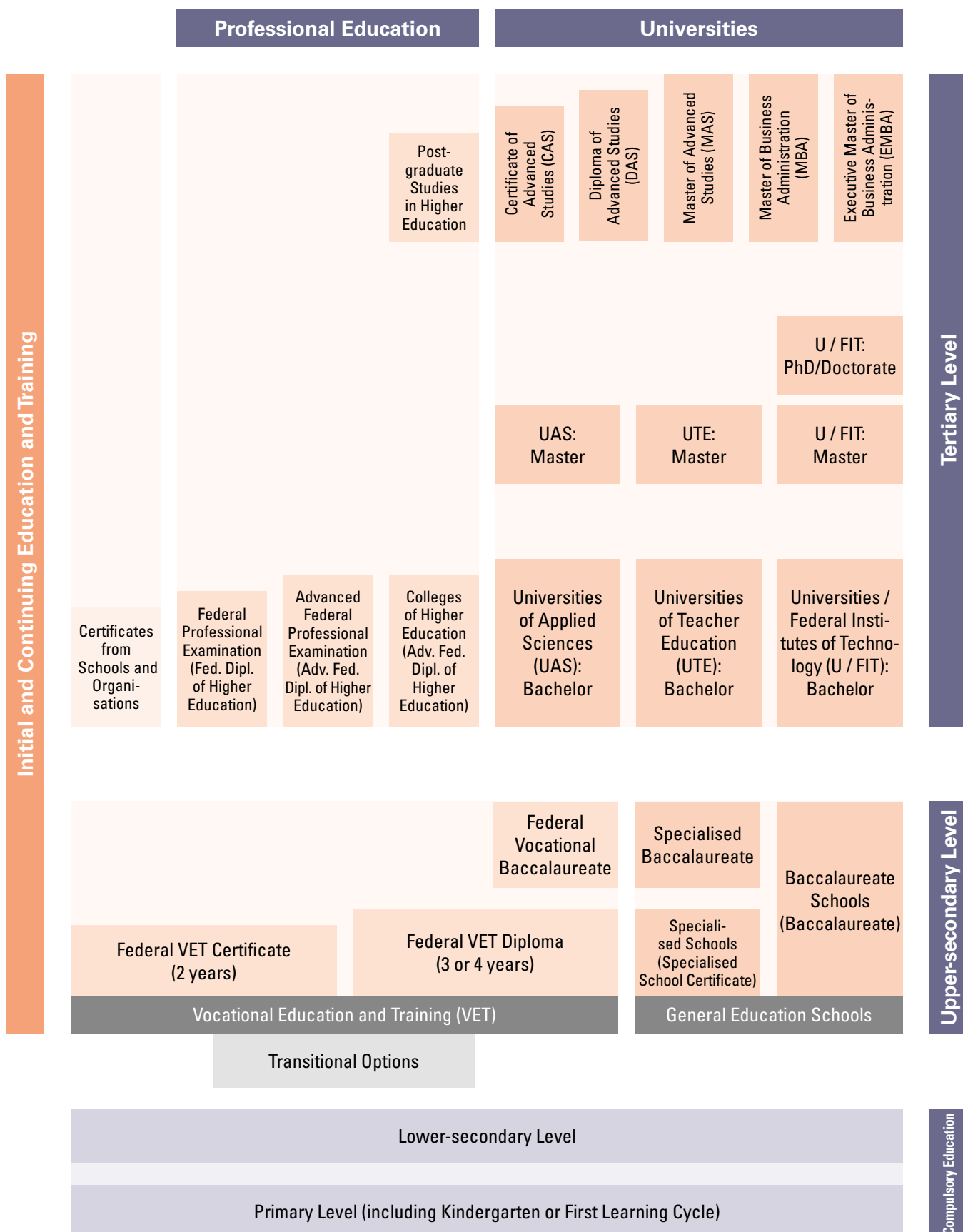
1. Primary level (compulsory)
2. Lower-secondary level (compulsory)
3. Upper-secondary level (voluntary; is considered the standard qualification)
4. Tertiary level (voluntary)

At both the upper-secondary level and the tertiary level, there is a more practical vocational area (tertiary B) and a more theoretical academic area (tertiary A).

Besides and complementary to the formal education system, there are numerous non-federally or -state regulated courses and further training opportunities referred to as non-formal continuing education (sometimes, but not consistently, also called "quaternary stage" [not shown in the diagram]).



