

FEDERAL OFFICE
FOR INDUSTRY AND LABOUR

INFO-PARTNER

Vocational Training



In a country like Switzerland, poor in natural resources, labour is the most important factor of production. A prerequisite of quality production is adequately trained workers, and thus vocational training at all levels has taken on particular significance here. For this reason, school education and vocational training are of a very high standard in Switzerland. The unusually large number of opportunities for training in this country contribute in a major way to the professional advancement of the individual. The Swiss show in general a great readiness to learn, and there are many people who, apart from their daily work, improve their professional knowledge by attending lectures in the evenings or at weekends, or by taking courses in specialized schools.

During the last decades, the Confederation has contributed financially to vocational training at all levels. In 1971, the Confederation, the Cantons and the Communes spent a total of 4 milliard francs on education and training.

The School system in general

The public schools (primary and secondary) provide the basis for professional training. Basically the Cantons are responsible for the organisation of the educational system, from public school to university, but according to Art. 27 of the 1874 Federal Constitution, they are merely required to provide adequate primary education. This is free and compulsory, and must be exclusively under the direction of the State. In addition, it must be possible for followers of all religions to attend without fear of infringement of their beliefs

and the construction of vocational schools, as well as by taking other appropriate measures.

In 1971, 97 million Swiss francs were spent for this purpose.

The law on vocational training regulates in particular the period of apprenticeship chosen by a majority of young people after they have completed their compulsory years of schooling. The minimum age for beginning an apprenticeship is 15 years. Training in the different professions is covered by special regulations. These contain details of the designation of the profession, the length of the apprenticeship, the number of apprentices which an enterprise is entitled to train as compared to the number of skilled workers it employs, the teaching programme and the examination requirements for successful completion of the apprenticeship. At the end of 1971 there were 206 regulations for 271 professions. In 1971, 131'876 young people were in apprenticeship, of which 95'748 were boys and 36'128 girls. 95'352 chose to be trained and passed their examination in handicrafts and industry, whereas 36'524 passed it in commerce and trade. Apart, from this approximately 2'672 boys and girls were trained in public commercial schools; their diplomas are equal to the certificate of ability in the commercial field given after the final examination of apprenticeship. Scholarships permit many who would not otherwise have been able to afford it to pursue a professional training or apprenticeship.

During the whole apprenticeship, the apprentice must attend a vocational school. This schooling forms a part of the apprenticeship and completes the practical training. The number of annual schooling hours is 320 to 480 for the technical and 360 to 480 for the commercial schools. The plans established by the Federal authorities form the basis of the training programme. There also exist school workshops providing at the same time for the practical side of the apprenticeship and the compulsory courses of the professional school. However, in 1971, only 5 % of the apprentices in handicraft and industry were trained in such workshops.

All apprentices who have completed their apprenticeship are required to take their final examination. The candidates who successfully pass this examination, which is conducted by the cantonal authorities, receive the federal certificate of ability which confers on them the title of skilled worker in the trade (for example skilled carpenter, skilled dressmaker). Not only apprentices but also skilled workmen and employees who did not have the possibility of undergoing vocational training when they were younger, may now take this examination and receive the federal certificate of ability. They are authorized to take the examination when they have been trained in their profession or trade for twice the length of time prescribed for the apprenticeship, and if they have attended a vocational school or can prove that they have acquired their professional knowledge in some other way.

Numerous public and private vocational schools and courses are open for further training once the apprenticeship has been completed. Their object is to prepare first of all for higher examinations (master craftsman's examinations) which can be conducted, under the supervision of the federal authorities, by the professional associations. Any Swiss national may be admitted to these examinations, provided he is in full possession of his civil rights, has successfully passed the apprenticeship's final examination and worked at the trade for at least three years since completing his apprenticeship. Foreigners enjoy equal status of treatment if their State grants reciprocity. The tests cover not only the practical side of the trade but also the commercial and legal knowledge necessary for a worker to run a business on his own. The diploma confers on the holder the right to use the title specified in the examination rules and certified by law (i.e. master joiner, certified accountant, master electrician, etc.). In 22 professions or trades, only master craftsmen have the right to train apprentices. On the other hand, the diploma is not considered at Federal level to be a prerequisite for exercising a trade. However, many Cantons authorize only diploma holders to practise freely certain professions (electricians,

gas- and waterpipe-fitters, chimneysweeps). Until the end of 1971, 44'500 diplomas were issued, in 80 different professions or trades, to a total of 40'600 men and 3'900 women.

Amongst vocational schools, the Colleges of Technology of Biel, Brugg, Buchs, Burgdorf, Fribourg, Geneva, Le Locle, Lausanne, Lugano, Luzern, Muttens and Winterthur are especially important. They train engineers (of non-university level) for Architecture and Civil engineering, electrical and mechanical engineering, chemistry and watchmaking. During the winter term of 1971/72, 7'400 students attended these Colleges of Technology. Over 4'000 of them were in the mechanical and electrical engineering sections.

Agricultural schooling

The Federal Law of October 3, 1951 on the development of agriculture and the preservation of the peasantry (Law on Agriculture) regulates vocational training in agriculture in the same way as the Federal Law on vocational training does in other branches of the economy. The apprenticeship lasts not less than two years. The law contains regulations on teaching programmes apprenticeship and master's examinations, professional counselling, courses and lectures.

Candidates over 22 years of age, who can give proof of a minimum of 4 years of practical experience in agriculture and have successfully attended a school of agriculture, are authorized to take the vocational training examination in agriculture. Candidates of at least 28 years of age, who have exercised their profession for a 3 year term after passing the vocational training examination in agriculture, can be admitted to the master examination. The object of the latter is to establish whether the candidate has the required ability and general knowledge necessary to run an agricultural establishment on his own. 1'378 apprentices and 1'046 farmers went through the above-mentioned examinations in 1971.

Training in home economics

As a rule, the organization of this training is a matter for the Cantons. The Confederation supports it through subsidies, according to the Federal Vocational Training Law and the Agriculture Law. In many Cantons, girls are already being given a basic training in home economics (cooking, housekeeping, gardening) in public schools. Post-school domestic training, declared compulsory by a growing number of Cantons and Municipalities, contributes to the development of elementary knowledge. Increasing importance is attached to domestic science, which is considered as a basis for further education in home economics, nursing and social professions. This training lasts from one to two years and leads to the examination in domestic science. In 1971, 2'674 contracts for apprenticeship in home economics were concluded, of which about a fifth were in the farm sector. Numerous schools, which are as a rule boarding-schools, prepare girls for a course of longer duration, comprising all the branches of a household. Special schools for women teach primarily the art of sewing. Professional examinations on home economics are held for domestic servants and housekeepers. Besides this there exist schools for housekeeping in farms. The professional examination for farmers'wives is equivalent to the master examination for farmers.

The Universities

In this connection, one must also mention the universities, which are of great significance in professional training. Of the 9 universities in our country, only the two Federal Institutes of Technology, at which the natural sciences and technical subjects are taught, are Federal institutions. Apart from these, there are 7 cantonal universities (Basle, Berne, Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel and Zurich), and in St. Gallen^a graduate school of Economics, Business and public administration. The "Ecole des Beaux-Arts" in Geneva has a school of architecture at university level.

During the summer term of 1971 32'264 people, 7'316 of them foreigners, studied at the 7 cantonal universities; 9'808 of these, of which 1'135 were foreigners, studied at the Federal Institutes of Technology, and 1'597, of which 378 were foreigners, attended the Graduate School of St. Gallen.

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