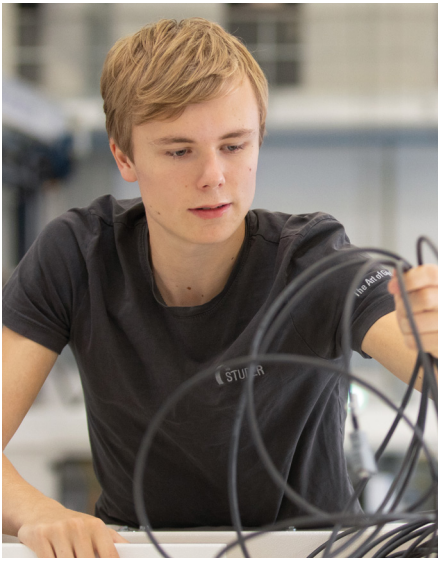
Swiss VPET System – A Brief Guide



VPET
Switzerland

Key features of the Swiss VPET system that contribute to its success:

2/3

Main education and training pathway

Around two-thirds of all young people in Switzerland enrol in a VET programme upon completion of compulsory education.

Dual-track approach to learning

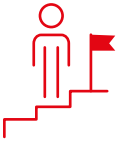
The Swiss VPET system is based on the duality between theory and practice.

Labour-market focus

Training covers only professional competences that are actually in demand and for which there are already existing job vacancies.

Principle of training for a specific professional activity

Swiss upper-secondary level VET programmes provide learners with the professional competences needed to carry out the given professional activity on their own after graduation.



Vocational qualifications for adults

Adults can also seek Swiss upper-secondary level vocational qualifications. There are several ways to obtain a Federal VET Certificate (based on two-year VET programme) or Federal VET Diploma (based on three- or four-year VET programme).

Preparation for challenging technical and managerial roles

Swiss tertiary-level professional education is geared to the needs of the labour market and prepares participants for challenging technical and managerial roles.

Permeability

Learners may pursue more advanced education and training opportunities, switch from vocational/professional pathways to general education/university pathways and later change the course of their working lives with relative ease.

Lifelong learning

Job-related continuing education options exist at all levels within the Swiss VPET system.

Scan the QR code to find more information and up-to-date facts.

Overview

The Swiss VPET system enables young people to enter the labour market and ensures that there are enough skilled workers and managers in the future. It has a high labour market relevance and is an integral part of the education system, spanning both upper-secondary and tertiary level.

Dual-track approach to learning

The Swiss VPET system is based on the duality between theory and practice. At upper-secondary level, this duality can be seen in the distribution of training content across different learning locations: classroom instruction takes place at a vocational school (theory) and workplace training takes place at a host company (practice). For some occupations, there is a third learning location, which is designed to complement the other two: these branch courses take place at a branch training centre. At tertiary level, this duality is expressed through a combination of classroom instruction and the previous and current work experience of participants.

Labour-market focus

The requirements for individual upper-secondary level vocational qualifications and tertiary-level professional qualifications are determined by the private sector. Training covers only professional competences that are actually in demand and for which there are already existing job vacancies.

Principle of training for a specific professional activity

Clearly defined training programmes and nationally harmonised qualification procedures lead to qualifications that are also clearly understood, recognised and in demand on the labour market. Swiss upper-secondary level VET programmes provide learners with the professional competences needed to carry out the given professional activity on their own after graduation.

Permeability

The Swiss VPET system spans both upper-secondary and tertiary level. It is built on clearly defined education and training options and a national qualifications framework. It is highly permeable: learners can pursue more advanced levels of training, switch from the VPET system to higher education and reorient their working lives more easily thanks to the recognition of prior learning.

The Swiss VPET system covers a broad spectrum of education and training opportunities. The various options take into account different abilities and are geared towards the needs of different age groups. A wide range of job-related continuing education courses available at all levels.

An overview of the Swiss VPET system can be found on page **10**.

Collective governance

The VPET system is collectively governed by the Confederation, the cantons and professional organisations. These three main partners work together to maintain a high level of quality within the VPET system. They also strive to ensure that there is an adequate supply of apprenticeship/traineeship positions and training options.