Graphic: Swiss education system





### 1.2.1. Primary and lower-secondary level

The primary level and lower-secondary level (eleven years in most cantons, including preschool) together form the compulsory schooling period that all children in Switzerland complete. At the end of lower-secondary level, pupils are generally 15 to 16 years old.

### 1.2.2. Upper-secondary level (vocational education and training VET, general education schools)

The compulsory levels are followed by the upper-secondary level (two to four years). The young people now either pursue a vocational education and training (VET) in the shape of a so-called dual apprenticeship (training in a company, combined with school lessons) or at school only (Specialised Schools, baccalaureate schools). The upper-secondary level degrees are considered the standard qualification in Switzerland. After successfully completing VET, young people hold either a Federal VET Certificate (after a two years VET), a Federal VET Diploma (after a three to four years VET), and/or a Specialised Schools Certificate or baccalaureate (baccalaureate, Specialised Baccalaureate or Vocational Baccalaureate).

The two paths at upper-secondary level, vocational and general education, are well established in society and the economy.

After the compulsory schooling, around two thirds of young people in Switzerland complete a VET. We highlight this pathway here in particular because not all countries are familiar with the VET-training model: VET (apprenticeship) takes place partly at a VET-school and in branch courses and partly in the host company. In this way, the various sectors train the skilled workers of tomorrow themselves today and thus ensure that their know-how is passed on. People from countries where education and training are offered only by schools and universities, i.e. exclusively theoretical educational paths, tend to underestimate this highly respected and successful practical vocational path and choose a purely school-based one, even though it is often less suitable, more expensive or offers poorer future prospects.

Adults who missed out on the upper-secondary level in their youth can catch up on this in adult education (see chapter 2).

### 1.2.3 Tertiary level and continuing non-formal vocational training

After secondary education, the broad field of adult education opens up – from vocational specialisation and higher qualifications to university, language and leisure courses. A distinction must be made here between the formal tertiary level education, which is regulated at cantonal or at federal level, and non-formal, job-related continuing education.

#### Non-formal continuing education

Non-formal, i.e. not cantonally or federally regulated courses of continuing education are offered by private and public institutions. They cover a wide range of professional, general and creative workshops and seminars as well as specific specialist courses, entire study programs, and postgraduate studies at universities.

#### Formal qualifications from federally accredited professional educators and universities

Formal continuing education on the tertiary level is provided by professional educators and universities.

Professional education offers experienced professionals the opportunity to deepen their professional knowledge, to specialise and to generalize. It offers further qualification possibilities via the Federal Professional Examination (FPE) and the Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE) as well as via degree courses at Colleges of Higher Education.

In the university sector, there are three different paths to choose from:

- Application-oriented Bachelor's and Master's degree programs at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)
- Bachelor's and Master's degree programs at universities of teacher education (UTE)
- Bachelor's and Master's degree programs (with a stronger focus on theory and research) at universities and Federal Institutes of Technology (U / FIT)

Tertiary education is voluntary. However, with the ever-growing demands and rapid changes on the labour market, it is becoming increasingly important. Accordingly, universities are subsidized and continuing professional education is supported by federal contributions to school fees.

### 1.3. Recognition of degrees and titles

#### 1.3.1. Federally recognized qualifications and their characteristics

Federally recognized courses and qualifications lead to protected title designations in German, French and Italian (specific English translations of the titles are recommended, but not protected). This means that only graduates of these courses and with these qualifications have the right to use these titles. This protects them and their profession from competition from people with unclear professional qualifications.

As a result, these titles and professional designations function as quality labels in business and in the working world. They certify the specialist training, knowledge, and skills of the title holders and the institutions that guarantee the quality of their training.

