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Autor: Natsch, Rudolf / Lenzin, René
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Specialised universities to open in 1997

Deep-seated changes in the university system

The Swiss university landscape is at present undergoing dramatic transformation. From autumn 1997 specialised universities – in all probability eight of them – will join the existing universities and federal institutes of technology. This is the most radical education reform project for decades and is being implemented in an astonishingly short time.

The launch date is rapidly approaching. This is not a given for the Swiss education scene, so dependent upon federal procedures; particularly when we take into account

Andreas Stuber*

that this is the most far-reaching and expensive project for very many years. The specialised universities will start teaching in 1997. According to today's plans there should be eight of them: one in French-speaking Switzerland, one in Canton Berne, one in Canton Soleure, one (possibly two) in Canton Aargau, one in each Basle half-canton, one in central Switzerland, one in Zurich, one in eastern Switzerland and one in Ticino.

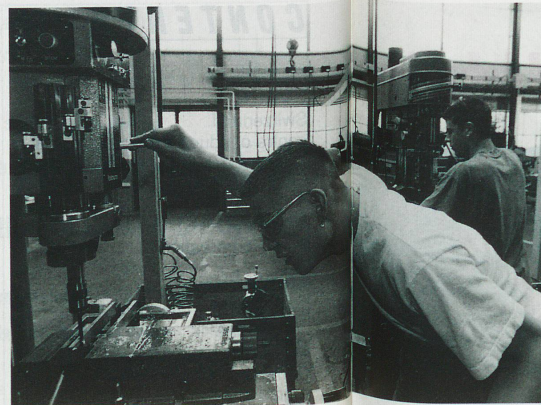
The specialised universities will supplement the existing cantonal universities and the two federal institutes of technology in Zurich and Lausanne. It is intended that they should concentrate more intensively on practical work

and that they should promote cooperation with small and medium-sized businesses in the fields of research and development.

The aim of the specialised universities is to provide access to academic laurels for those who have chosen vocational training and intend to remain with it.

Expensive and complex

This reform does not come cheap by any means. The initial expansion phase between 1997 and 2003 will cost Sfr. 5.4 billion, of which the federal government will provide a maximum of Sfr. 1.6 billion. This means extra expenditure of Sfr. 600 million over the present level of federal assistance to universities – and in these very gloomy financial times, that is not small fry. In addition, the project is by no means simple. There are already 29 higher engineering schools with about 10,000 students, as well as 14 colleges of business administration with 2,200 students and 7 schools of art with 330 students. All of these would of course like to be given Berne's seal of approval as specialised



Children are taught two things which bring success to adults: concentration and creativity.

Swiss apprenticeships are still regarded as good training. (Photos: Keystone)

universities. Another problem is that the specialised school system includes units organised in very varied ways – some being umbrella bodies, etc.

Why so quickly?

In spite of its high cost and complex structure the reform project is being implemented very rapidly. In June 1994 the Federal Council presented the draft law to parliament. In January 1995 it was passed by the Council of States and last autumn by the National Council. This year the executive ordinances should be approved, and next year each of the new specialised universities will receive federal recognition. In parallel with this the cantons will pass their own laws, and indeed the creation of the specialised universities will sometimes be used, as for example in Aargau, to make old dreams about cantonal universities come true.

Since their diplomas will be Euro-compatible, the specialised universities should help to compensate in some measure for the voters' refusal to join the European Economic Area in December 1992. Equally important are the hoped-for favourable economic consequences; the specialised universities are considered as an investment in the future of the country.

Criticism too

The high speed of these reforms has led to some scepticism in political discus-

sions. It is claimed, for example, that the opportunity is being missed to realise a genuine joint construction on a "single building site". The objection is that reform of vocational training will take place only after the specialised universities have started work, although there is a sense in which the latter are a "continuation" of vocational training. The existing universities are also accused of lack of cooperation. In this sphere too reforms are taking place, but some people feel that not enough attention has been given to coordination between these and the new specialised universities.