The **Confederation** plays a strategic role and has comprehensive regulatory powers. At upper-secondary level, the Confederation enacts around 250 VET ordinances. At tertiary-level, it approves examination regulations for federal examinations and core syllabuses for professional education institutions.

The **cantons** are responsible for implementing the vocational and professional education and training and supervising apprenticeships, vocational schools and professional education institutions. The cantons also provide vocational, education and career guidance services to young people and adults.

Professional organisations include social partners, trade associations and other organisations and training providers. Companies have a vested interest in training apprentices. Professional organisations establish the content of training.

VPET system funding

The Confederation, the cantons and, to a large extent, the private sector all contribute to funding of the Swiss VPET system. Most of the public sector costs are covered by the cantons and are used for the purpose of implementation.

Among other things, the Confederation provides performance-based lump-sum subsidies to the cantons to help offset the costs of the Swiss VPET system. It also pays subsidies to third parties involved in projects to review and revise training programmes. VPET system finances also depend to a large extent on the contributions made by professional organisations and companies.

Cost-benefit ratios

Companies that offer apprenticeship positions do so on a voluntary basis. It is therefore crucial that these apprenticeships are perceived by host companies as a winning proposition. Regular surveys of host companies show that most companies therefore generated a net benefit from their involvement in apprenticeship training: The value of the apprentices' productive output during the training period surpasses the training costs.

Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training provides young people with their first exposure to working life. It is the basis for lifelong learning and opens a wide range of career prospects. There are around 250 occupations to choose from.

Main education and training pathway

Around two-thirds of all young people in Switzerland enrol in a VET programme upon completion of compulsory education, either a two-year programme for the Federal VET Certificate or a three- or four-year programme for the Federal VET Diploma.

Two-year programmes for the Federal VET Certificate

These VET programmes provide young people with more practical skills to obtain a recognised qualification for a specific occupational profile. Graduates of the two-year programme for the Federal VET Certificate may enrol directly in a three- or four-year VET programme for the Federal VET Diploma.

Three-year or four-year programmes for the Federal VET Diploma

These VET programmes provide learners with the competences needed to work in a specific occupation and open access to tertiary-level professional education. Learners also have the option of preparing for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB) either during their training or after qualifying.

Apprenticeship market

There are two sides to the apprenticeship market: the supply side (host companies offering apprenticeship positions) and the demand side (young people looking for apprenticeship positions). The State plays a mediating role: it ensures the best possible general conditions for host companies, encourages them to offer apprenticeship positions and helps young people to choose an occupation.

VPET professionals

VPET professionals can be found at both upper-secondary level (three learning locations: host companies, vocational schools and branch training centres) and tertiary level (professional education institutions) within the Swiss VPET system. They ensure that education and training is practice-oriented and directly related to real work situations. SERI ensures the quality of vocational pedagogy courses for VPET professionals.

