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Autor: Klaffke, Oliver
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Who pays for lifelong learning?

BY OLIVER KLAFFKE

According to educational experts, it is essential to continue learning in the age of the New Economy. Now new regulations are to be enacted governing responsibility for adult education.

FURTHER EDUCATION is a costly business. Anyone wishing to gain additional professional qualifications in their later years, needs to dig deep into their wallet. For an MBA course you can expect to pay several tens of thousands. Post-graduate studies at university are cheaper but in most cases they, too, dig into the budget to the tune of several thousand francs. And anyone wanting to catch up on secondary education can pay anything up to CHF 6600.

Adult education is also putting a strain on the public purse, but education experts believe state expenditure is still too low. Every year the government and cantons pay around CHF 300 million for further education, corresponding to approximately 1.5 percent of the entire state expenditure on education.

The CHF 350 million a year spent on further education courses for the unemployed since the new unemployment insurance law came into force also come under the category of adult education costs. Formerly the government and cantons paid jointly, but the new financial compensation system currently undergoing public hearing and scheduled for introduction in 2004 re-organises the competences between government and cantons. In the education area several shifts are planned: the govern-

Oliver Klaffke is a free-lance journalist resident in Hägendorf (SO) and specialises in educational matters.

ment retains responsibility for basic schooling, while the cantons now have responsibility for adult and further education and the associated costs. This proposal contradicts the conclusions of a study conducted on behalf of the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) and the Federal Office for Culture. The authors of the study call for the government to assume more responsibility for further education. According to this study, the state should step up its education efforts particularly for individual groups such as women, foreigners or older people. While the practicality of many courses which

and fall victim to the red pencil. The BBT hopes that its current budget of CHF 40 to 45 million will not be used for such measures, though this is unlikely.

Education experts fear a reduction in the range of state education options. Whether this is a true loss, however, is questionable, since even now over 85 percent of all further education courses are offered by private companies or institutes.

Further education is faced by another, completely different problem besides funding: demand is sluggish. Frequently the interest in acquiring new knowledge is somewhat low. The very people who

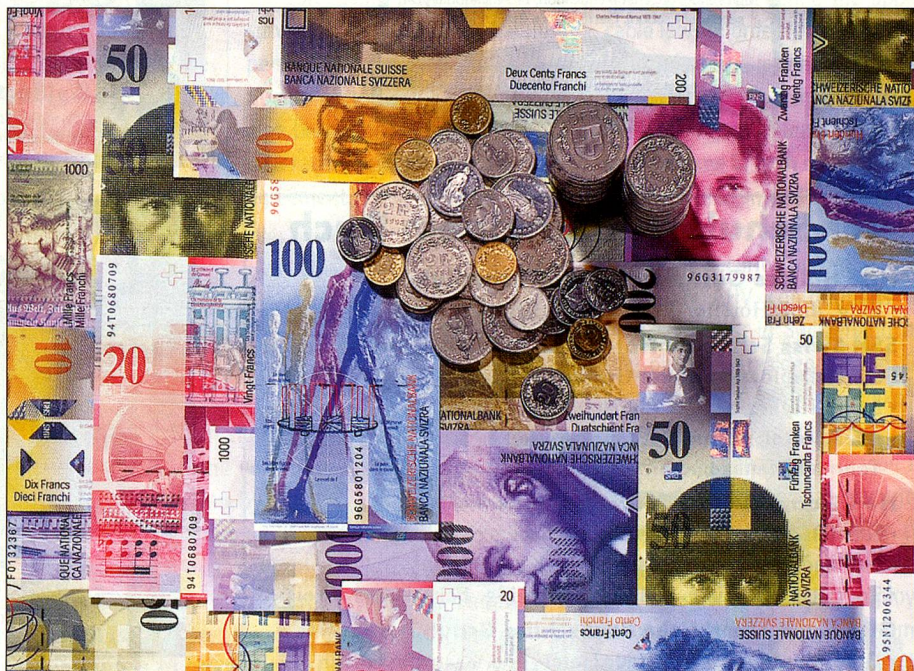


Photo: Bildagentur Baumann

Who will pay the rising cost of further education?

enjoy great popularity especially among women (language courses, personality development) is undeniable, they are generally not as highly valued as classical training courses which are more closely targeted at professional or vocational qualifications.

The red pencil looms

There are fears that, under budgetary constraints, such educational offerings would be regarded as unnecessary nonsense

urgently need further education rarely take advantage of it, while those who already have good qualifications flock to courses in order to become even more successful.

As an incentive to lifelong learning the Christian Trade Union has suggested the introduction of an education voucher (see box, page 5) to be presented on completion of an apprenticeship and used within five years. The costs would amount to only CHF 120 to 175 million. 