There are three forms of federal recognition: via the educational institution, the course or the examination:

- Institutional recognition for universities: Institutions that bear the designation “university”, “Universities of Applied Sciences”, and “universities of teacher education” must undergo a federal recognition procedure known as accreditation. Only accredited universities can have their degree programs accredited. A list of all accredited Swiss universities can be found at: : [www.swissuniversities.ch/themen/studium/akkreditierte-schweizer-hochschulen](http://www.swissuniversities.ch/themen/studium/akkreditierte-schweizer-hochschulen)
- With the Colleges of Higher Education, the recognition applies to the courses. Federally recognized courses lead to protected titles with the abbreviation of the type of school and program (German: “HF” and “NDS HF”). A list of recognized courses and the core curricula can be found at: [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereFachschulen](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereFachschulen)
- A list of all Federal Professional Examinations and Advanced Federal Professional Examinations as

well as the examination regulations can be found at: [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereBildung](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereBildung)

#### 1.3.2. Degrees with institutional recognition, association recognition, or without recognition

In addition to the federally recognized courses and diplomas, there are further education courses at all levels and on every subject that lead to qualifications with different types of recognition: For example, they are under the supervision of a professional or industry association, a recognized institution, or a cooperation of several schools. Even without state recognition, such qualifications can be recognized throughout Switzerland or within an industry and enjoy a high reputation (e.g. by the Swiss Commercial Association SKV or the H+ Association of Swiss Hospitals).

There are also training courses or courses that conclude with a confirmation of attendance or a school's own diploma or certificate. Such certificates and diplomas are not subject to any further supervision. Their value or benefit varies depending on the quality of the school, and must be assessed individually.

### 1.4. Connectable, permeable, and integrative

When young adults in Switzerland choose an educational path, this does not mean that they have to continue on this path for the rest of their lives. Each degree opens up further educational opportunities. Thus, the Swiss education system provides scope for individual development.

Thanks to clearly defined admission criteria, various catch-up options and transfer solutions (Passerelle examinations), it is also possible to switch between the academic-theoretical and vocational-practical areas and climb to higher levels. The aim of this permeability is to make optimum use of people's resources. After all, lifelong learning and sustained motivation contribute to both individual satisfaction and overall economic benefit.

Finally, the Swiss education system is integrative, i.e. it also offers people with an inadequate education or a non-Swiss educational background the opportunity to obtain a federally recognized school-leaving qualification and then complete an apprenticeship, study or reorient themselves professionally and gain new qualifications (see chapter 2).

### 1.5. Link to further information

Further information on the Swiss education system can be found on the website of the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI) [www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/de/home/bildung/bildungsraum-schweiz.html](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/de/home/bildung/bildungsraum-schweiz.html)

**Federally or cantonally recognized tertiary-level courses and qualifications lead to the following recommended English titles:**

Degree / course of education	Title	Examples
Federal Professional Examination	(profession) Federal Diploma of Higher Education	Marketing Specialist Federal Diploma of Higher Education
Advanced Federal Professional Examination	(profession) Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education	Information Security Manager Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education
Degree program at Colleges of Higher Education	Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in (subject area)	Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Forestry
Postgraduate degree program at Colleges of Higher Education	Certified Expert in (subject area), Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education	Certified Expert in Intensive Care, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education
Bachelor's degree from Universities of Applied Sciences	Bachelor of Science/Arts (abbreviation of the accredited UAS) in (subject area)	Bachelor of Science FHNW in Computer Science
Bachelor's degree from Universities of Teacher Education	Bachelor of Science/Arts (name of the accredited UTE) in (subject area)	Bachelor of Arts PH Lucerne in Primary Education
Bachelor's degree from universities	Bachelor of Science/Arts (abbreviation of the accredited university) in (subject area) Bachelor of (name of the faculty), (abbreviation of the accredited university)	Bachelor of Science UZH in Psychology Bachelor of Theology UBS
Master's degree from Universities of Applied Sciences	Master of Science/Arts (abbreviation of the accredited UAS) in (subject area)	Master of Science FHO in Engineering
Master's degree from Universities of Teacher Education	Master of Science/Arts (abbreviation of the accredited UTE) in (subject area)	Master of Arts PHSG in Secondary Education
Master's degree from universities	Master of Science/Arts (abbreviation of the accredited university) in (subject area) Master of (name of the faculty), (name of the accredited university)	Master of Science ETH in Process Engineering Master of Law, University of Bern





## Haven't found the right training or further education yet? Benefit from educational advice now!

The Swiss education system allows for many different ways to achieve professional and personal goals.

However, the many options can also be confusing and overwhelming.

Which training or further education is the right path for me?

In our telephone education advice service, we will guide you through the "education jungle" and show you your options step by step.

### **Your advantages:**

You will receive

- Suggestions for suitable courses, seminars or training programs based on your information in the questionnaire
- An overview of the different levels and types of education
- Information about the Swiss education system

This will give you an initial overview that can help you find or decide on the right training or further education program.

