



## EDUCATION IN SWITZERLAND

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### General information on the education system

Since the creation of the Federal Government in 1848, education has always been highly valued in Switzerland and the quality of her schools and universities is well known.

The Swiss educational system is strongly decentralised. Since each canton has its own legislation concerning education, they are to a great extent free in defining the school curriculum

In Switzerland, there are public and private schools of various levels and scopes. Public schools are funded and controlled by local governments, they are in general of a high standard. Higher Education is provided by 10 cantonal universities and two Federal Institutes of Technology run by the federal government which offer top quality education and research. Study fees in such schools are comparatively low. Access, however, is not easy since academic prerequisites are very high

In general, private schools are totally independent from the government. Study fees are comparatively high. Their standard and the corresponding academic prerequisites can vary greatly from institute to institute. It is up to the prospective students to carefully choose the school they want to attend. Time and efforts spent on this homework will pay off. Private schools are sometimes also supported by the government, with a corresponding control in return. Some diplomas are therefore recognised by the Swiss authorities, others are not

Hotel management represents a modest portion of private education in Switzerland. Nevertheless, Swiss hotel management schools have a long tradition – over one hundred years for the first ones. Many of these schools have a high standard and an excellent reputation and recognition among the world's leading hotel groups. A high percentage of hotel managers all over the world have graduated from a private hotel management school in Switzerland. Unfortunately success has also attracted persons who opened schools with a focus on short term profits only. This makes it even more important for the prospective students to carefully research the field and select a good school. Some tips are given below on how to begin the search for a private school.

Click on the following links for detailed information about the Swiss education system (Pre-school education, compulsory education, upper secondary education, vocational training, higher education, universities of applied sciences, non-university higher education, research in Switzerland):

[Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education](#)  
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CH-3001 Berne  
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Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities

Sennweg 2  
CH-3012 Berne  
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Federal Office for Education and Science

Hallwilerstrasse 4  
CH-3003 Berne  
Tél.: +41 31 322 96 91  
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Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology

Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Bern  
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Research in Switzerland:

### **Advice to prospective Chinese students**

To a prospective student seeking to study in a private school or a hotel management school in Switzerland, we can give the following information and advice:

#### *Define your objectives*

You should know exactly what you want before you enrol into a school or go to Switzerland. Try to get as much information as possible about the school where you want to study – it is worth the time and the effort since you will spend considerable time at the school and a lot of money on tuition fees. There is no shortcut to a good diploma.

#### *Be careful with intermediaries (agents)*

Contact the school yourself, there is no real need for an agent. In many cases they tend to ask for exaggerated amounts of money for their services, e.g. in relation to getting a visa to study.

#### *Admission policies and language abilities*

Be careful if a school has hardly any requirements. The education level of students tends to be low in these establishments.

The admissions policy of a school, especially for private universities, can also give indications about the academic level of its curriculum. It is therefore important to inquire about such policies

How competitive is the admission policy of a school? Is there a waiting list? Is there an age limit? Do schools test the language abilities? What documentation must a student submit (previous academic performance, undergraduate degrees for entrance into a university, language certificates, etc.)? Are there any entrance or placements tests? Are transfer students from other universities accepted?

Is there any language test, TOEFL or others, before acceptance? It is essential that the student must be able to follow tuition at private universities, professional schools and hotel management schools teach exclusively in a foreign language, mostly in English. If the language abilities are insufficient, the whole benefit of studies abroad will be lost. The student might drop out, will be asked to absolve an additional language course or may even be asked to leave. This will not only lengthen the study time but also make it more expensive. Therefore make sure that the language skills are sufficient and get them tested. You cannot study abroad without a good working knowledge of a foreign language

#### *Curriculum, certificates and diplomas*

Set a goal for the studies. Inquire how many years it will take to reach that goal (MBA, Bachelor, Degree, Diploma, Certificate, etc.). There are many different certificates and diplomas awarded by the schools. One should therefore ask for additional information on the value of such documents. Academic recognition and acceptance in prestigious universities also prove excellence in teaching and in the programs.

