



## **Training Teachers Who Shape the Future: Teacher Education in Switzerland**

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In Switzerland, teachers across all educational levels are trained at universities, with the majority receiving their education at universities dedicated to teacher training. Established and integrated into the system of higher education institutions in the early 2000s, universities of teacher education (UTE) are designed to train prospective teachers for primary and lower secondary levels, as well as for special needs education. Some of these universities of teacher education (UTE) are integrated into universities of applied sciences. Due to their practice-oriented degree programs and research focused on occupational fields, universities of teacher education are classified typologically as universities of applied sciences. At the national level, their legal foundation is established by the recognition regulation issued by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK). Teacher training for the eight-year primary level (including kindergarten or entry level) is typically conducted at universities of teacher education. The program spans three years and culminates in the awarding of a teaching diploma and a bachelor's degree. The program equips them with the vocational skills essential for the education and holistic development of primary school pupils. The program comprises subject sciences, subject didactics, educational sciences, and practical vocational training. Teacher training for the lower secondary level is primarily conducted at universities of teacher education and, in some cantons, at universities. The program spans 4.5 to 5 years and culminates in the awarding of a teaching diploma and a master's degree. The training equips students with the vocational skills essential for educating and supporting the development of lower secondary school pupils. Obtaining a teaching diploma for baccalaureate schools and upper secondary specialized schools requires both a bachelor's and a master's degree in a specific subject area. Depending on the canton, vocational training is undertaken either at universities of teacher education or at universities. The training for the teaching diploma equips candidates with the professional skills essential for educating and guiding the development of pupils at baccalaureate schools. The University of Basel also offers Bachelor and Master degrees in various disciplines for teacher education.

**Keywords:** training teachers, teacher education, universities specializing in teacher education, shape the future, Switzerland, University of Basel

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Dear Readers,

In Switzerland, teachers across all educational levels are trained at universities, with the majority receiving their education at universities dedicated to teacher training. The education and training of teaching staff for primary school levels (including kindergarten or the initial learning cycle), lower secondary levels, baccalaureate schools, upper secondary specialized schools, and professions in the field of special needs education are primarily provided by universities, with the majority offered by universities specializing in teacher education. Due to their practice-oriented degree programs and research focused on occupational fields, universities of teacher education are classified typologically as universities of applied sciences. However, they are governed under a distinct framework. At the national level, their legal foundation is established by the recognition regulation issued by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK). The degree programs in teacher education and training confer professional qualifications and encompass scientific components, teaching-specific modules, educational science elements, and practical training opportunities. They integrate theory with practical work and combine teaching with research. Teacher education and training are structured within a two-tier model, comprising Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, in accordance with the Ordinance of the University Council on the Coordination of Education at Swiss higher education institutions. Students' academic achievements and performance are assessed using ECTS credits. The duration of studies varies depending on the chosen degree program. The Master's degree is awarded based on scientific study. Teaching and professional qualifications are recognized across Switzerland (EDK, 2024a).

The pathway through the University of Teacher Education is typically selected to obtain a teaching diploma for the kindergarten/lower level, primary level, or lower secondary level. While the teaching diploma for the two lower levels can be completed in six semesters of full-time study (Bachelor's degree), obtaining a teaching diploma for the lower secondary level requires a minimum of nine semesters, including both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree. The pathway through the university is an option for a Sek I degree program, but it is mandatory for a Sek II degree program (teaching diploma for baccalaureate schools). After completing a university bachelor's degree in up to two teaching areas, students can switch to the University of Teacher Education for the master's phase, during which they complete their master's studies and obtain a teaching diploma for secondary school. If the goal is to obtain a teaching diploma for baccalaureate schools, the master's phase is completed at the university and supplemented by a 2–3 semester course in didactics and methodology at the University of Teacher Education (CCT-Career Counselling for Teachers, 2024).

The cantons, in collaboration with the Confederation, coordinate the higher education sector. The EDK holds responsibility for the recognition of university diplomas awarded to teachers. In accordance with Article 63a of the Federal Constitution, which addresses higher education, the Confederation and the cantons jointly oversee the

coordination and ensure quality assurance within the Swiss higher education sector (EDK, 2024b).

Established and integrated into the system of higher education institutions in the early 2000s, universities of teacher education (UTE) are designed to train prospective teachers for primary and lower secondary levels, as well as for special needs education. Some of these universities of teacher education (UTE) are integrated into universities of applied sciences. Additionally, part of teacher training is conducted at universities and, to a much lesser extent, at universities of applied sciences. Since their establishment in the early 2000s, universities of teacher education have experienced significant growth in student enrollment across all branches of study. By the 2023/24 academic year, approximately 23,600 students were enrolled in universities of teacher education (BFS, 2024).