There has also been controversy about the fact that the federal government is for the moment concentrating its subsidies in the technical and economic spheres and is therefore giving a preference to "male" professions. It is only in a second phase that "soft" and rather more "female" branches, such as the health and social professions, will come to the fore. The federal authorities have been arguing that these fall under cantonal jurisdiction and that they are responsible only for professions recognised by the Federal Office for Industry and Labour. In spite of this, however, as from autumn 1997 there will be specialised universities for art and later for the health and social fields, one of which will be in Canton Berne. But these will have to be financed entirely by the cantons and will start out with a very small number of courses.

Recognition of diplomas: Interview with Rudolf Natsch*

"To be able to work abroad"

Swiss Review: If a Swiss Abroad asks about the validity of diplomas in Switzerland, the answer will be: "It depends on the canton" or "It depends on the university" or even "It depends on the faculty". Do we not have to clean up our own house before pursuing international diploma recognition agreements?

Rudolf Natsch: We should do the one without neglecting the other. It is in our paramount interest that our Swiss diplomas should be recognised abroad. But we cannot only make demands. We have to give something in return. Perhaps the debate on European integration will give some impetus to efforts here at home which point in the same direction.



Rudolf Natsch: "At the end of the day, the winners will be those which can offer a little more than the others". (Photo: Michael Stahl)

With the reform of the university entrance system and the introduction of the vocational certificate and the specialised universities, things really are moving here. Is this due to pressure from outside?

I would not like to use the word pressure, but it is true that the integration debate provided a definite incentive to do something. It is twenty years since we were given the authority to set up specialised universities, but the time has come when we really must pursue this fully. With the close network of specialised institutions which we now have, the preconditions already exist to carry out reform in a relatively short time. Training in these establishments can already claim to be just as high quality as in other countries. But we would like to have something extra,

because in the last resort it is not just a question of having our universities recognised as formally equivalent. At the end of the day, the winners will be those which can offer a little more than the others.

One of Switzerland's advantages as a business location is its high level of education and training. Is there not a danger that mutual recognition of diplomas would mean a levelling downwards?

It would be completely arrogant to suggest such a thing. During the European Economic Area negotiations there was a general conviction that we would have to recognise each other's diplomas, but that every country had to understand that there would be some ways in which they would each have to sacrifice quality on a common altar. The idea that one's own system is the best seems to be widespread and not uniquely Swiss. Objectively speaking, all the countries concerned are in a position to provide good education and training.

Which would gain the most from the mutual recognition of diplomas, Switzerland or the EU?

Even if somebody in Brussels is listening, I would say that we have more to gain. For us it is of the first importance that our citizens residing abroad should be able to work. It is vital to them personally, but it is also of great overall significance for our export-oriented economy.

There is an information agency which deals with the validity of university diplomas. How will the recognition of other types of diploma be regulated, for example regarding access to the specialised universities?

The Federal Office for Industry and Labour is working on this intensively at the moment. Every day we process about 20 applications from people all over the world who wish, for example, to take a vocational examination and want to show that they have appropriate training behind them. In principle the specialised universities set their own requirements. But we may be in a position

*Rudolf Natsch is Deputy Director and head of the Vocational Training Division at the Federal Office for Industry and Labour. He is responsible for diploma recognition in Switzerland's bilateral negotiations with the European Union.

* The author is domestic affairs editor of the Berne daily "Der Bund".

to state whether a foreign diploma is the equivalent of our vocational certificate.

Would your task be simplified by an agreement with the EU?

That would depend on the number of people going to and fro. Even if we did have an agreement by which, for example, diplomas issued by specialised universities were recognised mutually, there would probably still have to be an authority of some kind to confirm that a specific diploma was one included in the agreement.

I would like to close with a personal question. How has the Swiss educational landscape changed since you left school?

Education and training changes more quickly nowadays, and innovations are taken up with much less resistance. In addition, the flood of information and the stimulus that this gives to students at all levels is now almost overwhelming. The danger of superficiality resulting from it can be countered only by the realisation that education and training is a matter of building blocks and that there is no such thing as completed training. The idea that one's training must be continually kept up to date throughout one's life is increasingly a part of education policy. But this does not mean that everybody lives according to it.

Interview: René Lenzin

Training in the hotel and restaurant industry

Reform needed despite world renown

Its specialised gastronomy and hotel schools enjoy a high reputation worldwide, although foreign establishments are catching up.