What is the value of the certificate/diploma issued at the end of the studies? Does this certificate/diploma allow the student to enter prestigious schools offering higher education, for instance for postgraduate studies? Does it allow the student to transfer to other universities abroad? Are the credits recognised?

Some international well-known hotel chains recruit directly from Swiss hospitality schools, therefore providing good career opportunities. Ask the school if they have any agreements with such hotel chains. If you know any people in the hospitality business, ask them about which schools enjoy the best reputations as well.

#### *Affiliations and recognition of the schools*

Many schools will advertise their recognition by and affiliation with Swiss or international organisations, mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States. This can be confusing for a student in search of the best possible school and more precise information on this should be requested. The affiliations with organisations and other schools abroad can be very beneficial as they may enable a student to transfer to other schools without losing any credits. Academic recognition and acceptance in prestigious universities also proves excellence in teaching and in the program of the school in question.

Generally, the Swiss Federal authorities (the central government) do not "recognise" any private school, as education is the prerogative of the Canton. Therefore, local authorities (cantonal level), ensuring that certain standards of quality are respected, may grant certain forms of recognition to the schools. As all commercial enterprises in Switzerland, a school also has to be registered in the commercial registers of the Canton. This is not, however, an official recognition of the school. Remarks such as "School recognised or accredited by the Swiss Government or authorities" are thus sometimes misleading. In such a case, one should exert caution with that school.

Likewise, the mentioning "Swiss" in the name of some schools, as well as the use of the Swiss cross in the school's logo refer strictly to the geographical location of the school and has no association whatsoever with an official recognition of that school or its diploma.

#### *Alumni*

Most schools in Switzerland maintain a network of alumni. This is especially true for the hotel management schools but also for private universities, professional, boarding and finishing schools. Ask for a list of the alumni and look for other Chinese nationals. Contact them and ask about their opinion of the school and the career opportunities after leaving school. A list of alumni might be more difficult to obtain from language schools, but most of them can give you the address of some former students.

Some alumni associations also run placement services for students who have just graduated. This could be an important factor to finding your first job opportunity.

#### *International dimension*

How many students are presently registered at the school? How many nationalities are there? Is any nationality over-represented among the students (why travel all the way to Switzerland if you

share the classroom exclusively with other Chinese students?). If Chinese students are over-represented at the school, it is tempting to speak Chinese too often and not practice any foreign language. Likewise the benefit from the international exposure will be lost. Does the school have a list of alumni? Can you talk to former, or present students of the school?

#### *Tuition costs*

How much does the tuition cost? In which currency is it quoted (Swiss francs, US dollars, Renminbi, etc)? What exactly is included in this price (tuition, food and board, airport pick-up, laundry, sports, excursions, books, etc)? What other expenses will the student have to pay once he is in Switzerland?

The cost of living in Switzerland is higher than in China. A budget should be prepared for expenses not covered in the quotation of the school, such as: food, drinks, health insurance (compulsory in Switzerland), other insurance, laundry, tuition books, public transportation (especially if not living on campus), excursions, sports, telecommunications, etc.

Students attending hotel management schools can usually benefit from six months training after six months theoretical lessons. Generally a monthly wage of roughly SFr. 2'000. - will be paid. However, after deducting taxes, costs for food and board as well as insurance, a net amount of about SFr. 1'200. - will be paid to the trainee. These prices are indicative and depend on the place of training. This activity is a practical training which is part of the studies and not an opportunity to work in Switzerland.

Partial scholarships on merit are available from some of the schools. Please contact the schools directly for more relevant information.

#### *Withdrawal policy*

Ask the school about its withdrawal policy (refunding of the tuition fee in case of non completion of the course, etc.).

#### *Operation of the school*

As the schools listed are private, they are run according to commercial principles. One element of decision can be the duration of operation of a school. Experience, quality and reputation come with time. The longer the school has been in operation, the more credentials and references can therefore be presented.

The teacher body is an important aspect of the education process. How many teachers work at the school? What are their credentials? What is the student/teacher ratio? What is the average size of the classes? Can a student experiencing academic difficulties benefit from individual attention? In short, does the school have sufficient qualified staff to provide satisfactory operations?

