

Education system

# Switzerland

described and compared with  
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of Switzerland. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Switzerland for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

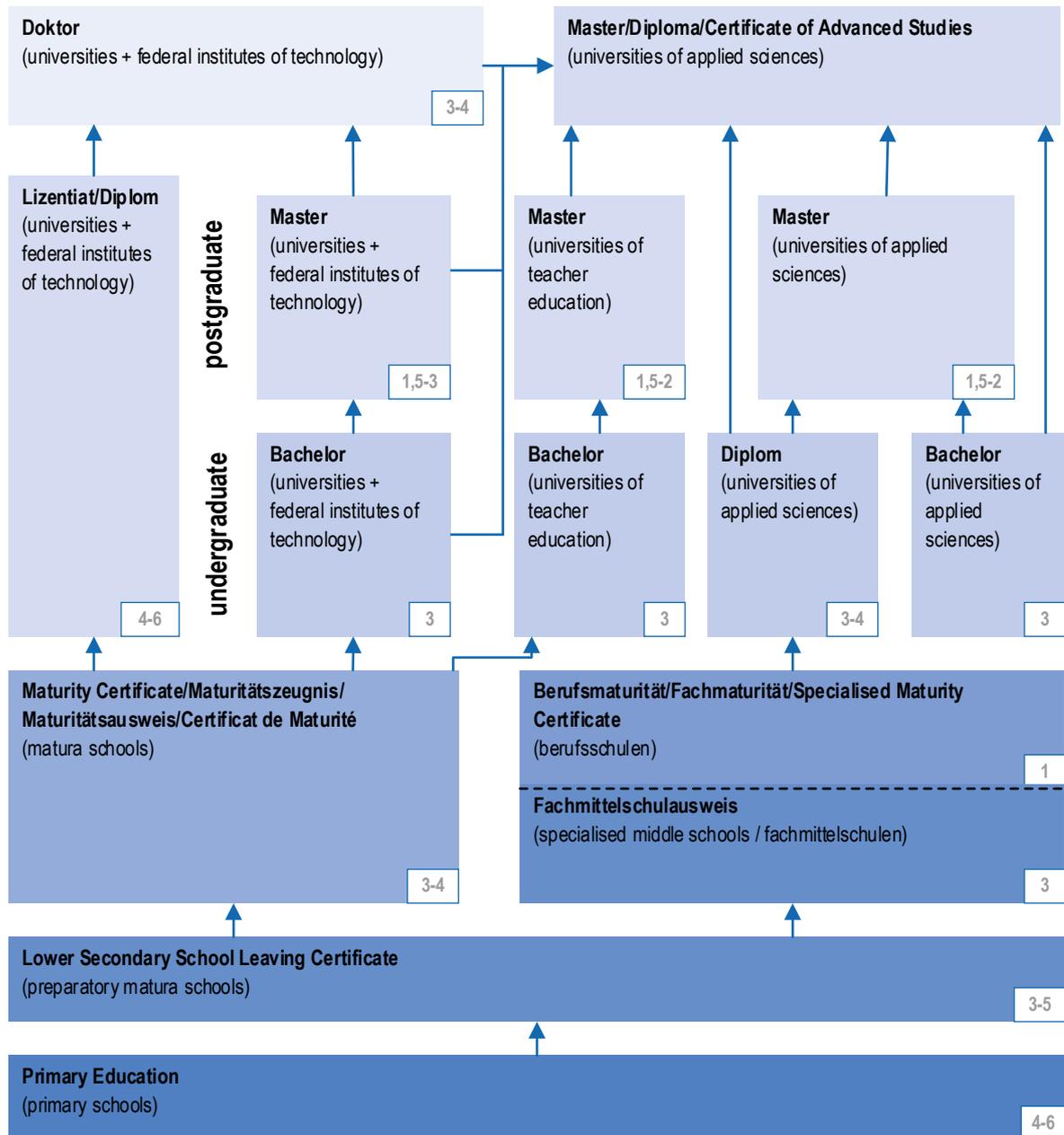
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We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.