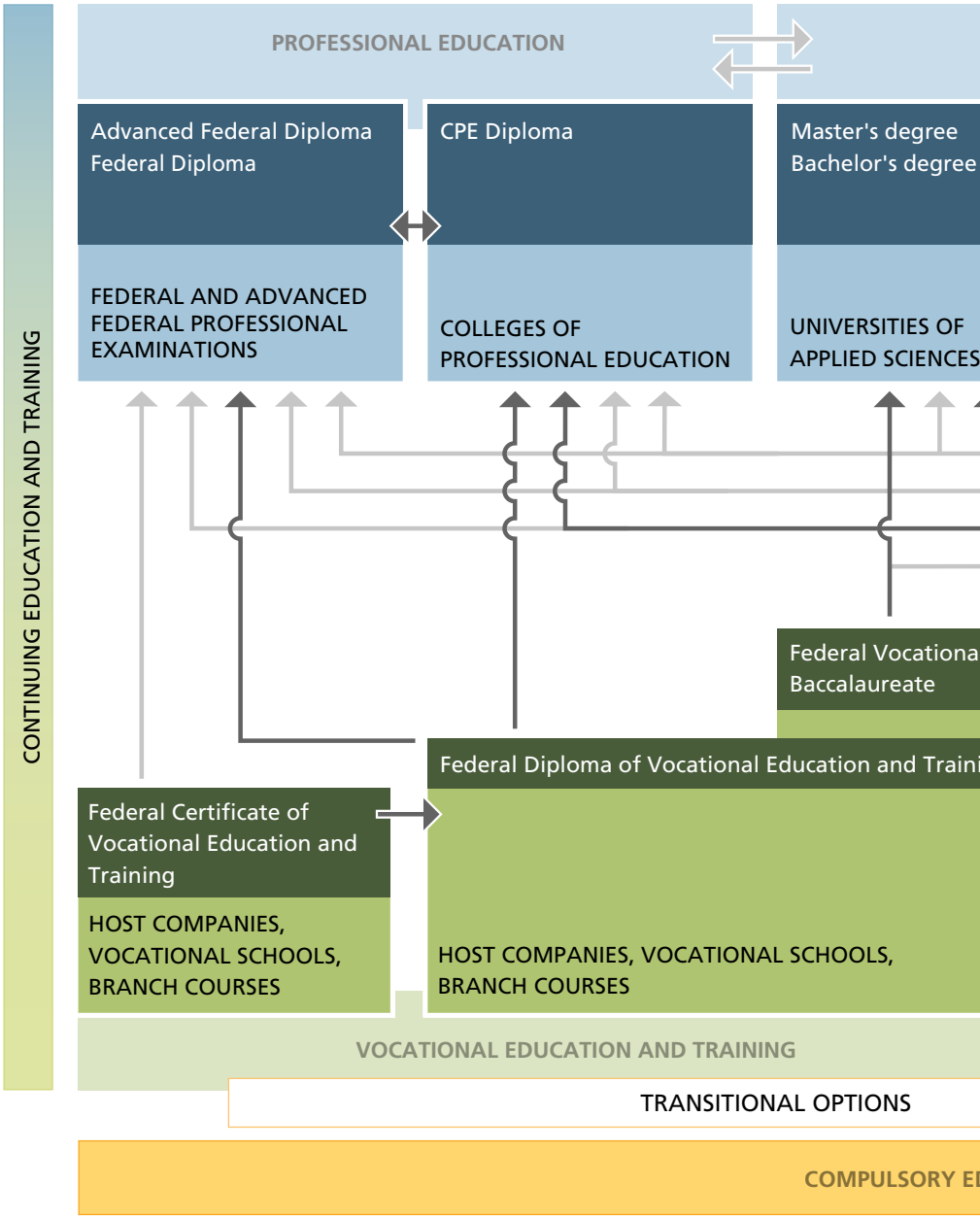
Encouraging talented young people

Young people who are both hard workers and fast learners have the possibility of shortening the duration of their VET programme, obtaining exemption from portions of education training and even waiving the final examination. Workplace trainers at host companies are also encouraged to give greater responsibility and more challenging tasks to such young people. Vocational schools also offer optional courses (e.g. language certification courses).

