

International Schooling for Tomorrow Forum Forum international L'école de demain

June 6–8th, 2004

Toronto, Canada

6 au 8 juin 2004

ADDITIONAL COUNTRY PAPERS:
SWITZERLAND



Supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education
Avec la participation du ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario



OECD Schooling for Tomorrow – Toronto-Meeting June 2004

Swiss Country Note¹

Swiss context and environment

- Switzerland is a small country with approximately 7 millions of inhabitants. National languages are German (67 %), French (20 %), Italian (10 %) and Romansh (3 %).
- It was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that modern Switzerland took shape, with its industries, its tourism and its financial services. Agricultural Switzerland of 19th century was transformed into an industrial country. Today, the structure of the economy features a high degree of specialisation, the presence of large multinationals and a strong banking sector. Despite its small size and very limited population, Switzerland possesses a very attractive market for European businesses. The first reason for this is the country's wealth.
- Switzerland is a confederation comprising 26 cantons and half-cantons. This federalist system is still in force today². Endowed with their own constitutions, their own governments and their own laws, the cantons have the right to legislate in certain areas. For example, they enjoy broad powers in areas such as education, public health, land-use planning, the preservation of law and order, and judicial organisation. Confederation and cantons share responsibilities in the education sector (e.g. Confederation is responsible for professional education).
- Traditionally, the upper secondary sector is divided on two main tracks: 2/3 of young people are following a professional education, 25% are following a general instruction. Tertiary education is divided primarily into two areas – that of the more academically-oriented higher education institutions and that of advanced vocational training.

Reforms of the last decade

In 1990, Switzerland passed a review of national policies for education which influenced national policies for education of the last decade.

¹The views expressed in this paper are those of Mr. Andri Gieré of the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology, Switzerland.

² The federal Constitution stipulates how powers shall be divided between the Confederation and the cantons. Article 3 of the Constitution states that the cantons shall “exercise all rights which are not transferred to the Confederation”. The cantons are thus sovereign states, as long as that sovereignty is not limited by the Constitution. They exercise all of the rights that are not assigned to the Confederation. They themselves decide what measures to enact in their areas of jurisdiction. Even so, the Confederation and the cantons work together and lend each other mutual support. The cantons are consulted regarding some of the Confederation's undertakings, and lawmaking in particular. In return, the cantons are required to enforce federal law as it is defined in the Constitution and federal legislation. But federal law takes priority over cantonal law. The Confederation monitors the cantons' compliance with federal law. The expression “co-operative federalism” is used to summarise this system.

- A sharp decline in the number of vocational diplomas in the late 1980s, the numbers have been stabilising. The recent creation of a vocational diploma (maturité professionnelle) in 1993 should also pave the way for the development of vocational curricula. This vocational diploma was based on a practical training and enables young people to take up study at a university of applied sciences (UAS).
- During the 1990's, responsible bodies took measures to enhance autonomy of compulsory school institutions and to create proper school management.
- Patterns for quality development / assurance have been developed during the 1990's in favour of the compulsory school institutions.
- In the early 1990's, special measures tended to enhance postgraduate programs in universities and higher professional education.
- In 1995, the Swiss Government and the cantons decided to reform the general secondary school diploma (maturité gymnasiale). The new regulations call for a single type of academic diploma (until then there had been five), a reduction in the number of subjects and examinations, and the introduction of a thesis requirement. These reforms are fully operational since 2003.
- During the 1990s, most (cantonal) university act has been revised, strengthening primarily university's autonomy and responsibility (following the principles of New Public Management).
- A major step in Swiss education system was the creation of the seven universities of applied sciences in 1997 (federal act of 1995). UAS can boast the following advantages:
 - o Short courses of study, of three or four years.
 - o Scientific instruction closely tied in with a corresponding profession and field of activity, enabling students to make a seamless transition to working life.
 - o A scientific teaching staff in constant contact with the world of labour.
 - o Students who are generally more familiar than university students with the world of work, and who have clear ideas of their career objectives.
- Closely related to the creation of the UAS was the transformation of former teacher training institutions (situated on various levels) to pedagogical universities (located on UAS-level); this process is now reaching completion.
- By the end of 2002, Swiss Federal Parliament adopted a new law on professional education. One of the main goals is the dissociation of qualifications and specific training programs in order to increase the flexibility of the qualification system. This reform is based on exhaustive experience in some important sectors of professional education, i.e. 'professional exams' and 'higher professional exams', federal exams for general maturity or professional maturity, professional qualification without apprenticeship. This type of qualification can be considered as an appropriate answer to the growing need for modular education programs.