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 Duration of education

## Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the EHEA and European qualifications framework. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification and QF-EHEA level	EQF level	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level	EQF level
<i>Berufsmaturität/ Fachmaturität/ Specialised Maturity Certificate</i>		HAVO diploma for the general education component	4
<i>Maturity Certificate/Maturitätszeugnis/ Maturitätsausweis/Certificat de Maturité</i>		VWO diploma	4+
<i>Diplom – 4 years (Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée)</i>		HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Bachelor (Fachhochschule/ Haute Ecole Spécialisée)</i>	1 <sup>st</sup>	HBO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Bachelor (University/ETH)</i>	1 <sup>st</sup>	WO bachelor's degree	6
<i>Master (Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée)</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	HBO master's degree	7
<i>Diplom/Diplôme/Lizentiat/Licence (University/ETH)</i>		WO master's degree	7
<i>Master (University/ETH)</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	WO master's degree	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- EHEA-QF = Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area. NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
- The EQF/[NLQF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).

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- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

## ■ Introduction

**Switzerland is a confederation (*Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft/Confédération Suisse/Confederazione Svizzera*), a federal republic consisting of 26 cantons, subdivided into 2800 communes. A total of four different languages are spoken throughout the various cantons: Switzerland has German, French, Italian and Romansh regions.**

Administratively, Switzerland is a federal republic. The national government and canton authorities are jointly responsible for education. Each canton has its own Department of Education. The government oversees education at a national level, while the cantons are responsible for compulsory education.

The Ministers of Education from each canton are represented in the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education/*Schweizerischen Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren/Conférence suisse des directeurs cantonaux de l'instruction publique* (EDK/CDIP). The main task of EDK/CDIP consists of coordinating and harmonizing cantonal policy in the area of primary and lower secondary education.

Each canton is free to determine the structure of its education system, based on guidelines for educational content and the organizational structure of schools determined by the EDK/CDIP. For this reason, the education system differs greatly from canton to canton. In an attempt to address this situation, the cantons have formulated the goal of further harmonizing the various education systems: *Harmonisierung der obligatorischen Schule* or *Harmonisation des structures scolaires* /Harmonisation of compulsory education (*HarmoS*).

The national government and cantonal authorities supervise the various universities in close collaboration with the Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS), a joint organization of the confederation and cantons charged with all university-related issues. The universities are represented in a joint organization known as Swiss Universities (formerly known as the *Rektorenkonferenz der Schweizer Universitäten/Conférence des recteurs des universités suisses* or Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, CRUS).

Higher education in Switzerland is run according to a binary system, in which a distinction is made between academic education and higher professional education.

Primary and lower secondary education is compulsory, from the age of 7 to 16. The Swiss education system is based around three official languages: German, French and Italian, depending on the language area in which the education is being provided. The academic year runs from September to June.

## ■ Primary and secondary education

### Primary education

Primary schools/*Ecoles primaires/Primarschulen* provide primary education (*educati3n primaire/primarstufe*) for the 6-12 age group. Primary education programmes have a duration of 4 to 6 years, this may vary from canton to canton. No certificate is awarded upon completion. Education is compulsory and free of access.

### Secondary education

Secondary education is divided into a lower secondary level for ages 12-15 and an upper secondary level for ages 13/14 to 16/17.

#### Lower secondary level

Lower secondary education or *enseignement de caractère prégymnasial / gymnasiale vorbereitung* is provided in grades 7 to 9 at *Preparatory Matura Schools*. Programmes last 3 to 5 years, depending on the canton. Upon completion, pupils receive a Lower secondary school leaving certificate or *Certificat d'études secondaires*. This certificate grants admission to the upper level of general secondary education and vocational education.

Most cantons subsequently offer a tenth school year to facilitate the transition between lower and upper secondary level.

