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Gaining life experience in Switzerland

What to do after finishing compulsory education or high school? Often the best answer is to take a year out. There is a plethora of gap year opportunities to choose from in Switzerland.

Go to university? Do vocational training? Or look for a job? Many young people ponder these questions once they have left school. Making the right choice is not always easy, which is why gap years are a popular option in Switzerland.

Bridge-year courses

Bridge-year courses, of which there are many, used to be referred to as the “tenth school year”. They are run by the cantons and can vary considerably in nature. On average, a bridge-year programme will last six to 12 months. Many help to fill gaps in schooling or provide guidance on choosing a profession. This will often include helping people to find apprenticeships.

Voluntary work

In return for doing voluntary work, you will receive free board/lodging and possibly a small amount of pocket money. Many volunteers like to work on farms. Agriviva is a body that organises agricultural placements for some 1,500 young volunteers from around the world each year. Swiss Abroad also take advantage of these opportunities. For example, Yacyia Robinson from Australia spent this summer working at a family farm in the canton of Solothurn. “I definitely want to be working with animals in future,” says Robinson, who developed a particular affection for the cows.

Internship

Internships provide an in-depth insight into the world of work. From hospitality and healthcare, to media and construction – almost all professions offer work placements. Most of these are advertised on various online platforms. When applying for an internship, you must provide a CV, cover letter and references – just like you would if you were applying for a permanent job. Interns are treated as employees and usually receive a small wage. To gain admission to a university of applied sciences, you normally need to have been on a work placement for several months.

Movetia offers a language assistantship programme that allows students from abroad to gain initial work experience by helping out for a year as a language assistant at an upper secondary school or vocational school.

Young Australian Yacyia Robinson (left) with her “Agriviva parents” Stefan and Maria Marti, alongside “Fuba” the cow. (Photo: Julia Spahr, “Schweizer Bauer”).



Au pair

Working as an au pair for a family with children can be an interesting experience for young men and women alike. Although the remuneration is nothing to write home about, you not only receive free board and lodging but are also given enough spare time to attend language courses and get to know Switzerland better.

Language courses

Intensive language courses allow you to immerse yourself in the language of your choice. Numerous private schools in Switzerland offer language courses for every level. We recommend that you aim for a course that earns you a recognised language certificate.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Information sheets on the relevant options are available to order free of charge from education-suisse by email (info@educationsuisse.ch). Education-suisse also has a Facebook page, which now also includes a closed group for all young Swiss Abroad who are currently furthering their education in Switzerland.

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