### **Teacher for the Primary Level (Including Kindergarten or Entry Level)**

Preschool and primary teachers educate children aged 4–12, covering general education, music, and physical education subjects. Additionally, these professionals foster students' social skills and encourage both independent and collaborative learning (Berufsberatung, 2024a). Teacher training for the eight-year primary level (including kindergarten or entry level) is typically conducted at universities of teacher education. The program spans three years and culminates in the awarding of a teaching diploma and a bachelor's degree. Students are trained as generalists, enabling them to teach six or more subjects. The program equips them with the vocational skills essential for the education and holistic development of primary school pupils. The program comprises subject sciences, subject didactics, educational sciences, and practical vocational training. Students are required to complete 180 ECTS credits, 36 to 54 of which are allocated to practical vocational training (EDK, 2024c).

### **Teacher for Lower Secondary Level**

Teacher training for the lower secondary level is primarily conducted at universities of teacher education and, in some cantons, at universities. The program spans 4.5 to 5 years and culminates in the awarding of a teaching diploma and a master's degree. The training equips students with the vocational skills essential for educating and supporting the development of lower secondary school pupils. The program encompasses subject sciences, subject didactics, educational sciences, and practical vocational training. In the Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, students are required to complete 270 to 300 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 48 ECTS credits allocated to practical vocational training. Typically, students are trained to teach three to four subjects (EDK, 2024d). Teachers at the lower secondary level educate pupils in upper school, typically aged 12 to 16 years, across various performance levels. These educators specialize in teaching three to four subjects from their professional training, such as physical education, English, and mathematics. They design lesson plans and evaluate students' work and assessments. Additionally, they foster skills such as independent learning and teach learning strategies (Berufsberatung, 2024b).

### Teacher for Baccalaureate Schools and Upper Secondary Specialized Schools

Obtaining a teaching diploma for baccalaureate schools and upper secondary specialized schools requires both a bachelor's and a master's degree in a specific subject area. The subject-specific course of study is typically focused on two subjects taught at baccalaureate schools. Depending on the canton, vocational training is undertaken either at universities of teacher education or at universities. The training for the teaching diploma equips candidates with the professional skills essential for educating and guiding the development of pupils at baccalaureate schools. The vocational training encompasses subject didactics, educational sciences, and a practical component, the latter comprising a minimum of 15 ECTS credits. The subject-specific Bachelor's and Master's degrees typically span 4.5 to 5 years and are completed at a university. However, programs for teaching subjects such as Music and Visual Design are offered exclusively at universities of applied sciences. The vocational training consists of 60 ECTS credits, equivalent to one year of full-time study (EDK, 2024e).

### Training of VET Teachers

The education and training of vocational teachers—those working in training companies, VET schools, colleges of higher education, and job-related continuing education and training—are conducted at university institutions and other educational institutions. The education and training of VET teachers are regulated by the Confederation. The programs differ based on the educational level and the teaching workload, whether part-time or full-time (EDK, 2024a).

However, there are numerous alternative pathways into the teaching profession (CCT-Career Counselling for Teachers, 2024):

- It is also possible to enroll in a teaching diploma program at a university of teacher education without a Matura, provided that an admission procedure is completed, followed by an entrance examination (e.g., a supplementary examination or “admission sur dossier”). Additional information regarding admission to the FHNW University of Teacher Education is available [on their official platform](#).
- Specialist teachers at vocational schools often move into the education system directly from industry. They typically complete an apprenticeship alongside their teaching responsibilities, such as at the [Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training](#) in Zollikofen near Bern.
- Teachers are also in demand in [adult education](#), and there are various pathways to qualify for these roles.
- There are also numerous opportunities to teach **outside the formal school system**, such as working as a ski instructor or trainer.

The Aebli-Näf Foundation aims to advance teacher education in Switzerland by supporting the academic education and professional development of teacher educators. Contributions may be provided to cover the costs of shorter training or research stays, professional training, further education, research projects, development or implementation projects, as well as research and training-related events. The Aebli-Näf

Foundation also periodically awards prizes for outstanding achievements in the field of teacher training (Aebli-Näf Stiftung, 2024).

The University of Basel also offers Bachelor and Master degrees in various disciplines for teacher education. More information can be found on the [University of Basel website](#) (Universität Basel, 2025).

In summary, the training of teachers for the Swiss state school system typically occurs at the university level. Graduates obtain both a teaching diploma and an academic qualification, either a bachelor's or master's degree. The teaching diploma is recognized across Switzerland, irrespective of cantonal affiliation, provided that all legal requirements for diploma recognition are fulfilled. The fundamental prerequisite for commencing teacher training is a baccalaureate. Alternatively, an equivalent educational qualification may also be recognized. Regardless of the type of teacher training, the program consists of four subject areas. These include educational sciences, didactics, subject-specific training, and engagement with science and research in the relevant subject area (Bildung-Schweiz, 2024).

Sincerely,

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