

4. The Educational System - A Recipe for Success in Switzerland and Beyond

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The Apprenticeship – The Most Important Training in Switzerland Combining School and on The Job Training

A flexible education system is one of the main success factors of a prospering national economy with high productivity and low youth unemployment

The success of the Swiss economy - among other productivity factors - is due to an unusually diverse educational system that has taken many many decades to become what it is today. A look at its history shows how the various factors that came together in Europe in a unique constellation helped establish a prosperous country with an affluent population. A lack of natural resources — aside from water — has driven innovation and creative approaches in overcoming challenges and leveraging opportunities. Some well-known Swiss executives started their career as an apprentice: Sergio P. Ermotti, Group CEO of UBS AG; Markus Hongler, CEO of Schweizerische Mobiliar Versicherungsgesellschaft AG; Peter R. Voser, Chairman of the Board of Directors of ABB Group/former CEO of Royal Dutch Shell; Heinz Karrer, former CEO of Axpo Holding and now president of Economiesuisse to name a few.

Educational choices are made at a young age in Switzerland

Around 70% of Swiss young people at a young age of 14/15 years, who complete the mandatory nine years of elementary and secondary school decide in favor of vocational education and training, generally called an “apprenticeship.” By choosing one of more than 230 professions, young people in Switzerland can secure for themselves the right career path that very often fits their passion. As such, practical, basic vocational education and training on the job ensure the next generation of qualified skilled workers, managers and executives. In addition, very important, young people learn at a young age to deal with monthly salaries and become to a certain degree financially independent of their families, a good experience to have at a young age.

- Elementary school (5-6 years depending on the canton)
- Secondary school (1st – 3rd/4th grade, 3 – 4 years depending on the canton)
- Secondary school II (4th – 6th/7th grade) either as
 - Apprenticeship (3 – 4 years)
 - Vocational secondary school (4 years) or
 - High school (4 years)

Established at the secondary level II, a basic vocational education program (apprenticeship) covers a broad range of educational and training opportunities. Such vocational training programs take into account different skills and abilities, and are geared towards the needs of different age groups. In addition, there is an extremely diverse offering of vocational continuing education and training programs.

During the three to four-year *basic vocational education* that leads to a federal certificate (Eidgenössischem Fähigkeitszeugnis, EFZ) or upon completion of the Swiss Certificate of Proficiency, young people acquire a certified qualification to practice a certain profession. The Eidgenössische

Berufsmaturität or Swiss vocational school-leaving certificate can be acquired simultaneously or after obtaining the EFZ which then allows admission to most universities. One of the reasons why 70% of Swiss young people choose an apprenticeship is not only the long-lasting tradition in Switzerland, but also the open educational system allowing further education as a completed apprenticeship is well accepted and respected as very practical and effective education. Contrary to the apprenticeship models in Germany (which has a very rich tradition in this respect too), young people start their education after 9th grade and finish typically at an age of 18/19 years, ready to then either continue as a professional clerk or whatever other profession or take the academic route and start a university based education.

The world is yours – continuing education after the apprenticeship at university of applied sciences or university

To be eligible for further general education, the Eidgenössische Berufsmaturität or Swiss vocational school-leaving certificate is offered as a supplement to basic vocational education with EFZ. Upon completion, the student is guaranteed a place at a university without having to take an exam. Young people who pass the supplemental exam “Berufsmaturität – universitäre Hochschulen” or “vocational school-leaving exam for universal admittance to university” (ETH/EPFL) are accepted to a technical college or university.

Special option: The 10th grade – bridge year combined with practical experience

After completing the mandatory nine school years, the requirements for basic vocational education can be covered with bridge education programs. These practical and work-related course offerings supplement the obligatory school curriculum.

The Impact on Apprenticeship for Companies and the Swiss Economy – Productivity and Low Youth Unemployment

A direct relationship to the working world is treated as a hallmark of strength in vocational education and training. Different places of learning reflect this success: In a company or manufacturing plant, young people learn work-related skills and acquire knowledge and, in doing so, are actively integrated into the company's operations and production processes. Of course, it is an investment for a company both financially and with respect to personal resources to train apprentices for three or four years. According to the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, it pays off to invest in young talents as the apprentices result in trained and educated staff according to the company's specific requirements. The *productivity* of an apprentice correlates with the investment of the company. In general an apprentice with three years of vocational training has a positive balance in his second year. With a four years' and usually more expensive vocational training, a positive outcome can be measured in the apprentice's third year.