#### Upper secondary level

The upper level of general secondary education (*Matura school education*) is provided by *Matura Cantonal / Grammar Schools / Lycées / Ecoles de Maturité Gymnasiale* or *Gymnasiale Maturitätsschulen*. The nominal length of the study programme is generally 3 to 4 years, depending on the canton. The study programme generally starts in grade 9 or 10 (age 13 or 14) and has a nominal length of 4 years. If the study programme has a duration of 3 years (from grade 10), pupils in grade 9 must receive preparatory matura education. In German-language areas, this type of education can start in grade 7, with the nominal study programme lasting a total of 6 years.

Education generally comprises 36 hours of lessons per week, and consists of seven core subjects (*Grundlagefächer*), one main subject (*Schwerpunktfach*) and one supplementary subject (*Ergänzungsfach*). The *schwerpunktfach* is part of the curriculum during the final 2 years and comprises 6 hours of lessons per week, divided over two subjects. The *ergänzungsfach* is on the curriculum during the final year and comprises 4 hours of lessons per week.

The seven core subjects consist of the three official languages (German, French and English), mathematics, *naturwissenschaften* (physics, chemistry and biology),

*geistes- und sozialwissenschaften* (history, geography and basic economics and law) and *bildnerische gestalten* (fine arts education).

Pupils take a final examination (*Matura examination*) at *Grundlage* level for all core subjects, at *Schwerpunkt* level for one subject and at *Ergänzungs*-level for one subject. The final examination may also include an elective subject. The final examination concludes with a *Maturitätsarbeit*. After having successfully completed the *Matura examination*, pupils are awarded the *Maturity Certificate/Maturitätszeugnis /Maturitätsausweis* or *Certificat de Maturité*.

On average, pupils will be 19 years of age by the time they obtain this certificate. Pupils will have enjoyed at least 12 years of education between the start of primary education and obtainment of the *Maturitätszeugnis*. This type of education is specifically geared towards preparing pupils for further study at a university.

In terms of level, the *Maturity Certificate/Maturitätszeugnis/Maturitätsausweis/Certificat de Maturité* is comparable to a VWO diploma.

### **Secondary vocational education**

After having completed the compulsory 9 years of primary and lower secondary education, pupils can also opt to attend a vocational education programme at one of the *Berufsschulen*, *Ecoles de Culture Générale* and *Fachmittelschulen* (FMS). The latter institutes are an offshoot of the former *Diplommittelschulen*. These study programmes have a nominal length of 3 years. Study programmes consisting solely of vocational education conclude with a *Certificate of Specialised Middle School/Special Baccalaureat/Fachmittelschulenausweis/Certificat de l'Ecole de culture générale*. These certificates do not offer direct access to higher education. This will require completion of a supplementary study programme with a length of no more than 1 year.

There are also various study programmes consisting of both general and vocational subjects. The nominal duration of these programmes is 4 years. These study programmes are provided at *Fachmittelschulen*, *Specialised Middle Schools* and *Specialised Baccalaureate Schools*. General education consists of the subjects language, mathematics, natural sciences, *gesellschaftsfächer*, *müsische fächer* and sports. Successful completion of these study programmes leads to a *Berufsmaturität/Fachmaturität/Specialised Maturity Certificate*. These certificates offer access to higher professional education at one of the *Fachhochschulen*.

In terms of level, the *Berufsmaturität/Fachmaturität/Specialised Maturity Certificate* is comparable to a HAVO diploma for its general education component.

### Post-secondary education

Hotel management schools provide programmes at post-secondary level in the area of hotel management and tourism. These institutions provide non-university education, with the exception of the *Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne*: this institution is a university of applied sciences. Most hotel management schools are not recognized by the Swiss Federal Government. Some institutions are accredited by their local canton.

In order to be recognized as a hotel management institution by the Swiss Federal Government, the institution must offer programmes in one of the official Swiss languages and have authorization to issue the federal diploma of “*Restaurateur-Hôtelier HF*”, “*Hôtelier-Restaurateur ES*” or *Ristoratore-albergatore SSS*”. These programmes are provided at post-secondary level and have a nominal length of 3 years.

