

Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training System

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- VET is the mainstream upper secondary program in Switzerland, serving 70 percent of Swiss young people and preparing participants for careers in a range of both white-collar and blue-collar occupations—high-tech, human service, health, as well as traditional trades and crafts.
- Switzerland enjoys virtual full employment—unemployment is under 4 percent—and youth unemployment is the lowest of all developed countries thanks in large part to the seamless transition of youth from apprenticeships to full time jobs.
- The Swiss VET system attracts a broad cross-section of students, including high achievers, because:
 - It immediately puts young people in a setting with adults, where they are given more responsibility combined with ample coaching and support.
 - The learning is much more hands-on, contextualized, and applied: academic concepts are made real.
 - Students are paid while they are learning, typically the equivalent of about \$600- \$700 a month to begin, growing to \$1,100- \$1,200 by the third year, and this for three to four days of work a week at the most.
 - At the end of the apprenticeship they have a nationally recognized qualification that is portable, and the opportunity to move directly into full-time employment or to continue on into higher education.
- The Swiss system intentionally provides a number of crosswalks and points of transfer to allow students to move between academic and vocational studies as well as from VET on to higher education at a university of applied sciences. Because of this, employees beginning their careers on the factory floor or in a bank have a real chance to one day move up the corporate ladder by pursuing further education and advanced qualifications.
- VET 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.
- Each Swiss industry sector partners with the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation to develop industry qualifications and assessments, training curriculum, and additional course work for students during their upper secondary vocational education.
- The system produces highly skilled, ready-to-work new employees for Swiss businesses, serving as a real and important economic incentive for businesses to participate.
- About 30 percent of Swiss companies host “educational” employees, 16- to 19-year old apprentices who do everything an entry-level employee would do, albeit under the wings of credentialed trainers within the company.

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