#### *Compound and facilities*

Does the school own its compound or are the facilities rented? When did the last renovation of the facilities take place? Do the facilities get upgraded regularly? What facilities are offered on compound in terms of leisure, arts, telecommunications (it is important to communicate with parents and friends), computers? Is there an Internet access available for the students?

Is accommodation offered on campus or does the student have to travel from the domicile to the classroom? How many students share one room? How large are the rooms? Does every student have a desk to study after classes? Where can the meals be taken? Are there any cooking facilities available to the students?

(one might want to have some Chinese noodles once in a while)? Can the language schools arrange accommodations? Where are these (apartments rented by the school or home-stay in a family)? Is the accommodation included in the price? Ask for a description of the accommodation.

If accommodation is not included in the tuition costs of the school, it is important to budget a sufficient amount of money for it, as the rental of rooms and apartments in Switzerland is much more expensive than in China. In Geneva for instance, one should budget SFr. 350 and upwards for a room (home stay or in student residences) and SFr. 800.- and more for an individual small apartment. These prices are per month and do not include any food.

#### *Location of the school*

The location is important. Is it better to study in the quiet and peaceful ambiance of a mountain resort or does the student need the excitement and facilities of a city? How far is the school from the next airport? Is public transportation nearby?

### **Hotel management schools and private schools**

#### *Hotel management schools*

Swiss Hotel Management Schools are privately run. The Consulate General of Switzerland cannot therefore recommend any particular school.

One private association, the Swiss Hotel School Association groups together the leading hotel schools of Switzerland. To become a member of ASEH, a school has to undergo a strict procedure of accreditation.

Please note that prospective students should contact the schools directly. Each school applies its own admission criteria.

#### *Private Schools*

These schools being privately run, the Consulate General of Switzerland cannot recommend any in particular. As the quality of schools can vary greatly, it is advised to choose the school carefully.

One private association, the Swiss Federation of Private Schools, brings together 250 private schools in Switzerland.

Please note that prospective students should contact the schools directly. Each school applies its own admission criteria.

### **Lucerne School of Art and Design**

<http://www.hgk.fhnz.ch/international>

### **Public universities**

#### *Preliminary remarks*

The number of students at Swiss universities is constantly increasing. It is therefore not always possible for foreign students to be admitted to a university, despite increasing international mobility.

There is no central university admissions board; each student enrolls directly at the university of his or her choice. Each public university is fully competent to decide whether the candidate with a foreign certificate fulfils the admission criteria or not. Each university is free to restrict the admission of foreign students to courses with limited admission capacities.

In order to study at a Swiss university, a foreign student should as a rule have a very good command of either German, French or Italian depending on the university he/she wishes to attend (see list underneath). Only very few of the public universities offer postgraduate studies in English or partially in English. Further information (admission requirements, cost of studies, etc.) is available underneath

There are 12 official higher education establishments in Switzerland (10 cantonal universities and 2 Federal Institutes of Technology) as well as a number of other colleges of higher education.

***German-speaking:***

Universität Basel, Universität Bern, Universität Luzern, Universität St. Gallen, Universität Zürich, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich ETHZ

***French-speaking:***

Université de Genève, Université de Lausanne, Université de Neuchâtel, Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne EPFL

***Bi-lingual French and German:***

Universität Freiburg/Université de Fribourg

***Italian-speaking:***

Università della Svizzera Italiana

The following may also be considered as institutions of higher education: the College of Secondary Education of St. Gallen (Pädagogische Hochschule St. Gallen), the Graduate Institute of International Studies (Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales HEI) in Geneva and the Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (Institut de hautes études en administration publique IDHEAP) in Lausanne. The Institut Universitaire Kurt Bösch (L'université postgrad du Valais).

Higher Education Programmes with English (or partially taught in English) as language of instruction:  
MBAs conferred by Swiss universities  
Postgraduate studies

***Information in English for foreign students***

Information on the following points can be found on the website of the Rector's Conference of the Swiss Universities (scroll down to and click on 1 Information and Documentation Service and then click on Higher Education in Switzerland):

**- Higher education in Switzerland**

- Studying in Switzerland
- Admission requirements
- Application procedure, immigration formalities, residence permit
- Entrance examination to Swiss Universities
- Cost of studies, etc.