## ■ Admission to higher education

The *Maturitätszeugnis* or *Maturitätsausweis/Certificat de Maturité* provides access to the entire higher education system. In some cases, a higher education institution may also apply supplementary or specific requirements for each individual study programme. The certificate of secondary education must be accredited by both the *Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft* and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK/CDIP).

A secondary education certificate accredited solely by the canton (*Kantonale Maturität*) does not provide the same rights as the *Eidgenössische Maturität*.

A *Berufsmaturität/Fachmaturität/Specialized Maturity Certificate* will only provide access to higher professional education at a *Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée*.

## ■ Higher education

Like the Netherlands, Switzerland has a binary higher education system. *Fachhochschulen* (including *Musik- und Kunsthochschulen*) provide higher professional education while *Universitäten* and *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschulen* (ETH) provide academic education.

Switzerland has a total of ten universities, two federal technical universities, eight specialized universities of applied sciences and fifteen teacher-training institutions. Swiss higher education institutions enjoy a great degree of autonomy. As a result, study programmes, entry level requirements and admission procedures tend to vary a great deal. The programmes provided in German-speaking areas differ from those provided in French-speaking areas in terms of duration and content.

As of the 2001/2002 academic year, Swiss higher education institutions also offer bachelor's and master's degree programmes. Students also still take part in traditional *Diplom/Diplôme/Licence/Lizentiat* programmes.

## ■ University education

Academic education is provided by ten *Universitäten* and two *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschulen* (federal institutes of technology). The ten universities are divided over all regions: five in the German region in Basel, Bern, Lucerne, St Gallen and Zurich, three in the French region located in Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchatel, one in Lugano, the Italian region and one bilingual university (German and French) in Fribourg. The federal technical universities are located in the German region in Zürich: *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETHZ)*, with the second located in the French region in Lausanne: *Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)*.

Most universities offer programmes in the fields of law and social studies, mathematics and natural sciences and the humanities. Half of all universities also provide programmes in the area of medicine. Various universities solely offer programmes in a limited number of fields.

### ***Diplom/Diplôme/Licence/Lizentiat* programmes**

The nominal duration of these traditional programmes is 4 to 6 years, depending on the programme. After 1 and 2 years, students are generally required to take an interim examination, leading to the *Vordiplomprüfung/Propédeutique/Examen Préliminaire* and *Vordiplomprüfung/Zwischenprüfung/Propédeutique/Examen Préliminaire II*, respectively. These examinations must be completed successfully in order to take part in a programme. The programme generally consists of a 2-year basic training programme (*Grundstudium*) and a 2-year advanced programme (*Vertiefungsstudium*), with a more in-depth focus on subject content.

Once the nominal 4-year programme has been completed, students have one semester to write their final paper (*Diplomarbeit*). Technical programmes and programmes in the area of dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary science last 5 years, while studies in the area of medicine have a nominal length of 6 years.

The programmes lead to the *Diplom/Diplôme* or *Licence/Lizentiat*, depending on the specialization and focus of the programme:

- *Licence/Lizentiat*: programmes awarding this title are usually those in arts or social sciences, rarely in the natural sciences. The programme focuses on a single major and two minors, or two majors.
- *Diplom/Diplôme*: programmes in the natural or social sciences usually award this title; these are programmes with a single major.

In terms of level, the *Diplom/Diplôme* or *Licence/Lizentiat* is comparable to a WO master's degree.

### **Bachelor's-master's programmes**

The nominal duration of the bachelor's programmes (first cycle programme) at universities and federal technical universities is 3 years (180 ECTS). Successful completion of the programme leads to a bachelor's degree stating the relevant field, such as Bachelor of Arts/of Science/of Law/of Theology.

