



### **School and Education**

Education System
Compulsory Education
Vocational Education and Training / Middle School
Universities / Universities of Applied Sciences
Recognition of Qualifications



### **Education System**

The Swiss education system is outstanding in that it allows for continued personal advancement. Vocational training is highly valued. It a the basis for further training and for higher education.

#### **Structure / Authorities**

In Switzerland there are three consecutive levels of education:

- Compulsory education (public school: Kindergarten, primary school und secondary level I)
- Vocational education and training, or middle school (secondary level II)
- Universities of applied sciences / universities, and professional education and training (tertiary).

The state is responsible for all three levels and responsibilities are shared by the federation, cantons, and communities. For this reason schools and school systems may vary according to canton. There are also private kindergartens and schools. Private instruction is possible under certain circumstances

#### **Compulsory Education**

There is 11 years of compulsory education in Canton Bern. It usually begins when the child is 4 years old. Parents can be fined if their children are absent from school without notification or reason. Newly arrived young people up to the age of 16 are required to attend school. They have the right to enter compulsory school even during the current school year. There are small differences between the French and German speaking parts of the canton. More information about kindergarten and school attendance can be obtained from the municipality of residence or on the school's website.

#### **Education Following Compulsory Education**

The far majority of young people continue their studies following compulsory education. There are many options available. The best place to get information is at the vocational guidance and information centers (BIZ |OP). Vocational education and training (Berufslehre |Apprentissage) is the most frequent choice. Vocational education allows future access to professional education and training. Persons who receive a vocational diploma are later able to attend a university of applied science. Approximately 20 percent of young people receive a gymnasium baccalaureate granting them direct access to universities.





#### **Scholarships**

Scholarships allow persons with little means to go to school or to obtain professional training. Scholarships provide financial support for education following compulsory education. Foreign residents of Canton Bern might also be eligible for scholarships depending on the student's or parents' citizenship and type of permit. Further information is available from. For further information, please contact the educational grants department of the cantonal administration.

# Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/school-and-education/education-system



### **Compulsory Education**

Compulsory Education offers children a basic education which enables them access to futher education. Public schools are free of charge.

#### Registering a Child

Communities are responsible for the public schools. To register a child for public school one must contact the community of residence or the school administration.

#### **School Levels**

Compulsory Education consists of three consecutive levels:

The first stage includes kindergarten and the first two years of primary. Kindergarten usually lasts 2 years. There is also the basic level model (Basisstufe | Cycle élementaire). Here, children of different ages are taught together.

- The middle school comprises the 3rd to 6th primary grades. The school informs the children and parents in the 5th school year about the promotion procedure to the upper school.
- The upper school (secondary level I) lasts 3 years. In the upper school there are
  three different types of schools (Realschule, Sekundarschule and in some
  municipalities the special secondary school). They have different performance
  requirements.

Children who do not speak German or French receive special support at all levels. Detailed information on compulsory schooling can be found in the various cantonal brochures.

#### **Public School / Private School**

Public school is free of charge. Boys and girls are taught together. The curriculum is confessionally neutral. Most children and young people attend public school (95%). There are private schools. In general, parents who wish to send their children to private school must pay for school themselves.



#### **Parents' Rights and Duties**

Schools are obligated to inform parents of everyday school life and of their child's performance at school. For this reason schools conduct progress reports (between teachers and parents), parents' evenings (school information for parents), and information events. Most of these events are compulsory for parents. If both parents cannot attend, they must excuse themselves. The parents must also find out how they will still receive the information. Important decisions (e.g. transfer to lower secondary school) are discussed with the parents and the child. Parents are responsible for their child's attendance at school. If a child cannot attend (e.g. illness) parents must inform the school. They should also make sure that their children who do homework have a quiet place at home in case the children need to do homework or prepare for a test. By taking a regular interest in homework and school projects they can support their child. For persons who are not yet familiar with the Swiss education system there are special information events which are often held in languages other than German or French.

#### **Questions / Support**

Questions regarding school should always be directed to the teacher first. The teacher can also help when parents are in need of support. The teacher will also contact the parent first if they feel the child needs something or there are questions. In general, it is important that parents communicate and work closely with teachers. Mental or social difficulties can be handled by the school counselling service (Erziehungsberatung | Service psychologique pour enfants et adolescents) which offers free support for children and their parents.

# Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/school-and-education/compulsory-education



# Vocational Education and Training / Middle School

Following compulsory education most young people choose to attend vocational education and training. In general, persons wishing to study at a university must obtain a diploma from a middle school. This is also possible through vocational education and training.

#### **Importance of Education**

A good education and professional life are important. Following compulsory education young people have various options to choose from to prepare themselves for professional life (secondary level II). Finding a good position without further education is difficult. The vocational guidance and information centers (BIZ | OP) advise young people and parents free of charge on questions of education and training. The responsible office of the cantonal administration is the Secondary School and Vocational Training Office (Mittelschul- und Berufsbildungsamt | Office des écoles moyennes et de la formation professionnelle).

