

Official news

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **28 (2001)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **21.06.2024**

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Opportunities for young Swiss Abroad

Persons wishing to study in Switzerland should obtain detailed information beforehand in order to avoid unpleasant surprises.

In recent years the number of students at Swiss universities has steadily grown. Approximately 96,672 students were enrolled at Swiss universities and Federal Institutes of Technology in November 2000. This includes around 2,840 Swiss Abroad¹, who have returned to Switzerland to study. Young Swiss Abroad seeking to study in Switzerland are attracted not only by university courses but also by other educational opportunities.

Often our young compatriots abroad lack the information to build an accurate picture of the range of courses available in Switzerland. Added to this, certain vocational apprenticeships are either non-existent in some coun-

¹Persons who have Swiss nationality but also carry a foreign residence permit.

tries or demand completely different qualifications. In principle, young Swiss Abroad are entitled to the same educational opportunities as Swiss living in Switzerland. However, it is much more difficult for them to get started. Young Swiss Abroad who cannot speak any of our national languages and no longer have a network of relations in Switzerland often seek to return to study in Switzerland with little or no financial resources. These are difficult conditions under which to study successfully and pose virtually insoluble problems to young people.

Pre-study qualifications

First of all the qualifications for the desired course of study must be determined. In many cases proof of a pre-university education abroad, for instance a foreign certificate of matriculation, cannot be directly compared with a Swiss certificate of matriculation. Even when the bilateral accords with the EU come into force, Swiss universities will continue to remain

independent when it comes to admitting students. If education abroad does not meet the required criteria, supplementary or preparatory courses must be attended. In some cases candidates will need to sit an entrance exam. Conditions of acceptance vary from university to university. To obtain binding information on conditions of acceptance, it is best to contact the relevant university or consult its home page.

Adequate language skills

Good language skills are required for admission to an institute of learning or to qualify for a vocational apprenticeship. To study in Switzerland you must be able to speak and write at least one national language fluently. If your language skills are inadequate or non-existent, your period of study risks being extended by much longer than planned, at a correspondingly higher cost. Moreover, the cantons generally do not award grants for language courses.

Recognition of your diploma

Before embarking on study in Switzerland, it is important to determine whether the course will be recognised when you return home. The bilateral accords distinctly improve the chances of diplomas being recognised within the EU. The principle of mutual recognition applies for degrees from universities of applied sciences and universities alike. In other areas, it is up to a potential employer to decide on whether or not to recognise the degree. Switzerland and the EU mutually recognise diplomas for professions which are "regulated" in the individual member states, i.e. professions which require a specific national diploma or equivalent certificate in order to practice them. The medical sector as well as architects and lawyers are subject to special regulations which define the criteria to be fulfilled.

Study costs

Many Swiss Abroad are under the misapprehension that education



Besides working, young people serving an apprenticeship also need to attend college for one or two days of the week.

in Switzerland is free. For attendance during the obligatory schooling period, no costs are charged for schooling in your own domicile. The costs of attending vocational schools, universities of applied sciences or universities are generally reasonable compared to other countries. However, some institutes of education charge Swiss Abroad higher fees since their parents live and pay taxes abroad. In addition, living costs in Switzerland must be taken into account. These can be relatively high, even if your needs are small. As a result, you should reckon on average monthly costs of CHF 1400 to 1800 for a relatively cheap course of study. Even an apprentice's monthly salary of several hundred francs is not enough to cover all living costs.

So young people are faced with a problem when it comes to financing their studies. In principle their parents are primarily responsible for their financial support. However, if their means are insufficient to pay for a course of study in Switzerland, it is possible to apply for a grant from the home canton.

Grants

Since every canton defines its own

Studying in Switzerland for several terms

Swiss universities, Federal Institutes of Technology and universities of applied sciences have signed a Socrates-Erasmus agreement with over 100 universities throughout the EU. Switzerland cannot participate officially in the Socrates programme since it is not a member of the EU or the EER, and no bilateral accord with the EU has yet been signed in the education area. However, the Swiss parliament makes funds available to allow universities to take part as so-called "silent partners". Students from the EU can spend two semesters at a Swiss university.

To apply for the Erasmus programme, a bilateral agreement must exist between your university and the Swiss university. Information is available from the Conference of Swiss University Rectors, ERASMUS Switzerland Office, Sennweg 2, CH-3012 Berne, www.crus.ch. Various Swiss universities have also signed additional exchange agreements with universities outside the EU. Check with your university.

regulations on student grants, the criteria for eligibility and the amount vary. The financial subsidy from the home canton is indexed to the parents' income and assets as well as the expected living costs and course fees. Generally speaking, only state-recognised courses given at public institutes of education are supported. An ap-

plication for a grant is processed only when the applicant has been accepted for a course. However, it is possible and recommended to make preliminary enquiries. Since cantonal grants seldom cover all the costs, it is essential that applicants find a secondary source of income. Several private institutions such as the Association for

the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS) offer grants supplementary to cantonal grants. Dual citizens in particular should enquire about the possibility of a grant from their second country of nationality.

Accommodation

Finding suitable accommodation may present another problem. If possible, young Swiss Abroad should arrange to stay with relatives or friends before beginning their studies in Switzerland. University letting agencies can help you to find a cheap room or share an apartment with others. Rooms in student and apprentice homes are much in demand and must be reserved in good time. Additionally, young Swiss Abroad can obtain a list of accommodation from the AJAS.

Information sources

Information on educational questions and professional apprenticeships is available from the relevant institutions, careers advisory centres and the AJAS. For information on further education and post-graduate studies, it is best to contact the relevant careers advisory centres and universities directly. The staff of the AJAS advises young Swiss Abroad on questions concerning education and issues information sheets as well as contact addresses. They can also help with applications for grants. Their main focus is on providing information on post-school studies.

For further information on education in Switzerland, please contact the Association for the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS), Alpenstr. 26, PO Box, CH-3000 Berne 16, Tel. +41 31 351 61 40, Fax +41 31 351 61 50, www.aso.ch, ajas@aso.ch. Other useful Internet addresses on education are given on the OSA page in the previous issue of the Swiss Review (No. 3).

Patricia Messerli, Service for the Swiss Abroad, EDA

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

"For a minimum basic insurance at affordable health insurance premiums ('mini-Max' Initiative)"

(until 9 July 2002)

Federal Democratic Union, EDU, Central Secretariat, PO Box, CH-3607 Thun

"National Bank profits for the AHV"

(until 10 October 2002)

Committee for a secure AHV PO Box 105, CH-4011 Basle

Overview of Swiss institutes of higher education

Switzerland boasts ten universities in total. Five are located in German-speaking Switzerland, four in French-speaking Switzerland and one in the Ticino. Two Federal Institutes of Technology in Zurich and Lausanne complete the list of university-level institutions in Switzerland. Basle, founded in 1460, is Switzerland's oldest university, while Lugano, founded in 1996, is the youngest. Zurich University has a roll-call of 20,598 students for the current study year, while only 256 are enrolled at the University of Lucerne.

In 1997, in addition to its universities, Switzerland established seven regional "Universities of Applied Sciences" (Fachhochschulen) in Berne, North-Western Switzerland, Eastern Switzerland, Central Switzerland, Western Switzerland, Italian-speaking Switzerland, and Zurich. In all they comprise 200 different colleges.