In terms of level, a bachelor's degree (EHEA-QF 1<sup>st</sup> cycle/EQF level 6) obtained at a *Universität* or *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule* is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree. Full description of all [EQF levels](#).

The subsequent master's programmes (second cycle programme) last 1½ to 2 years (90-120 ECTS). The master's programme in the area of medicine has a nominal length of 3 years. The second cycle programme sees a more in-depth focus on subject content, building on the knowledge acquired during the first cycle. The programme concludes with the writing of a final paper (*Masterarbeit*). After having completed the programme, students obtain a master's degree stating the relevant field, such as a Master of Arts/of Science/of Law/of Theology/of Medicine.

In terms of level, a master's degree (EHEA-QF 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle/EQF level 7) obtained at a *Universität* or *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule* is comparable to a WO master's degree. Full description of all [EQF levels](#).

### **PhD**

The third cycle of university education is solely provided at universities and federal technical universities (ETH). In order to be admitted to the PhD phase, students must obtain a higher education master's degree with good results. Most programmes last 3 to 4 years, and comprise independent research which may or

may not be combined with an educational programme. After having publicly defended their thesis, students are awarded the degree of *Doktor*.

## ■ Higher professional education

In Switzerland, higher professional education is provided by *Fachhochschulen/Hautes Ecoles Spécialisées* (Universities of Applied Sciences). The education provided at these institutions is practically and professionally-oriented.

### **Diplom/Diplôme programmes**

These programmes have a nominal duration of 3 to 4 years and are of a more professionally-oriented nature. Disciplines include technology and information technology, architecture, agriculture, social work and art.

The programme offers access to the labour market or to a master's or advanced master's programme in higher professional education.

In terms of level, a *Diplom* obtained at a *Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée* following a nominal 4-year programme is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree.

### **Bachelor's-master's programmes**

The nominal duration of bachelor's programmes (first cycle programme) at a *Fachhochschule* usually is 3 years (180 ECTS). Successful completion of the programme leads to a Bachelor of Arts/of Science stating the relevant field, such as Bachelor of Arts in Music or Bachelor of Science in *Automobiltechnik*. The associated master's programmes (second cycle programme) last 1½ to 2 years (90-120 ECTS). Successful completion of the programme leads to a Master of Science/of Arts stating the relevant field, such as Master of Arts in Music.

In terms of level, a bachelor's degree (EHEA-QF 1<sup>st</sup> cycle/EQF level 6) obtained at a *Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée* is comparable to an HBO bachelor's degree. Full description of all [EQF levels](#).

In terms of level, a master's degree (EHEA-QF 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle/EQF level 7) obtained at a *Fachhochschule/Haute Ecole Spécialisée* is comparable to an HBO master's degree. Full description of all [EQF levels](#).

**Weiterbildung/Further education**

*Fachhochschulen* provide such further education programmes. In most cases, admission will require a higher education bachelor's degree. These are specialized advanced programmes that do not lead to a doctorate. The programmes involve a study load of 10, 30 or 60 ECTS. Depending on the study programme of choice, students obtain a Certificate of Advanced Studies, Diploma of Advanced Studies or the degree of Master of Advanced studies.

**Pedagogische Hochschulen**

*Pedagogische Hochschulen* provide teacher training programmes. These are 3-year programmes (180 ECTS) resulting in obtainment of a bachelor's degree and 1½ to 2-year advanced programmes resulting in obtainment of a master's degree (90-120 ECTS).

## ■ Assessment systems

The Swiss education system applies a wide range of assessment systems, which vary from canton to canton. The most common assessment systems are described below.

The higher and secondary education system applies a 1-6 grade system, with 4 representing the minimum passing grade.

Numerical grade	Letter grade	Description	Meaning
6	A	<i>Ausgezeichnet/sehr gut/très bien</i>	Excellent
5	B	<i>Gut/bien</i>	Good
4	C	<i>Genügend/mittelmässig, satisfaisant/suffisant</i>	Satisfactory
3-2	D	<i>Ungenügend/insuffisant</i>	Unsatisfactory

The higher education system applies a 1-10 grade system, with 5 representing the minimum passing grade.