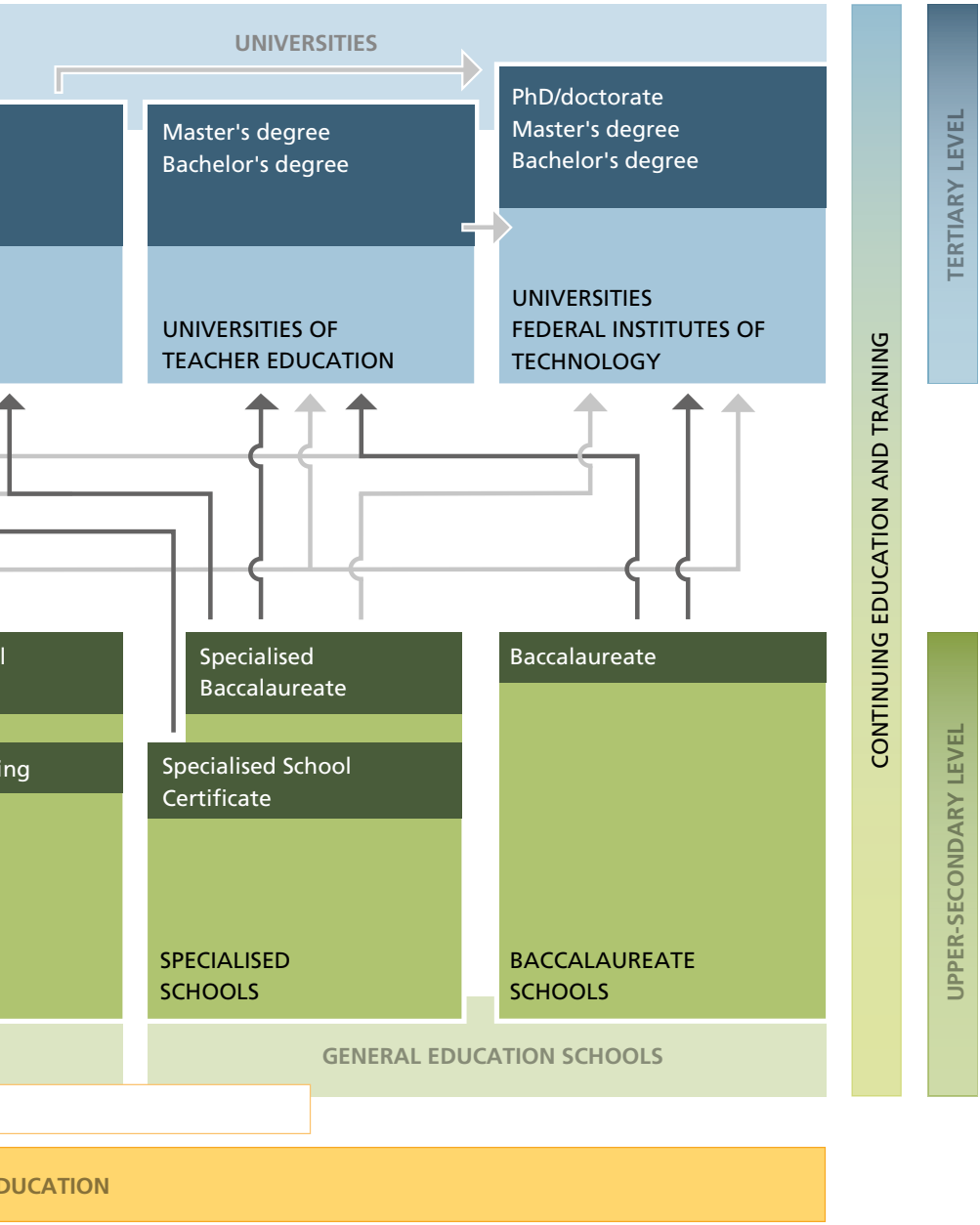
SwissSkills, EuroSkills and WorldSkills competitions

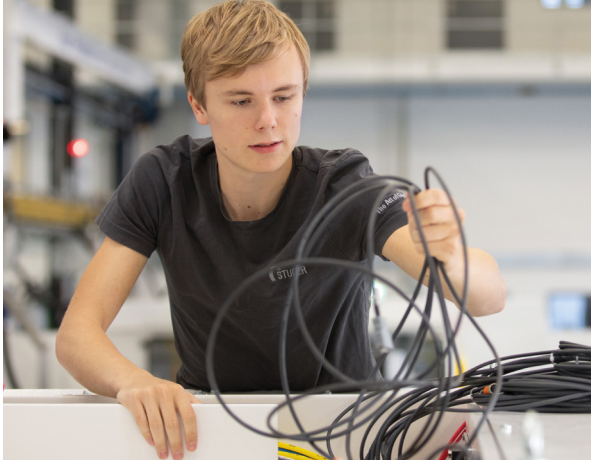
Each year, numerous Swiss trade associations select their champions to compete at skills competitions at various levels. Thanks to the 'SwissSkills' initiative, centralised competitions are held on a regular basis.