**Register now and concretize your training plans.**

**[www.ausbildung-weiterbildung.ch/Bildungshilfe/Bildungsberatung](http://www.ausbildung-weiterbildung.ch/Bildungshilfe/Bildungsberatung)**

## 2. Adult education at lower- and upper-secondary level

The Swiss education system offers opportunities to catch up on a federally recognized school-leaving qualification at a later stage in life and thus opens the door to basic vocational training or a course of study for adults.

### 2.1. Catch up on regular school-leaving qualifications

#### 2.1.1. Secondary school leaving certificate

In recent years, some cities and cantons have set up catch-up education opportunities for the lower-secondary level. They enable adults with inadequate basic school education to obtain a recognized lower-secondary school leaving certificate. This enables them to start a VET apprenticeship or attend a baccalaureate school, for example.

The courses last 12–15 months; lessons take place two to three times a week in the evening.

##### Admission requirements

- Minimum age 18 years
- Passed entrance test in German and mathematics
- High willingness to learn (participants must learn the majority of the course material independently).

#### 2.1.2. Baccalaureate or Federal Vocational Baccalaureate

There are various options for adults to obtain a baccalaureate or a Vocational Baccalaureate:

##### Attendance at a cantonal baccalaureate school for adults

Several cantons have cantonal baccalaureate schools for adults. These are subsidized and therefore significantly cheaper than private baccalaureate schools.

Baccalaureate schools are available as part-time courses that can be completed alongside a career. They last around seven semesters and allow students to work a maximum of 50 percent. There are also full-time courses of six semesters (on the basis of three to four full days per week).

##### Admission requirements

- Minimum age 18 years
- Maximum age at entry 40 years
- (Mostly) residence in the canton where the school is located
- Completed lower-secondary school or proof of knowledge of three years of lower-secondary school material
- Completion of vocational education or proof of at least three years of regulated professional activity
- Good knowledge of the local official language
- Passing the entrance examination

##### Attending a private baccalaureate school

Private baccalaureate schools offer various teaching models: from full-time courses that lead to the baccalaureate examination in 18 months, to work-study models that last a varying number of semesters, and to self-study via distance learning, which can be completed in six to seven semesters.

##### Admission requirements

- Minimum age 18 years
- Completed compulsory schooling
- At least three years of professional experience
- Good skills in the local official language and English plus another foreign language (e.g. French or Italian)
- Mathematics skills at the level of the third year of lower-secondary school
- Passing the school's entrance examination

##### Federal Vocational Baccalaureate after completion of Federal VET Diploma (FVB 2)

There are two regular ways for young people to obtain a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate: during their vocational education and training (FVB 1) or after the VET (FVB 2).

The path to FVB 2 is open to adults. Most cantonal Vocational Baccalaureate schools offer special FVB 2 courses for adults. These last around four semesters in the part-time model; full-time courses last two semesters.

##### Admission requirements

- Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training
- Passed entrance examination

## **2.2. Catch up on a Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Many courses of continuing education require a federally recognized basic vocational training, i.e. a Federal Diploma of Vocational Training and Education (VET). There are four ways for adults to obtain this federal diploma:

### **2.2.1. Straight to the final exam**

Adults with at least five years of professional experience—usually two to three years in the desired profession—have the opportunity to take the federal final VET-examination in accordance with Art. 32 BBV (Federal Ordinance on Vocational and Professional Education and Training). The examination tests practical skills as well as vocational and general knowledge.

The type of exam preparation is not regulated; it can be done independently on one's own. Nonetheless attending a preparatory course at a VET-school is recommended. However, preparatory courses for catch-up training are not provided for all professions. Find out about the possibilities in your canton of residence (addresses of the cantonal departments of professional trainings are found here: [adressen.sdbb.ch](http://adressen.sdbb.ch)).

### **Admission requirements**

- Approx. five years of professional experience, of which around two to three years in the desired profession
- Command of the local official language at level B1 for three-year basic training courses, at level B2 for four-year basic training courses

The exact conditions are described in the VET regulations for the occupation. You can find a list of all VET (in German, French, and Italian) here: [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/grundbildungen](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/grundbildungen).

### **2.2.2. Validation of educational achievements**

Adults who have acquired sufficient skills and competences in a professional activity, can have them assessed as equivalent to a Federal VET-Diploma or -Certificate in a validation procedure. Based on this validation, they receive a Federal VET Certificate or a Federal VET Diploma without having to take an exam. The prerequisite for this is that a validation procedure is offered for the desired profession in the canton of residence.

