The Swiss education system is characterised by federalism, and organised in a decentralised manner. The primary responsibility for education lies with the cantons [1] (states). They are responsible for the education system, except where the Federal Constitution (Article 61 ff.) declares the Confederation, or the Confederation [2] and cantons together, to be competent.

- In the compulsory education sector (pre-school, primary and lower secondary level) the cantons and their communes are responsible for regulation and enforcement.
- In the post-compulsory education sector the regulatory competence at upper secondary level and in the tertiary sector lies both with the cantons and with the Confederation. Except for the universities of the Confederation, the cantons are responsible for enforcement.
- Vocational training (vocational education and training, tertiary level B professional education and training and job-related CET) is regulated by the Confederation. Here, too, the cantons are responsible for enforcement.

In matters which require a joint solution, the cantons coordinate between each other. For some areas the Federal Constitution lays down an obligation for the cantons to coordinate (e.g. coordination of the cantons in the compulsory education sector, collaboration and cooperation between the Confederation and cantons in the higher education sector).

For childcare facilities and services (child day-care facilities, day-care families und informal care services) please refer to the chapter on early childhood education and care [3].

**Compulsory education sector**

Under the Federal Constitution (Article 62) the cantons ensure the provision of an adequate primary school education that is available to all children. Compulsory, non-denominational teaching is managed or supervised by the state. At state schools lessons are free of charge.

The cantons and their communes are responsible for the regulation of and enforcement in the compulsory education sector (pre-school, primary and lower secondary level). Intercantonal and cantonal education law forms the legal basis for the compulsory education sector.

In addition, the Federal Constitution (Article 62(4)) obliges the cantons to harmonise, by means of coordination, school entry age, compulsory school attendance, the duration and objectives of the different levels of education, and the transition from one level to another.
Post-compulsory education sector

Secondary sector: upper secondary level

At upper secondary level, which is divided into general education and vocational and professional education and training courses, regulatory responsibility lies with both the cantons and the Confederation.

- The general education schools incorporate baccalaureate schools and upper secondary specialised schools. Alongside some private providers, most general education schools are maintained by the cantons.

The Confederation and the cantons together ensure that the cantonal baccalaureates are equivalent and comply with the national and intercantonal minimum requirements. To this end they have each adopted their own, but identical, regulations on recognition: baccalaureates are recognised under the baccalaureate recognition ordinance (MAV) or the EDK regulation on the recognition of baccalaureates (MAR).

Recognition of upper secondary specialised schools and their leaving certificates is carried out on the basis of the intercantonal diploma recognition agreement (Intercantonal Agreement on the Recognition of Educational Qualifications) and the Regulation on the Recognition of Certificates from Upper Secondary Specialised Schools which is based on the Intercantonal Agreement, and the related guidelines.

- Vocational education and training (VET), including the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate, is regulated by the Confederation (Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training [Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act, VPETA]). The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) adopts education ordinances which regulate the subject and duration of basic education and training, its objectives, requirements and content.

The Confederation, cantons and professional organisations share responsibility for VET. The cantons are responsible for implementing vocational and professional education and training (enforcement of Swiss federal law) and are, alongside private providers, the maintaining bodies for the education institutions.

Tertiary sector

At tertiary level, which is divided into a higher education sector and a tertiary level B professional education and training sector, both the cantons and the Confederation have legislative powers.

Higher education sector

Under Article 63a of the Federal Constitution the Confederation and the cantons are jointly responsible for coordinating and guaranteeing quality in Swiss higher education. A Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Higher Education Sector (Higher Education Agreement) and a cooperation agreement between the Confederation and the cantons are required to implement this constitutional obligation.
Universities

The two Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT) come within the competence of the Confederation (Federal Act on the Federal Institutes of Technology [FIT Act]). The 10 cantonal universities come within the competence of the canton in which each is located.

Universities of applied sciences

The universities of applied sciences come within the competence of the Confederation (Federal Act on Universities of Applied Sciences [Universities of Applied Sciences Act]), while the universities of teacher education come within the competence of the cantons. The maintaining bodies for the universities of applied sciences and the universities of teacher education are the cantons or groups of cantons.

Tertiary level B professional education and training sector

Tertiary level B professional education and training covers the non-university sector of the tertiary level. Tertiary level B professional education and training is regulated by the Confederation (Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act, VPETA). It is managed federally in partnership between the Confederation, the cantons and the professional organisations. The cantons are responsible for implementing vocational training on the basis of federal legislation.

Federal PET Diploma Examinations and Advanced Federal PET Diploma Examinations

The competent professional organisations regulate the admission requirements, learning content, qualification procedures, diplomas and titles. The regulations are subject to approval by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation [4] (SERI). The cantons can offer preparatory courses for PET and advanced PET examinations.

Colleges of professional education and training (PET colleges)

SERI is the competent authority for recognising courses of education. The cantons supervise PET college courses.

The recognition requirements and procedures are governed by the EAER Ordinance on the Minimum Requirements for the Recognition of Courses of Study and Post-Graduate Programmes at Professional Colleges.

Continuing education and training

Continuing education and training (CET) is largely market-based. There is a wide range of offers. The private sector plays an important role as the maintaining bodies and providers of CET and in its funding.

The Confederation and the cantons have a largely subsidiary role. At the level of the cantons job-related CET is regulated in the cantonal laws implementing the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA). In terms of legal provisions and organisation general CET is regulated differently depending on the canton. Some cantons have a specific CET act.
With the new articles on education in the Federal Constitution, the Confederation has been mandated to specify principles governing CET (Article 64a). The aim is to achieve a national continuing education and training act [6] that strengthens personal responsibility for life-long learning, improves equal access to CET and ensures consistency in federal legislation.

**Legislative References**

*Bundesverfassung der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* [7] [Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation]

*Bundesgesetz über die Berufsbildung* [8] [Vocational and Professional Education and Training]

*Verordnung des WBF über Mindestvorschriften für die Anerkennung von Bildungsgängen und Nachdiplomstudien der höheren Fachschulen* [9] [EAER Ordinance on the Minimum Requirements for the Recognition of Courses of Study and Post-Graduate Programmes at Professional Colleges]

*Verordnung über die Anerkennung von gymnasialen Maturitätsausweisen* [10] [Ordinance on the Recognition of Baccalaureates]

*Bundesgesetz über die Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschulen* [11] [Federal Act on the Federal Institutes of Technology]

*Bundesgesetz über die Fachhochschulen* [11] [Federal Act on Universities of Applied Sciences]

*Interkantonale Vereinbarung über die Anerkennung von Ausbildungsabschlüssen* [12] [Intercantonal Agreement on the Recognition of Educational Qualifications]


*Reglement über die Anerkennung der Abschlüsse von Fachmittelschulen* [10] [Regulation on the Recognition of Certificates from Upper Secondary Specialised Schools]

*Kantonale Bildungs- und Schulgesetzgebung* [13] [Cantonal school and education acts]