Swiss education system



Usual pathway Possible pathway


UNIVERSITIES
Master's degree
Bachelor's degree
PhD/doctorate
Master's degree
Bachelor's degree
UNIVERSITIES OF
TEACHER EDUCATION
UNIVERSITIES
FEDERAL INSTITUTES OF
TECHNOLOGY
TERTIARY LEVEL
CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Specialised
Baccalaureate
Baccalaureate
Specialised School
Certificate
SPECIALISED
SCHOOLS
BACCALAUREATE
SCHOOLS
UPPER-SECONDARY LEVEL
GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS



Federal vocational baccalaureate

The Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB) gives Federal VET Diploma holders further, more general education and entitles them to enrol in a Swiss university of applied sciences (UAS) without having to take an entrance examination.

The preparatory course for the FVB examination is generally taught by vocational schools. There are two options: either to take this preparatory course alongside the normal training regimen for the given VET programme or to do so after completion of the VET programme.

FVB orientations

Preparatory courses for the FVB examination provide learners with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue a Bachelor's degree at a Swiss UAS. Generally speaking, the orientation of the FVB will be aligned with the occupation covered in the VET programme:

- Engineering, architecture, life sciences
- Nature, agriculture and food
- Business and services
- Design and art
- Health and social care

If an FVB holder also takes the **University Aptitude Test (UAT)**, then enrolment in a cantonal university or one of Switzerland's two federal institutes of technology is also possible for all study programmes. A similar option is available to holders of the Swiss specialised baccalaureate.

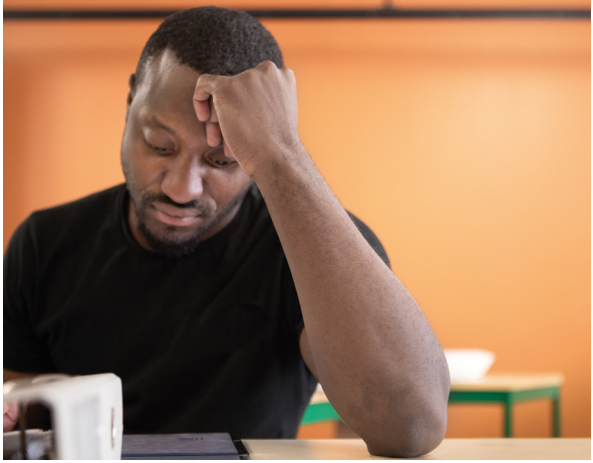
Universities of applied sciences

Universities of applied sciences (UAS) are part of the Swiss higher education sector. They offer a range of study programmes designed to prepare students for specific professional activities. Study programmes are structured according to the Bachelor-Master system. UAS also engage in applied research.

As a rule, the Bachelor's level qualifies the holder to carry out a specific professional activity. At the Master's level, UAS provide students with in-depth, specialised knowledge, preparing them for a more advanced qualification in their field. Holders of the FVB can generally enrol in a UAS without taking an entrance examination.

Wide range of fields of study

Swiss universities of applied sciences cover the following fields of study: engineering and information technologies; architecture, construction and planning; chemistry and life sciences; agriculture and forestry; business and services; design; health; social work; music, theatre and other arts; applied psychology; applied linguistics; sports.



Professional education

Professional education is geared to the needs of the labour market and prepares participants for challenging technical or managerial roles. Training combines theory and practice and ensures that the Swiss economy has an adequate supply of highly skilled workers.

Professional education builds on previous work experience. It allows professionals holding a Federal VET Diploma or equivalent upper-secondary level qualification to specialise in a given field and deepen their technical expertise. In addition, professional education provides the knowledge, skills and know-how needed to manage a company. Professional education includes the following:

- Federal examinations for the Federal and Advanced Federal Diploma
- Study programmes at professional education institutions

Strong labour market acceptance

Professional education opens up excellent career prospects: professional organisations and trade associations determine training content and ensure that it is tailored to economic needs. This practical approach explains the high level of acceptance of professional qualifications on the labour market.

Real-world training

Professional education is designed to impart specific knowledge and skills that are relevant to the labour market. Emphasis is placed on learning by doing to ensure that new knowledge is readily applicable. At the same time, training content is updated to keep up with the fast pace of innovation. Professional education ensures that the Swiss economy has an adequate supply of highly qualified professionals.

