

# School and Education

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# Education System

The Swiss education system is outstanding in that it allows for continued personal advancement. Vocational training is highly valued. It is the basis for further training and for higher education.

## Structure / Authorities

In Switzerland there are three consecutive levels of education:

- Compulsory education (Volksschule: Kindergarten, Primarschule und Sekundarstufe I)
- Vocational education and training, or middle school (Sekundarstufe II)
- Universities of applied sciences / universities, and professional education and training (Tertiärstufe).

The state is responsible for all three levels and responsibilities are shared by the federation, cantons, and communities. For this reason schools and school systems may vary according to canton.

## Compulsory Education

There is 11 years of compulsory education in Canton Aargau. It begins when the child is 4 years old. Parents can be fined if their children are absent from school without notification or reason. Young people under the age of 16 who are new residents have a right to attend compulsory school. Young people over the age of 16 who are new residents can find out about their options at the counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!).

## Education Following Compulsory Education

The far majority of young people continue their studies following compulsory education. Vocational education and training (apprenticeship, Berufslehre) is the most frequent choice. This allows future access to professional education and training. Persons who receive a vocational diploma (Berufmaturität) are later able to attend universities of applied sciences. Approximately 20 percent of young people attend university preparatory school (gymnasiale Maturität) granting them direct access to universities.

## **Scholarships**

Scholarships (Stipendien) allow persons with little means to go to school or to obtain professional training. Scholarships provide financial support for education following compulsory education. Foreign residents of Canton Aargau might also be eligible for scholarships depending on the student's or parents' citizenship and type of permit. Additional information is provided by the cantonal administration's scholarship section (Sektion Stipendien).

## **Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)**

[www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/education-system](http://www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/education-system)

# Compulsory Education

Compulsory Education offers children a basic education which enables them access to further education. Public schools are free of charge.

## Registering a Child

Communities are responsible for the public schools. To register a child for public school one must contact the community of residence or the school administration.

## School Levels

Compulsory Education consists of three consecutive levels:

- 2 years of Kindergarten (Kindergarten).
- 6 years of primary school (Primarschule). Children with special needs or skills receive additional support.
- 3 years of upper-level school (Sekundarstufe). Upper level school includes three different school types (Realschule, Sekundarschule, Bezirksschule) with different performance levels.
- Non-German-speaking children receive special support at all levels. Detailed information is available in the Brochure „Schools in Canton Aargau“.

## Public School / Private School

Public school is free of charge. Boys and girls are taught together. The curriculum is confessionally neutral. Most children and young people attend public school (95%). There are private schools. In general, parents who wish to send their children to private school must pay for school themselves.

## Parents' Rights and Duties

Schools are obligated to inform parents of everyday school life and of their child's performance at school. For this reason schools conduct meetings between teachers and parents, parents' evenings (school information for parents), and information events. Most of these events are compulsory for parents. Parents are responsible for their child's attendance at school. If a child cannot attend (e.g. illness) parents must inform the school. They should also make sure that their child does homework. By taking a regular interest in homework and school projects they can support their child. For persons who are not yet familiar with the Swiss education system there are special information events which are often held in languages other than German.

## **Questions / Support**

Questions regarding school should always be directed to the teacher first. The teacher can also help when parents are in need of support. In return parents are the first contact should the teacher have questions regarding a child or a child's needs. In general, it is important that parents communicate and work with teachers. Mental or social difficulties can be handled by the school counselling service (Schulpsychologischer Dienst) which offers free support for children and their parents.

## **Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)**

[www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/compulsory-education](http://www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/compulsory-education)

# Vocational Education and Training / Middle School

Following compulsory education most young people choose to attend vocational education and training. In general, persons wishing to study at a university must obtain a diploma from a middle school. This is also possible through vocational education and training.

## Importance of Education

A good education and professional life are important. Performance during the years of compulsory education has an important influence on future options. Following compulsory education young people have various options to choose from to prepare themselves for professional life (Sekundarstufe II). Finding a good position without further education is difficult. The counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!) offers free support for young people and parents concerning continuing education and training.

## Vocational Education and Training

Following compulsory education most young people choose to attend vocational education and training (apprenticeship, Berufslehre). An apprenticeship involves young people acquiring the practical skills required for a profession through a work environment while also attending a professional school. There are more than 250 different professions to choose from. An apprenticeship requires between 2 and 4 years for completion. Young people must independently apply for an apprenticeship with a firm. They should begin searching for a position during the last two years of compulsory school. Schools help young people in this process, but parents' support is necessary. The counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!) offers free support. Young people who complete an apprenticeship can obtain a vocational diploma (Berufsmaturität) during or following vocational education and training.