Still today "Lausanne" is a magic word for hoteliers. All over the world the doors of hotel management open almost automatically to graduates of the "Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne". The list of alumni of the Lausanne school, which was set up by the

Andreas Netzel*

Swiss Hotel Association, is equivalent to a who's who of the world's hoteliers. César Ritz, the founder of the modern high-quality hotel trade, was from Switzerland, as was the term "palace" which hotel pioneer Badrutt introduced in 1896 as the name of his first luxury hotel in St. Moritz.

About 1,200 students leave the 11 leading hotel training schools grouped

*Andreas Netzel is editor-in-chief of *hotel + tourism revue*, the biggest Swiss specialised paper for the hotel and restaurant trade, tourism and leisure activities.



in the Swiss Hotel Schools Association with diplomas every year. A large proportion of these come from foreign countries where it is particularly the practice-based training and excellent instruction in everything concerning eating and drinking which is so highly appreciated. It is true that specialised

hotel schools worldwide have made great progress and are catching up fast, but, particularly in English-speaking countries and Asia, they provide mainly theoretical training through their college system.

For its part Switzerland will in future offer specialised university courses in

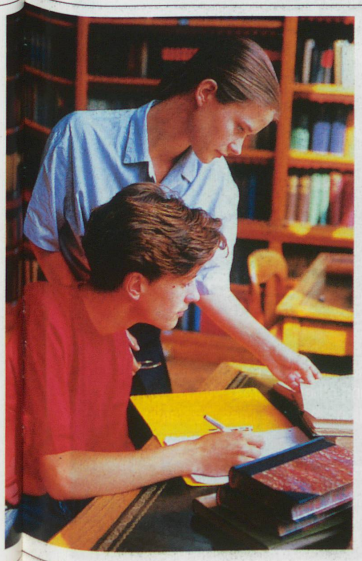
Practice-based training in eating and drinking matters, a special feature of the Swiss hotel industrie, is increasingly exported abroad. (Photo: Keystone)

restaurant and hotel management with a view to strengthening its attraction to top echelons. From summer 1997, these will be held at new "centres of competence" in Lausanne and Lucerne. At present the Swiss Hotel Association is the only organisation in the country to run a "business seminar" for hotels and restaurants.

The new vocational certificates

Switzerland's base and further training system for hotels and restaurants is different from those of other countries, as is the case with most professions. Students are trained to cook, to become qualified in hotel management, service and gastronomy and, the latest advance, to be hotel office staff through inter-cantonal specialised courses or school hotels. Since 1995 a pilot project, known as "Gastrofutura", has been trying to adapt traditional vocational training to modern needs by introducing interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral thinking.

Following base training it is possible to obtain a federal specialised certificate by pursuing further training courses. About one-sixth of some 6,000 apprentices who finish each year choose this option. It is then possible either to undergo yet more training in the specialised schools or follow other



A study on education policy

Switzerland's stony road to learning

Walter Hagenbüchle*

The school system is in motion – its "customers" as well as the schools themselves. After gently dozing through the 1970s and 1980s the bells of reform are ringing over Switzerland's school and vocational training landscape. All those involved are having to get used to the sound.

A number of specific reform plans, most of them in the field of vocational university entrance certificates and specialised universities, are now at the starting gate and ready to go, at least in policy terms if not entirely in financing. Reform of the university entrance system – the third attempt since 1968 – is now inexorably leading to a new subject structure. The driving force of the new wave of reform in our education system has come from outside. The catalyst is "Europe", and despite Switzerland's tendency to go it alone this word has lost none of its effect.

In spite of austerity, which has not spared education and training, schools are looking for more professionalism, more team spirit, more scholastic independence and extra training for teachers. Discussions are also taking place to make teacher training more academic. But the federalism of the Swiss education system stands in the way to some extent. In particular, the ambitious reform project creating the specialised universities requires an efficient training concept to be developed quickly, which will guarantee the competence of teaching staff in terms of both didactic methodology and scientific knowledge.