### **2.2.3. Shortened VET**

If you already have a Federal VET Diploma, a baccalaureate or a diploma from a general education school, you may be exempted from certain courses or school subjects at the vocational school and thus shorten the duration of your training.

### **Industry-specific shortenings**

Some sectors offer shortened training courses for adults with a VET qualification in the same occupational field. Such “second apprenticeships” are significantly condensed because a large part of the learning content has already been covered by the first VET and does not need to be learned again.

### **2.2.4. School-based VET**

For some professions (e.g. commercial employee, information technologist, or retail professional), it is possible to complete VET not in a company (as a “dual apprenticeship”), but in a full-time school (so-called “school-organized VET”) with an integrated one-year work placement and then take the federal final VET examination.

There are both vocational schools and private schools that offer such purely school-based VET courses. These are often also open to adults and lead to a Federal VET Diploma in the same time as a regular dual in-company plus school VET.

### 3. Tertiary level and non-formal continuing education: Degrees and admission requirements

#### 3.1. Non-formal continuing education

The range of non-formal, i.e. non-cantonally or federally regulated further education courses extends from vocational specialist training and postgraduate courses to general education leisure courses at public and private institutions.

Non-formal training courses have the advantage that providers can react quickly to the requirements of the labour market and to technological and societal developments, as they do not have to undergo long political and institutional procedures. In terms of fast-moving trends and in many areas related to digital transformation, they often have the edge over officially regulated courses.

The admission requirements are defined by the providers. Some courses of continuing education are open to all interested parties, others only to a qualified group of people.

Such courses generally conclude with the school's own diplomas or certificates; some also lead to an association certificate. Neither the continuing education courses nor any final examinations are under the supervision of SERI; the titles obtained are not federally protected.

However, this says nothing about the quality of the training and the practical value of these diplomas:

- The path to some Federal Professional Examinations does not run via officially regulated courses, but via qualifications with an association recognition (e.g. the HR-assistant by the professional organisation HRSE Human Resources Swiss Exams leading to the HR Specialist, Federal Diploma of Higher Education). In such cases, the quality standards of continuing education courses are correspondingly high, as is their acceptance in the economy, and thus the prestige of the qualifications.
- For historical reasons, some continuing education courses are not the responsibility of the cantons or the federal government, but of an association and are subject to the latter's standards and specifications (e.g. Swiss Red Cross nursing assistant).
- In some (more recent) subject areas international degrees are more important than federal certificates, diplomas, or recognition (e.g. IPMA project management certificates).

cates, diplomas, or recognition (e.g. IPMA project management certificates).

If you are interested in non-formal continuing education, find out whether professional associations or national and international organizations have defined criteria for recognition and professional practice in the field you are interested in. When choosing an educational institution, make sure that your further training actually leads to the recognition you aspire to.

If ECTS credits are awarded for a continuing education course and you would like to have these credited to subsequent continuing education courses, check whether the course description and credit allocation meet the requirements of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), i.e. whether they cover the required learning effort of around 30 hours per ECTS credit and whether the subject matter and the learning performance are documented in accordance with the ECTS requirements. Only then do you have a chance that the ECTS credits will be recognized at a later date

#### 3.2. Formal continuing education: Professional education

The purpose of professional education is to enable both young professionals (with a Federal VET Diploma and a few years of professional experience) and experienced professionals (with specialist and management experience) to gain further qualifications. It comprises the qualification steps of the Federal Professional Examination (FPE) and the Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE) as well as the study courses at the Colleges of Higher Education. The courses build on professional experience and are competence- and job market-oriented with a strong focus on application.

##### 3.2.1. Federal Professional Examination (FPE) and Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE)

###### Federal Professional Examination (FPE)

Those who pass the Federal Professional Examination (FPE) can take on more responsible tasks in the profession they have learned. This step is suitable for motivated and committed young professionals

who want to gain further qualifications after their Federal VET Diploma and a few years of professional experience and move up a rung on the career ladder with extended specialist knowledge.

With the FPE, the so-called Federal Diploma of Higher Education is acquired, which entitles the holder to use the corresponding title. The German, French, and Italian versions of the titles (e.g. Baupolier mit eidgenössischem Fachausweis / Contremaître construction avec brevet fédéral / Capo muratore con attestato professionale federale) are protected by law. English titles are recommended but not protected (e.g. Construction Site Supervisor, Federal Diploma of Higher Education).