A worthwhile investment

Professional education is financed through a combination of private and public funding. It is a worthwhile investment for graduates. Most people complete their training while working. Holders of a professional qualification earn nearly 30% more on average than holders of an upper-secondary level vocational qualification.

Interesting training options for all professional activities

Professional education covers the full range of professional activities. There are around 470 different professional qualifications to choose from, most of which are at level 1 (Federal Diploma).

Continuing education and lifelong learning

Continuing education is important for individuals, society and the economy. The constant changes in the labour market combined with technological advances challenge adults to adapt and develop professionally throughout their working lives.

SERI, together with the cantons, the private sector and other partners, seeks to encourage individuals to actively pursue continuing education on both a professional or personal level.

Basic skills are a prerequisite for lifelong learning and enable individuals to become socially and professionally active. SERI is therefore working with the cantons to ensure that adults can acquire and maintain basic skills.

Companies also benefit from having highly trained workers. SERI helps companies to prepare their employees for work-related challenges through the provision of continuing education.

SERI's other objectives include creating incentives for continuing education providers and ensuring that federal and cantonal authorities regulate and support continuing education in a coordinated fashion.

Adult acquisition of basic skills

In Switzerland, there are four pathways that enable adults to obtain a Federal Vocational Certificate (i.e. two-year VET programme) or Federal VET Diploma (i.e. three- or four-year VET programme).

The first two pathways are based on enrolment in a formal dual-track VET programme, either for the entire duration or through advanced placement. The other two pathways do not require enrolment in a formal dual-track VET programme: direct admission to the qualification procedure or validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL).

Advanced placement in a formal dual-track VET programme and the two non-formal pathways are specially designed for adults who already have work experience. Their individual knowledge, skills and know-how acquired over time can therefore be taken into account. Direct admission to the qualification procedure and VNIL requires at least five years of work experience. While direct admission to the qualification procedure is possible for all occupations, the VNIL option is only available for certain occupations.

VPET at international level

The internationalisation of education and labour poses challenges for the Swiss system of vocational and professional education and training (VPET). Switzerland has therefore taken active steps at multiple levels to address this phenomenon.

In the area of international cooperation in vocational education and training, the Confederation pursues three parallel objectives. Each reinforces and intensifies the impact of the others, namely: strengthening the Swiss VPET system within an international context, supporting socioeconomic development in selected partner countries and successfully positioning Switzerland at the international level.

Expertise

The Swiss VPET system has generated international interest. Switzerland is involved in the exchange of knowledge at diplomatic or technical level. Numerous foreign delegations visit Switzerland to find out more about the Swiss VPET system. At the same time, Switzerland maintains continuous dialogue with countries that either already have their own dual VET systems or wish to develop one.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF VPET)

The Swiss National Qualifications Framework for Vocational and Professional Qualifications (NQF VPET) makes it easier to compare and appreciate the value of Swiss vocational and professional qualifications at international level. All vocational and professional qualifications are assigned to a level within the NQF VPET.

International exchange and cooperation in VET

Switzerland supports international exchange and cooperation in education. This also includes support for corresponding activities relating to VET, such as cross-border exchange of learners enrolled in VET programmes and cooperation between VET stakeholders and partner organisations outside of Switzerland. Support measures are implemented by the national agency Movetia.

Recognition of foreign vocational and professional qualifications

SERI recognises many foreign upper-secondary level vocational and tertiary-level professional qualifications. Recognition makes it easier for holders of foreign qualifications to carry out a regulated professional activity in Switzerland, thus facilitating their integration into the Swiss labour market. SERI works closely with Swiss professional organisations and training institutions, which helps to ensure a high level of acceptance of recognition decisions.

International skills competitions

Switzerland regularly sends its best young professionals to international skills competitions, such as the EuroSkills competition and the WorldSkills competition. These events create an incentive for young professionals and offer Switzerland an opportunity to showcase the excellence of its VET programmes.

Swissnex is Switzerland's global network for education, research and innovation. Swissnex frequently draws attention to vocational education and training in various contexts, whether it be at events organised for interested stakeholders or at conferences and world exhibitions.

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Swiss Confederation

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