According to the Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the IMF, unemployment – if formed a country – would be the fifth largest in the world. As a solution to one of the world's biggest social challenges, apprenticeship is about jobs for youth as well as for the proper training for unqualified or under-qualified people. According to the ILO Study 2014, youth unemployment is around 2.9 times greater than adult unemployment and yet, young employees are the backbone of the future.

Throughout Europe and the world, youth unemployment is a rising challenge. According to the OECD, the youth unemployment rate is as follows in 2016:

Iceland	6,2%
Switzerland	8,3%
Germany	8,6%
Sweden	9,1%
Denmark	10,5%
Canada	13,2%
UK	13,7%
USA	14,4%
France	17,2%
Spain	22,8%
Italy	27,4%

Source: OECD.org /Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET); age 15-29 years in percent of workforce

Outlook – Success Stories from Switzerland and Around The Globe

Vocational training and especially that Swiss based Apprenticeship model have recently prompted a lot of attention across the world. The Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN) based in Geneva has been created and attempts to promote vocational training and apprenticeships across the world to tackle high levels of youth unemployment or quite basically offer education to a wide part of the population in a productive way.

Accenture and AmCham Switzerland with the support of GAN and ETH Zurich University have aligned to write a report on best practices of Swiss companies to promote the vocational education in the United States and provide examples of life stories of successful CEO's who have gone through an apprenticeship. The report is expected to be published in September 2017.

At Accenture – Vocational Apprenticeship Trainings 2017 and in The Future

The lack of skilled workers in Switzerland is an ongoing issue. As a basic vocational education organized by companies, Accenture is also offering attractive apprenticeship programs for young people since 2011. As a member of the Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN), it is particularly important for Accenture to create forward-looking education and training programs that are relevant to the labor market. This is done by supporting and further developing training models for basic vocational education programs, which is why Accenture decided to modify and expand its vocational education program.

Accenture offers apprenticeships in three vocational fields:

- IT specialist with Swiss Certificate of Proficiency (EFZ)
- Commercial retail specialist with Swiss Certificate of Proficiency
- Media specialist with Swiss Certificate of Proficiency

Since 2012, *media specialist apprentices (EFZ)* and current commercial retail apprentices are being trained at Accenture. By 2017, it will increase to ten apprenticeships in IT as well as

six apprenticeships for commercial retail. The ultimate goal is to further expand the overall number of apprenticeships. By 2020, there will be forty apprenticeship positions in IT, eight for media specialists and six in commercial retail training.

Education and training are a priority – expansion of the apprenticeship program at Accenture Switzerland

In the *media specialist apprenticeship*, students spend the first year of their four-year program at the Zürcher Lehrbetriebsverband ICT (ZLI), an external vocational school in Zurich. During the second year of the apprenticeship, students become familiar with Accenture's internal departments. There, they support the IT Support, Human Resources & Recruiting, Finance and Marketing teams. They deepen their marketing and media expertise by working in the Marketing department but also directly by completing their own projects and being staffed to client engagements.

Budding *commercial retail specialists* spend time in each of the different internal departments at Accenture over the course of their three-year training. These departments include Human Resources & Recruiting, Office Operations, Executive Assistant, IT Support, People Mobility, Finance, Marketing and Contract Management. In the last year of their training, apprentices additionally have the opportunity to apply their newfound knowledge by working on client projects. The percentage of commercial retail apprentices has constantly risen at Accenture since the introduction of the company's vocational training program. The goal is to train and hire six budding commercial retail specialists every year by 2021.

In addition to its retail training program, Accenture is providing a new vocational training program in IT starting with the 2017/2018 school year. It is based on a cooperation with Noser Young Professionals (NYP), the Zurich Competence Center of the Noser Group for basic and continuing professional training and education in ICT. There, budding IT specialists (EFZ) will learn the essential skills of an application developer during their first two years of a four-year apprenticeship. In this first phase at NYP, students will also provide services for the partners of the Noser Group as well as for external customers. During the last two years of the apprenticeship, they will be assigned directly to various client engagements at Accenture in Switzerland and probably abroad. This will give apprentices the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skills from NYP and, in doing so, gain a foothold in IT consulting.

About the author:

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