## **Middle School**

Middle schools (Mittelschulen) offer a broad general education. These schools prepare students for an academic education at universities or universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen). There are middle schools through which students earn a university preparatory diploma and there are middle schools where students earn a specialized or vocational diploma. The university preparatory diploma grants direct access to universities. The specialized or vocational diploma grants direct access to universities of applied sciences. These are open to students with university preparatory diplomas as well. Specialized or vocational diploma students may attend universities by passing an exam. In some cases, additional conditions may apply.

## **Bridge Programmes**

Young people who move to Canton Aargau between the ages of 16 and 21 may, under certain circumstances, participate in a bridge programme (Brückenangebot) offered by the cantonal school for professional education (Kantonale Schule für Berufsbildung, ksb). The main emphasis is on preparation for work. A bridge programme supports young people in finding an internship or apprenticeship. Those interested should contact the counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!) or the service Pathfinder (Anlaufstelle Wegweiser).

## **Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)**

[www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/vocational-education-and-training--middle-school](http://www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/vocational-education-and-training--middle-school)

# Universities / Universities of Applied Sciences

There are two different types of universities in Switzerland. The universities and the universities of applied sciences. Questions concerning admission on the basis of a foreign diplomas should be directed to the universities.

## Higher Education System

There are two different types of universities in Switzerland. The universities and the universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) (Tertiärstufe). Universities of applied sciences are more practice-oriented and universities are more theory-oriented. The two types are equal and organised according to the European Bologna System. On completion one receives a Bachelor's or Master's degree which is recognised throughout Europe.

## Admission

Universities have varying admission policies. Swiss university preparatory school diplomas guarantee access to universities. Foreign diplomas will not always be recognised. Questions regarding the recognition of foreign diplomas for admission will be answered by the respective universities. In general, very good German skills are required. An exception is made for courses of study which are offered entirely in English. The counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!) will provide free information on higher education opportunities.

## Professional Education and Training

In addition to the universities professional education and training (höhere Berufsbildung) is a popular form of continuing one's education in Switzerland. This enables professionals to specialize and deepen their professional knowledge as well as their leadership skills. Professional education and training follows vocational education and training (apprenticeship, Berufslehre). A university preparatory school diploma is not necessary. The counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!) will provide free information on the various possibilities.

## Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

[www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/universities--universities-of-applied-sciences](http://www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/universities--universities-of-applied-sciences)



# Recognition of Qualifications

Foreign qualifications are not always valid in Switzerland. Under certain circumstances, it is possible to have qualifications validated. This is a requirement for some professions.

## Recognition

Persons with foreign qualifications can, under certain circumstances, have them validated in Switzerland. Validation confirms that the foreign qualification is the equivalent of the Swiss qualification. Regulated professions (e.g. healthcare professionals, teachers, etc.) require validation. Which agency is responsible for the validation process is dependent upon the profession or training. A fee is charged for the validation process. Additional information is provided by the national information centre for recognition of foreign qualifications (Nationale Kontaktstelle für Diplomanerkennung) or the counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!).

## Determining the Level of Qualification

A validation process is not necessary for unregulated professions. For these professions it is possible to request that the level of qualification be determined (Niveaubestätigung). This process determines the status of a foreign diploma relative to the Swiss education system. Such a determination can be helpful in finding employment. Additional information is provided by the national information centre for the recognition of foreign qualifications (Nationale Kontaktstelle für Diplomanerkennung) or the counselling centre for education and career in Canton Aargau (ask!).

## Professional Qualification Later in Life

Adults with professional experience who do not have a recognised qualification can still obtain a Swiss qualification through vocational education and training or professional education and training. The process varies according to previous training, experience, and age. Good German language skills are an essential prerequisite (Level B1/B2 CEFR). Those interested can contact the portal Aargau (Eingangsportal Aargau) for free advice. Obtaining a professional qualification betters one's position in the job market and grants access to continued education.

**Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets,  
brochures)**

[www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/recognition-of-qualifications](http://www.ciao-aargau.ch/en/school-and-education/recognition-of-qualifications)