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Training in Switzerland (3)

Often undervalued: Apprenticeship

MZ The Swiss occupational apprenticeship is practically unique in the world, for only a few countries have a system comparable in quality. It is the main theme of this third instalment of our series.

A majority of young Swiss men and women serve an occupational apprenticeship. It is regarded as an excellent basic occupational training.

Different from other countries

In Swiss circles abroad one not infrequently comes across the view that the occupational apprenticeship is an inferior training without any opportunities for development. This idea is understandable when one bears in mind that, with few exceptions, occupational apprenticeships are largely unknown abroad or are at best equivalent to learning on the job in Switzerland. In most countries real vocational training takes place either at a university or at a polytechnic, while many young people acquire their occupational know-how through practical experience and possibly at voluntary supplementary courses.

Theory side by side with practice

An apprenticeship normally begins after the completion of elementary schooling («Vols-

schule»), that is to say, at about the age of 16. It lasts from three to four years, in a few cases only two, according to the sector and the aim of the training. The apprentice undergoes practical training in a «teaching firm» on three or four days a week and also attends a vocational school. The apprenticeship ends with a federal proficiency certificate. The working conditions for apprentices are subject to special (protective) regulations, which are monitored by the cantonal vocational training offices.

The apprentice receives a wage, which varies according to sector and rises with each year of apprenticeship. However, it is not usually enough to cover all his or her living costs.

Apprenticeship as a springboard

For those who obtain a qualification on completing an apprenticeship, there are a whole number of further education opportunities in every occupational field; for example, in technical occupations the higher technical colleges (HTL), where the education is comparable to

university studies but is more practically orientated; in the hotel and restaurant trade; the world-famous hotel schools; higher commercial and business schools etc.

It is also possible to enter a university after an apprenticeship by the so-called second training path via a «Maturitätsschule» for adults (similar to «A-level» courses).

How to secure an apprenticeship

There is no institution which will take over the search for an apprenticeship for someone wishing to train: he or she must set about this for himself or herself and do it early, that is to say, at least a year before he or she wants to start training. In our last article we pointed out how important it is to find out in good time about training conditions in Switzerland and to prepare carefully for the choice of occupation. The public (free of charge) and private vocational advice offices and the vocational information centres (BIZ) have lists of vacant apprenticeships in their canton or region. Various occupational associations (for example, the businessmen's association, hotel and restaurant trade) run their own placement agencies. However, the applicant can also apply direct to firms which interest him or her, or look for an apprenticeship via (specialist) periodicals.

We also wish to draw attention to the possibility of a «sniffing» apprenticeship. Without committing himself/herself, the future apprentice can, for a few days, get an impression in a (teaching) firm of what he/she can expect from the vocational training at which he/she is aiming.

The situation on the apprenticeship market differs from sector to sector and from region to region.

Preparation often necessary

It is often advisable – sometimes essential, even – for young

Swiss abroad to fit in a preparatory year before the actual beginning of vocational training. The purpose of this interim year is for the young person to familiarize himself/herself with the training system in Switzerland, to acquire any know-how he/she may lack and to integrate socially, too, without being subject to any very great pressure. During this time, it is possible calmly to make a choice of occupation on the basis of direct information.

The interim year can consist in

Technical Colleges

In addition to apprenticeships and university studies (see article in the next issue) there is a third route to a vocational training with qualifications: the technical colleges. They provide training in many occupational fields, especially those of health, education and social work, in transport and commerce, media careers, the hotel industry, all spheres of art, data processing and the technologies, agriculture and languages. In French-speaking Switzerland, in particular, certain technical occupations and crafts can be learnt in so-called training workshops as well as in occupational apprenticeships. Certain kinds of training are offered not only side by side with an occupation but also on a whole-day basis. The diplomas of the state and semi-private technical colleges are recognized by the state. Many private schools also offer shorter courses. Their diplomas are not normally recognized by the state (commercial and secretarial diplomas, for example), but they nevertheless improve one's chances on the labour market by comparison with untrained people.

Entry conditions vary a great deal. They range from a good Swiss «Volksschulabschluss» (elementary school-leaving certificate) through occupational practical work to a completed occupational apprenticeship or the passing of a matriculation examination («Maturitätsprüfung»). Foreign school-leaving certificates are sometimes recognized provided they are comparable with Swiss ones.



Goldsmith's apprentice



attending a tenth elementary school year («Volksschule»), an integration course (for young people from abroad), a vocational choice year or a preparatory year. This instruction is given by public-sector schools in many places and is normally free of charge. Of course, many private schools also offer a varied programme with preparatory courses.

It should be particularly stressed that – for young people who speak a different language – attendance at an intensive language course before vocational training is almost always necessary. Such courses are principally offered by private schools.

(To be continued)

Swiss Schools Abroad: Will there soon be a new law?

On 8th December 1986, the Federal Council passed for submission to parliament a «message» and draft for a federal Act on the promotion of the education of young Swiss abroad. This Act is intended to replace the current law dating from 1974 and to place the Confederation's future contributions with greater emphasis within the framework of Switzerland's

cultural and economic presence abroad.

It has three main points:

- Extension of federal aid to those young Swiss abroad who are unable to attend a Swiss school
- Greater involvement of the sponsoring cantons responsible for educational welfare
- Considerable simplification of the subsidy system.

As expressed in the law's new title, the existing support is to be supplemented by various new forms of promotion, such as increased cooperation with non-Swiss schools abroad, and contributions to individual Swiss teachers and for courses in Swiss history and culture and Swiss national languages. However, as before, the school fees of individual Swiss children who attend non-Swiss schools abroad will not be paid.

At present, the Confederation supports 17 Swiss schools abroad, of which there are seven each in Europe and South America, two in Asia and one in Africa. They are attended by a total of 4,700 children; of these, 1,700 are Swiss (including foreign children with Swiss mothers). About the same number of Swiss children (1,800) are educated at German, French, American and British schools abroad.

Federal Office for the Promotion of Culture

Federal Ballots 1987

April 5th

- legislation on asylum
- referendum on armament
- procedure of vote regarding popular initiatives with a counter-proposition (double Yes)

October 18th

- Election of the National Council

December 6th

- the matter put to vote has not been decided yet

Are you 50 this year?

You can join the voluntary AVS/AI not later than one year after your 50th birthday. This is your *last chance!* For further information please write to your Swiss representation.

Editor of the Official Communications:
Service of the Swiss abroad,
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

The Federal Authorities in 1987



President of the Confederation:
Pierre Aubert

Born in La Chaux-de-Fonds on 3rd March 1927. Citizen of Savagnier/NE. Married, father of two children. Attorney-at-Law. Federal Councillor since 7th December 1977.

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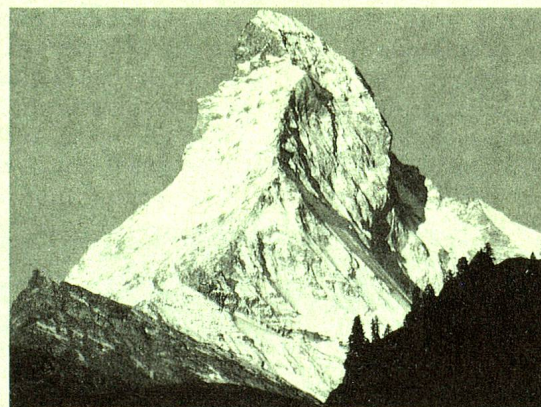
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