The Federal Diploma of Higher Education certifies that the holders have in-depth specialist knowledge and leadership skills. This enables them to take on specialist functions as well as first leadership and management functions. In crafts and manual professions, this examination is used to acquire group leader or chief fitter skills and often the supervision of apprentices is also part of the later area of responsibility. The Federal Diploma of Higher Education corresponds in some respects to the former "journeyman's examination". The Federal Diploma of Higher Education is often an admission requirement for an Advanced Federal Professional Examination in the same profession.

#### **Admission requirements for the Federal Professional Examination**

- As a rule, a Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training or an equivalent qualification and
- some years of professional experience in the field

#### **Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE)**

If you want to climb to the highest level in your profession and prepare to manage your own company, for example, you can take the Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE). This is aimed at highly qualified professionals with several years of experience in a management position who are looking to progress to an expert position or to executive management tasks.

After passing the Advanced Federal Professional Examination the candidates receive the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education, which enti-

#### **Tertiary level and non-formal continuing education**

ties them to use the corresponding protected German, French, and Italian title, for example "eidgenössisch diplomierte Wirtschaftsprüferin / Experte-comptable diplômée / Esperta contabile diplomata" – the recommended English translation is "Swiss Certified Accountant, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education".

This federal diploma certifies expert knowledge in the professional field and/or the ability to manage and lead personnel. It qualifies the holders to take on a managerial position in an SME, a management position in a larger company or to run their own business or consulting firm. In the craft and trade sector, AFPE are also known as master craftsman examinations. Many newer, federally recognized qualifications in the medical and therapeutic field are also at the level of the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education (e.g. Naturopathic Practitioner, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education, or Expert in Oncology Care, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education).

#### **Admission requirements for the AFPE**

- As a rule, Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training or higher qualification in the specialist area and
- several years of relevant and qualified professional and/or management experience and
- the pertinent Federal Diploma of Higher Education (if there is one)

#### **FPE and AFPE: responsible bodies and organization**

Both Federal Examinations, FPE and AFPE, are accounted for and organized by professional and industry associations. The SERI approves their examination regulations and supervises the examination procedures.

The conditions for admission to the examinations and the legally protected titles that are acquired upon passing the examinations are set out in the examination regulations. The examination regulations also list the required skills and knowledge in detail.

There are currently around 280 FPE and 170 AFPE (as of spring 2024). The SERI maintains a list of professions in which you can find the qualifications, titles, responsible bodies, and examination regulations: [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereBildung](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereBildung)

### **FPE and AFPE: Exam preparation and pass rates**

There are specialised part-time preparation courses for every Federal and Advanced Federal Professional examination. The details vary and the courses last between one and six semesters.

The preparation courses are not mandatory and the providers are not audited by the federal government. If you wish, you can also prepare for the exam through self-study.

Only the examinations themselves are conducted and monitored centrally by the Swiss Federation. The pass rates for the federal professional examinations vary greatly and range from around 50 percent (e.g. Specialist in Social Health Insurance, Federal Diploma of Higher Education) to 100 percent (e.g. Guest Relations Manager or Mountain Guide, both Federal Diploma of Higher Education). The average across all professions and examinations is 75 percent.

### **3.2.2. Colleges of Higher Education**

There is a second route for young professionals who want to gain further qualifications. Those who do not want to specialise in their learned profession, but want to broaden their education beyond its boundaries (for example, in the direction of business administration or technology), go to Colleges of Higher Education.

Colleges of Higher Education courses are offered by cantonal educational institutions as well as private schools. The courses are based on framework curricula that are jointly developed by education providers and industry associations and approved by the SERI. The schools must adhere to the requirements of the framework curricula when designing the courses. As a result, the training courses are federally recognized and lead to a protected title (in German, French and Italian; English titles are mere recommendations).

There are currently (as of spring 2024) just over one hundred recognized training courses. They can be found in the SERI directory of professions at: [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereFachschulen](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/hoehereFachschulen)

### **Study programs**

The degree courses at the Colleges of Higher Educa-

tion impart generalist and management knowledge within a specialist field. They serve preparing students to take on independent specialist and management responsibility in their profession. Completion of a College of Higher Education course leads to a federally recognized diploma and entitles the holder to use the corresponding protected German, French and Italian title, for example "dipl. Maschinenbautechnikerin HF / Technicienne diplômée ES en génie mécanique / Tecnica dipl. SSS in costruzioni meccaniche" (HF, ES, SSS being the corresponding abbreviations for the Colleges of Higher Education); recommended English translation: Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Mechanical Engineering.