Actual discussions on policy strategy

- Swiss university sector (Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences) is adopting the principles of the Bologna Declaration by restructuring its study programs (modularisation / ECTS) and introducing new degrees (bachelor, master).

- Steering and control of the national education system (new article on higher education in the Swiss Constitution, new funding mechanisms).
- Equity of access to qualification programs (marked differences between the cantons).
- Improved permeability between general and professional education on all levels.
- Measures to meet cultural and social heterogeneity as well as different endowments.
- Intensifying early childhood education.
- “Partnership for education”: Partners helping schools.
- Modularisation of training programs
- Public funding of life long learning and continuous education (training programs presently under the responsibility of the cantons or private offers)
- A debate is ongoing on national level concerning language teaching in compulsory school (primary and lower secondary school): Some cantons are changing their curricula by introducing English language teaching before teaching a second national language, while some regions are concerned about national cohesion. The responsible bodies of the cantons met an agreement by introducing learning of two foreign languages on primary level and by defining competence-levels for both languages (second national language and English) by the end of compulsory education (= end of lower secondary level).

Programmes and initiatives for long-term reflection and system-wide innovation

During the last decade, the bodies responsible for education at the different levels are approaching a much more systemic view of the education system(s), fully according to one of the OECD-recommendations of the 1990-review. National coordination is strengthened, notably by voluntary cooperation between cantons. On this purpose, there are different measures ongoing:

- Confederation and cantons are trying to build up a national education monitoring for better understanding the interactions between different parts of the overall system and for gathering information for better steering of the system using a better knowledge-base.
- Cantons published recently a new study on further development of the overall system, based on the OECD-SFT-Toolbox (TransFormation – Quel système de formation pour un apprentissage à vie? http://www.edk.ch/PDF_Downloads/Dossiers/Stub20B.pdf, French). Different scenarios have been developed (personalisation, particularisation, and equilibration). According to this publication, key issues are the following:
 - o Interaction between labour market and education system
 - o Permeability between general and professional education, but also between education system and labour market
 - o Increasing importance of employability aspects in defining objectives of curricula versus independence of economic aspects for education system
 - o Modularisation of curricula for more individualised programs versus fragmentation of knowledge-base
 - o Strengthening autonomy of education institutions (management, finances), decreasing influence of government / administration, steering by contract and global budget allocation

- Increasing importance of teacher training in a complex and individualised education context
- Cantons are examining a system change by introducing to compulsory schools a more output-oriented steering.
- Cantons are defining harmonised performance standards for grades 2, 6 and 9 (Project “HarmoS”; first step will be achieved by 2007)
- Confederation and cantons are increasingly defining together priorities for development of education system (“Master-Plan”): Common agenda setting for sectors of shared competencies (upper secondary and tertiary levels) according to the (limited) financial resources.

Interesting Swiss web-sites

- Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education
http://www.edk.ch/Start/mainStart_e.html , esp.
http://www.edk.ch/f/CDIP/framesets/mainEDKPubl_f.html (french publications)
- Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science, www.bbw.admin.ch
- Swiss Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology, www.bbt.admin.ch
- Swiss Science Agency, <http://www.gwf-gsr.ch/>
- Swiss Federal Statistical Office, <http://www.statistik.admin.ch/eindex.htm>
- Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education, <http://www.skbf-csre.ch/>
- Simplified Diagram of the Swiss Education System (2001)
http://www.edk.ch/PDF_Downloads/Bildungswesen_CH/BildungCH_e.pdf