Numerical grade	Description	Meaning	Numerical grade
10-9	<i>Ausgezeichnet/sehr gut/très bien</i>	Excellent	10-9
8-7	<i>Gut/bien</i>	Good	8-7
6-5	<i>Genügend/mittelmässig, satisfaisant/suffisant</i>	Satisfactory	6-5
4-2	<i>Ungenügend/insuffisant</i>	Unsatisfactory	4-2
1	<i>Schlecht/mauvais</i>	Fail	1

Higher education institutions also apply the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), in which 60 ECTS represents one academic year and each credit represents a study load of 25-30 hours per week.

More information on the ECTS system is available in the [ECTS Users' Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.

## ■ Bologna process

As of the 2001/2002 academic year, Swiss higher education institutions also offer bachelor's and master's degree programmes. In 2008, approximately 85 per cent of all programmes were structured according to the bachelor's-master's degree system. As of the 2010/2011 academic year, only 7 per cent of all students take part in traditional programmes.

Information on the current situation can be found on [the European Higher Education Area \(EHEA\) website](#).

## ■ Qualification frameworks

In November 2009, the national Rectors' Conferences (Swiss Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education) approved the Qualifications Framework of the Swiss Higher Education Area (nqf.ch-HS). The nqf.ch-HS has taken over the descriptors of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and includes three qualification levels, namely *Stufe 1 – Bachelor*, *Stufe 2 – Master* and *Stufe 3 – Doktorat*. In June 2011, the Swiss University Conference adopted the nqf.ch-HS, insofar as it applies to the universities. The implementation will be coordinated by 'Swiss Universities' (formerly known as CRUS).

More information on the Qualifications Framework of the Swiss Higher Education Area (nqf.ch-HS) is available on the [website of Swiss Universities](#).

## ■ Accreditation and quality assurance

The *Agentur für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung (AAQ)*, Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance, carries out institutional accreditation in the Swiss Higher Education Area, also see the [AAQ website](#).

Decisions on accreditation of institutions and programmes can be found on the [website of the Swiss Accreditation Council \(Schweizerische Akkreditierungsrat\)](#).

An overview of all recognized higher education institutions is available on the Swiss Universities [website](#).

## ■ International treaties

Switzerland signed the Lisbon Convention in 1998 and ratified it in 1999.

## ■ Diploma Supplement

As of 2000 all *Fachhochschulen* issue the Diploma Supplement (DS). Universities issue the Diploma Supplement for all new bachelor's and master's programmes. The DS structure has been harmonized with the European Diploma Supplement format. The DS is issued in two languages (English and German, French or Italian).

More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the [Europass website](#) and on the [website of Swiss Universities](#).

## ■ Composition of file

Secondary school certificates usually consist of several pages. The certificate of secondary education must be accredited by both the *Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft* and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK/CDIP).

Graduates of higher education programmes are usually issued two documents: a single certificate stating the examination results and a certificate granting the holder the relevant official title (such as Licence/*Lizentiat* or *Diplom/Diplôme*). The Diploma Supplement (bi-lingual) is issued at all new bachelor's and master's programmes.

## ■ Overview of higher education institutions

[Website of Swiss Universities](#), including an overview of all recognised higher education institutions in Switzerland.

## ■ Useful links

- [Website of the Swiss Universities](#) and also [Swiss ENIC](#), offering information on the Swiss education system and an [overview of all institutions and study programmes](#) in Switzerland, and information about the [qualification framework in the Swiss Higher Education Area](#) (nqf.ch-HS).
- [Website van de Swiss Media Institute on Education and Culture](#) featuring information on the Swiss education system.
- [Website of the Schweizerische Agentur für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung \(AAQ\)/Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance](#).
- [Website of the Schweizerische Akkreditierungsrat](#) (Swiss Accreditation Council).