#### **Vocational Education and Training**

Following compulsory education most young people choose to attend vocational education and training (apprenticeship). An apprenticeship involves young people acquiring the practical skills required for a profession through a work environment while also attending a professional school. There are more than 250 different professions to choose from. An apprenticeship requires between 2 and 4 years for completion. Young people must independently apply for an apprenticeship with a firm. They should begin searching for a position during the last two years of compulsory school. Schools help young people in this process, but parents' support is necessary. Vocational guidance and information centers (BIZ | OP) provide young people with various offerings and advise them free of charge. Young people who complete a vocational apprenticeship can also obtain a vocational baccalaureate, either during their basic vocational training or afterwards. The vocational baccalaureate gives access to a university of applied sciences. For many professions in Switzerland, it is not necessary to absolve the gymnasium and study at a university.



#### **Middle School**

Middle schools (Mittelschulen | Ecoles moyennes) offer a broad general education. These schools prepare students for an academic education at universities or universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen | Hautes écoles spécialisées). There are middle schools through which students earn a university preparatory diploma and there are middle schools where students earn a specialized or vocational diploma. The gymnasium baccalaureate grants direct access to universities. The specialized or vocational diploma grants direct access to universities of applied sciences. These are open to students with a gymnasium baccalaureate as well. Specialized or vocational diploma students may attend universities (by passing an exam). In some cases, additional conditions apply.

#### **Bridge Programs**

Bridge programs (Brückenangebote | Solutions transitoires) are an interim solution following compulsory schooling. They are aimed at young people who have not yet found an apprenticeship or who would like to better prepare themselves for an apprenticeship or middle school. Young people who arrive after compulsory schooling also have access to bridge opportunites. The focus is on entry into the labor market. A bridge program helps young people find an internship or apprenticeship. Interested persons should contact the office for bridge opportunities for Canton Bern or the career counseling and information centers (BIZ | OP).

## Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/school-and-education/vocational-education-and-training--midd le-school



# **Universities / Universities of Applied Sciences**

There are two different types of universities in Switzerland. The universities and the universities of applied sciences. Questions concerning admission on the basis of a foreign diplomas should be directed to the universities.

#### **Higher Education System**

Swiss higher education institutions are divided into universities, federal institutes of technology, universities of teacher education and universities of applied sciences (tertiary level | degré tertiaire). Universities of applied sciences are more practice-oriented and universities are more theory-oriented. The types are equal and organized according to the European Bologna System. On completion one receives a Bachelor's or Master's degree which is recognized throughout Europe.

#### **Admission**

Universities have varying admission policies. Swiss gymnasium baccalaureate diplomas guarantee access to universities. Foreign diplomas will not always be recognized. Questions regarding the recognition of foreign diplomas for admission will be answered by the respective institution of higher education (university/training institution). In general, very good German or French skills are a prerequisite. An exception is made for courses of study which are offered entirely in English. Higher education advisory services of Bern will provide free information on higher education opportunities.

#### **Professional Education and Training**

In addition to the universities professional education and training is a popular form of continuing one's education in Switzerland. This enables professionals to specialize and deepen their professional knowledge as well as their leadership skills. Professional education and training follows vocational education and training (Berufslehre | Apprentissage). A university preparatory school diploma is not necessary. The Vocational Guidance and Information Centers (BIZ | OP) will provide information on the various possibilities.

## Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/school-and-education/universities--universities-of-applied-sciences



### **Recognition of Qualifications**

Foreign qualifications are not always valid in Switzerland. Under certain circumstances, it is possible to have qualifications accredited. This is a requirement for some professions.

#### **Accreditation**

Persons with foreign qualifications can, under certain circumstances, have them accredited in Switzerland. Accreditation confirms that the foreign qualification is the equivalent of the Swiss qualification. Regulated professions (e.g. healthcare professionals, teachers, etc.) require accreditation. Which agency is responsible for the accreditation process is dependent upon the profession or training. A fee is charged for the accreditation process. The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI is responsible for answering general questions regarding the accreditation of foreign diplomas. (Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation SBFI | Secrétaire d'État à la formation, à la recherche et à l'innovation SEFRI)

#### **Qualification Assessment**

An accreditation process is not necessary for unregulated professions. For these professions it is possible to request that the level of qualification be determined (Niveaubestätigung | Attestation de niveau). This process determines the status of a foreign diploma relative to the Swiss education system. Such an assessment can be helpful in finding employment. Additional information is provided by the national information center for the recognition of foreign qualifications (Nationale Kontaktstelle für Diplomanerkennung | Point de Contact national pour la reconnaissance de diplômes) or the Vocational guidance and information centers BIZ (Berufsberatungs-und Informationszentren BIZ | Centres d'orientation professionnelle OP).

#### **Professional Qualification Later in Life**

Adults with professional experience who do not have a recognized qualification can still obtain a Swiss qualification through vocational education and training or professional education and training. The process varies according to previous training, experience, and age. Good German language skills are an essential prerequisite (Level B1/B2 CEFR). Interested persons can, for example, obtain information and advice free of charge from the vocational guidance and information centers BIZ (BIZ | OP). Obtaining a professional qualification improves one's position in the job market and grants access to continued education.





# Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-bern.ch/en/school-and-education/recognition-of-qualifications