In addition, because of the often solitary nature of their work teachers tend to run out of steam relatively quickly. Schools act as a seismograph of social development and as a mirror reflecting changes in values. A symbol of this is the frightening fact that violence – both amongst young people themselves and against teachers – causes so little comment. School has turned into a scene of crime and at the same time can claim to be both a therapy post and a recovery point.

Although teachers are today specialised in learning, they are at the same time confronted with socialisation tasks which families no longer can or wish to undertake both for economic reasons and because of changing values. Teachers often have to do what should be done in the family context, and in their attempts to counter-balance this social deficit the only things they are offered are overloaded time tables and rigid organisational structures.

And young people themselves? An increasing number of them have lost interest in finding the answers to questions which they have not asked. They live in a mental desert in which school and knowledge are simply a nuisance. They find "reality" in the mass media and the virtual world of computer simulation. Questions will have to be asked tomorrow which are still taboo today. How far must the level of performance sink? How much mixing of cultural artefacts can the school system stand before the teaching mission itself breaks down and the reserves of talented teachers dries up?

Nor must we forget "schools as protection zones". These are inhabited by those who often have a slight physical or psychological problem and in consequence fall through the net of "normal school" into (private) "special schools" intended to make them fit. This is done at enormous cost to an achievement-oriented society.

Many teachers simply capitulate before these complex problems. They are entirely unable to grasp new forms of teaching and of learning. Their classrooms remain closed to new ideas. In this way the system contributes to protecting pedagogical wolves in sheep's clothing. Many of these are appreciated by their colleagues as good team members and full of humour, but are unable to draw out similar character traits from their pupils. And vice versa, not every loner is a bad teacher.

So all in all 250 years after Pestalozzi the education landscape is full of pitfalls and stumbling blocks. Can we wait any longer to deal with the fiasco of modern education? No. It is true that the history of modern teaching is short, but no really effective way of institutionalising learning and socialising youth has yet been found. And it should be said – people forget it much too easily – that school has also done a lot of good. It is compulsory schooling that we must thank for the fact that child labour was made to give way before state education in Switzerland.

*Dr. Walter Hagenbüchle is an editor at the Neue Zürcher Zeitung. The article is a summary by AB of two features he has published.

Education in Switzerland

Switzerland has no uniform education system. Mirroring the political construction of the country it is a complicated mix of schools dependent on cantonal education directorates. This can create problems when parents move from one place to another.

The education system is made up of primary schools, secondary schools, higher secondary schools, vocational schools, universities and soon specialised universities. The precise name and function of each type of school depends on the canton and the linguistic region, as does the number of compulsory school years.

The cantons regulate and control the school and university system, while private institutions dominate in adult education. If we add together those attending school with those participating in adult education courses, we arrive at a somewhat remarkable figure: more than a quarter of the population is enrolled in some sort of educational programme.

Compared with the countries surrounding us, Switzerland starts compulsory schooling late, in most cases at the age of seven. There are longer hours per week (up to 40) and more weeks in the school year – and the duration is eight or nine years. School schedules have not changed greatly since the primary schools were set up in the 19th century, and little account is taken of the changed work and leisure patterns of parents.

Decision on a child's future must be made relatively early, usually before the end of compulsory schooling, i.e. before his or her 16th birthday. But attendance at university does not usually start before the age of twenty, and university education lasts longer than elsewhere in Europe.

Swiss schools are selective to a high degree. Weak performers are separated from other pupils early, and it is rarely possible to catch up at a later date. Some 17% of pupils in any given year will reach university level. Vocational training, which is the road taken by most schoolchildren, is mainly in the hands of private enterprises.

Practically all the 3,000 or so municipalities in Switzerland have a school of some kind or another. This efficient and widespread education network accounts for about 20% of public budgets – at the federal, cantonal and municipal levels. The expenditure item "education and research" in the federal budget, taken together with federal spending on universities, amounts to Sfr. 14.5 billion, which puts it above both "social security" and "health care". The social status of teachers is high, and this is reflected in material terms: the average salary of Swiss teachers is amongst the highest in the world.

AB

Information source: "Switzerland from the Inside", published by Sclavo Verlag, Zurich, 1992. Available in French, German, Italian, English and Spanish.