Admission to the courses generally requires a Federal VET Diploma in a relevant profession. The duration of the required professional experience varies. It is rarely more than two years, often less. The degree courses are aimed at younger, ambitious professionals who are looking for their first independent specialist responsibility or management positions and want to take the next step in their professional career.

There are both part-time and full-time courses. Full-time courses last at least two years, while part-time courses last at least three years. Full-time courses usually include internships, while part-time courses require students to work at least 50 percent of the time in the relevant field.

### **Postgraduate degree courses**

Postgraduate degree courses at Courses of Colleges of Higher Education (abbreviated in German as NDS HF) are used for in-depth study and the acquisition of additional specialist knowledge. Many Colleges of Higher Education have their postgraduate courses recognized by the SERI. A list of recognized NDS HF degree courses can be found at [www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/nachdiplomstudium](http://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/nachdiplomstudium). Graduates of federally recognized NDS HF courses receive a federally recognized diploma and may use the corresponding title, for example "Certified Expert in Anesthesia Care, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education".

Admission to a postgraduate course at Colleges of Higher Education usually requires a degree at College of Higher Education level or higher. The courses are part-time and last between two and four semesters.



**3.2.3. Differences between examinations FPE / AFPE and Colleges of Higher Education courses**

Federal Professional Examination (FPE) Advanced Federal Professional Examination (AFPE)	Colleges of Higher Education
Further vocational training and specialisation based on qualified practical professional experience	Generalist further training in school teaching
Focused on a narrowly defined occupational field or industry-related subject area (e.g. gardening, car bodywork, hospital administration)	Related to a broader occupational field or a larger subject area (e.g. business administration, nursing, electrical engineering)
Offers experienced professionals the opportunity to demonstrate the specialist and management skills they have acquired with a recognized qualification	Offers young professionals the opportunity to gain higher professional qualifications by acquiring theoretical specialist knowledge and interdisciplinary professional skills

**3.3. Universities****3.3.1. The Swiss universities**

The Swiss university landscape consists of federally accredited\* Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), Universities of Teacher Education (UTE), (academic) universities and Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT). The study concept corresponds to the system of the European Higher Education Area with the three-part study structure Bachelor, Master, Doctorate (PhD). Academic achievements are recorded in ECTS points (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System Points).

In the European education system, ECTS points are used to compare degree courses and enable students to have credits earned at another university recognized. One ECTS point corresponds to a student workload of 25 to 30 working hours. A full-time academic year is generally worth 60 ECTS points.

In addition to undergraduate and graduate courses, all universities also offer continuing education courses and programs. Furthermore, all universities are active in various areas of research and offer services for third parties.

\* See chapter 1.3.1. Federally recognized qualifications and their characteristics

**3.3.2. Bachelor's and Master's degree programs****Bachelor's program**

The Bachelor's degree is the first university degree. It usually takes three years to complete and requires 180 ECTS credits.

Bachelor's degree programs at Universities of Applied Sciences generally qualify students for a profession. A Vocational Baccalaureate or baccalaureate with one year of work experience (internship) is required for admission. Under certain circumstances, admission can also be granted on the basis of an individual assessment of the applicant's previous career ("sur dossier").

Teachers for all school levels are trained at the Universities of Teacher Education. The UTE Bachelor's degree courses lead to a teaching diploma for pre-school (first learning cycle) and primary level. Admission requires a baccalaureate, a Vocational Baccalaureate with a Passerelle examination or a Specialised Baccalaureate in the occupational field "educational science".

The aim of a Bachelor's degree at a university is to acquire a basic academic education in the respective subject. Admission requires a baccalaureate (grammar school) or a Vocational or Specialised Baccalaureate with a Passerelle examination.

The following Bachelor's degrees are awarded by all Swiss universities:

- BA (Bachelor of Arts)
- BSc (Bachelor of Science)

## Tertiary level and non-formal continuing education

The following Bachelor's degrees are awarded by individual university faculties:

- BEng (Bachelor of Engineering)
- BLaw (Bachelor of Law)
- BMed (Bachelor of Medicine)
- BTh (Bachelor of Theology)

### Master's program

The postgraduate course following the Bachelor's degree is called a consecutive Master's degree.

Consecutive Master's degree courses at Universities of Applied Sciences provide additional in-depth and specialised knowledge.

A consecutive Master's degree of the Universities of Teacher Education allows its holders to teach at public lower-secondary level schools.

University Master's degree courses serve to complete the course of study. In most cases, the Master's degree is regarded as the standard degree in the academic subject.

Master's degree courses generally last three to four semesters and comprise coursework amounting to 90-120 ECTS credits. Direct admission is granted to students with a Swiss Bachelor's degree from the same type of university and in the same field of study. In all other cases, the acquisition of additional credit points may be required.

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In addition to the consecutive Master's degree courses that build directly on a Bachelor's degree, there are specialised and interdisciplinary Master's degree courses that often have additional admission requirements or require admission procedures.

The following Master's degrees are awarded by all Swiss universities:

- MA (Master of Arts)
- MSc (Master of Science)

The following Master's degrees are awarded by individual university faculties:

- MEng (Master of Engineering)
- MLaw (Master of Law)
- MMed (Master of Medicine)
- MTh (Master of Theology)

### 3.3.3. PhD (doctorate)

The doctoral degree (PhD) is a further academic degree after the Master's degree. It may only be awarded by universities. The prerequisite for a doctorate is generally a recognized Master's degree from a university with good grades. The universities decide on whom to admit to a doctorate. Occasionally, Master's graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences are also accepted.

### 3.3.4. Differences between Colleges of Higher Education and Universities of Applied Sciences

Colleges of Higher Education	Universities of Applied Sciences
Stronger focus on practical professional skills; for admission, professional experience is required, Vocational Baccalaureate is not required	Belong to the university level; admission either with Vocational or Specialised Baccalaureate, or with (grammar school) Baccalaureate plus professional internship
Do not have a research mandate and the courses are less scientifically oriented	Have a research mandate and enable further studies at universities
Enjoy national recognition	Enjoy national and international recognition

### 3.3.5. Differences between Universities of Applied Sciences and universities

Universities of Applied Sciences	Universities
Admission either with Vocational or Specialised Baccalaureate, or with (grammar school) Baccalaureate plus professional internship	Admission either with (grammar school) Baccalaureate or with Vocational or Specialised Baccalaureate plus the Passerelle examination
Have an application- and practice-oriented research mandate and enable further studies at universities	Have a research mandate in theoretical and basic research and enable a doctorate and an academic career
Enjoy international recognition	Enjoy international academic recognition

### **3.3.6. Postgraduate degree programs: MAS, DAS, CAS**

Various types of postgraduate courses are offered at all types of universities and increasingly also by private education providers. They serve to deepen, expand or introduce special knowledge on a topic or a particular area or to open up new professional fields. The universities design these courses themselves. The relatively small-format CAS in particular enable them to quickly pick up on current topics and offer them in their postgraduate program.

#### **Master of Advanced Studies (MAS)**

The most popular and most widespread further education course at Swiss universities is the three to four semester postgraduate course leading to the Bologna-compliant title "Master of Advanced Studies (MAS)". A MAS is completed with the writing of a Master's thesis and requires between 60 and 90 ECTS credits. The degree courses are designed to be taken part-time. There are fully modularized forms consisting of three to four independent parts (modules) that can be completed individually.

Admission requires a Bachelor's or Master's degree and several years of professional experience. Students with other requirements may also be admitted after individual assessment.

#### **Master of Business Administration (MBA), Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA)**

In the field of economics, the well-known English titles Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) are sometimes awarded for postgraduate courses in Business Administration. Both degrees are comparable to a MAS if they are awarded by an accredited university or University of Applied Sciences.

#### **Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS)**

A Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS) is awarded at the end of part-time diploma courses. They comprise at least 30 ECTS credits and can either be independent degrees or a modular component of a MAS degree course.

#### **Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS)**

The part-time certificate courses comprise at least 10 ECTS credits and conclude with a "Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS)". CAS courses are often considered a module of MAS courses: Many MAS courses have a modular structure and consist of three to four CAS.

The admission requirements for individual CAS or DAS courses are somewhat more relaxed, so that people without a Bachelor's degree can also be admitted. However, it is not always possible to continue on to an MAS degree.

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