

FOCUS CAREER

The vocational education magazine for parents and teachers
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MAIN THEME
APPLYING FOR
APPRENTICESHIPS
ROLES, POINTS OF
VIEW, EXPERIENCES



VETPLUS.CH

THE PATH OF THE PROFESSIONALS.

An initiative of the Confederation, the cantons and professional organisations

FOCUS ON: THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Anyone wanting a position as an apprentice or trainee has to apply for it, or in other words, 'promote' him/herself. Because this truism also applies to the apprenticeship market: **the competition never sleeps.** But how do you 'promote' yourself? How should you present yourself as the right applicant to an organisation that takes on trainees or apprentices? And what do such organisations look for in an application, during the work experience 'taster' period and at the job interview? **This magazine provides the answers.** And it contains tips from and details of the experiences of young people, parents, teachers and training professionals.

Focus Career – the vocational education magazine for parents and teachers – provides information on the prospects and career opportunities of Swiss professional and vocational education.



IN SHORT

Applying for an apprenticeship or trainee position

- * **requires an application file or set of application documents. This must be neat, accurate and factual and persuade the addressee with honest arguments;**
- * **needs patience. Refusals are a normal part of the process;**
- * **does not end with the confirmation of an apprenticeship position. To be prepared for the apprenticeship, you have to stick at it in school.**

'PROMOTING' YOURSELF

APPLYING FOR AN APPRENTICESHIP

You've chosen an occupation. In order to learn the chosen occupation, you need an apprenticeship or trainee position. So, the next step is: applying for one! How do you do that? What do young people and parents need to consider? Tips on obtaining an apprenticeship or trainee position.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) – or the "Lehre" (apprenticeship) – takes place in the "Berufsfachschule" (specialist vocational school) (one or two days a week), in the host company (three or four days a week) and in the joint, industry-course (depending on the occupation, a few days to several weeks). The apprenticeship cannot start without a position as an apprentice or trainee and, therefore, young people start applying for a position before completing school.

Applying means putting yourself forward for consideration or 'selling' yourself and your qualities. And that says it all: if you want an apprenticeship position, you have to promote yourself. Because most apprenticeship employers can choose from a large number of applications – or decide not to train any apprentices if none of the applications appeal. But 'promoting' yourself doesn't mean exaggerating or smooth-talking. That's bad salesmanship, which doesn't go down well with apprenticeship employers. So, approach it from the other way around: be honest, pleasant and enthusiastic. This applies to all the steps involved in the application process.

Application file and accompanying letter

If you're applying for a position as an apprentice, you need an application file or documents. This includes a CV set out in tabular form, copies of reports or certificates from the last three years of school, the results of the aptitude test (page 4) and, if applicable, a copy of your ID card for foreign nationals. This gives the apprenticeship employers an overview of the most important personal information. This file or set of documents is accompanied by a letter of application (also called a covering letter or letter of motivation), which is rewritten for every apprenticeship employer. In it, the applicant states why he/she is interested in this job and this employer. Therefore, persuasive arguments are called for. Students learn how to draw up an application file and write a letter of application in career choice lessons. The most important thing to remember is that all documents must be complete, neat, accurate and free from errors. Because first impressions count. Employers who receive ten, a hundred or even more applications, are selective. Anyone who fails to fulfil the formal criteria, falls at the first hurdle. That doesn't have to be the case. It's best to keep the application documents factual and simple. At the same time, the letter of application should be appropriate to the profession job and may certainly be creative – not way-out. Employers usually confirm receipt of an application by means of a short letter and outline the next steps.

Work experience 'taster' days and job interview

If your application documents satisfy the potential employer, you will often be invited to work experience 'taster' days (or one day). Many firms also invite applicants directly to a job interview.

The work experience days answer crucial questions for the firms: is the young person suited to our company? Does he/she have the right aptitude for the job, keenness and manners? During the work experience, the young people also find the answers to two questions that are important to them: is the job how I imagined it to be? And: do I feel happy in this organisation? With or without work experience, at some point, the job interview follows. If you make it that far, you're close to your goal. Therefore, the important thing now is to leave nothing to chance and to prepare well: make a note of any questions, practise interview situations, choose what you will wear carefully ... and take a deep breath before the interview.

Apprenticeship contract or rejection?

And, at some point, the crucial letter will arrive: apprenticeship or trainee contract or rejection, relief or frustration? The fact is that most students receive one or more rejection letters. The important thing is to find out the reasons for it in order to sort out the shortcomings for the next application. If the rejection letter does not give any reasons, you should ask about them. Just as importantly, don't give up, and remain flexible. It may be worthwhile widening the search to related occupations and other regions. And, just in case, there should be a Plan B (transitional offer, language-learning stay abroad, etc.).

Sooner or later, most young people find the right apprenticeship position. It is, as a rule, confirmed in writing. Apprentices/trainees receive the actual training contract following approval by the cantonal authorities. The contract has to be signed by the employer, the apprentice/trainee and his/her parents (or legal representative). Then, finally, the goal is reached. You've successfully 'promoted' yourself.

The role of the parents

The parents play an important role when it comes to the application.

General: Parents can advise, encourage and console their child, activate their network of contacts in the search for (taster) apprenticeships and tell their child about their own experiences of working life.

Application file: When putting together the file and writing the covering letter, children are pleased to have the support of their parents. Do they have all the documents? Is everything neat and accurate? Is the letter comprehensible, positive and free from errors?

Work experience 'taster' days: If you want to taste work experience, you should be informed about the relevant job and know the most important facts about the work experience employer. Involved parents go through the job profile with their child, look at the firm's website with him/her and, after the taster days, take stock together with their child.

Job interview: Parents can prepare and rehearse questions and answers with their child, as well as greetings and saying goodbye at the end of the interview. Don't forget: it's important to choose clothing that's appropriate to the job.

The role of the school

As well as helping with the choice of career (see Focus Career 4/12), the school also provides support with the application process. In the career choice lessons, students learn

- where to obtain information about apprenticeship vacancies;
- how to put together an application file;
- how to write a letter of application;
- how to prepare for a job interview and how to behave during it;
- what opportunities there are if the search for an apprenticeship position is unsuccessful (transitional offers).

Aptitude test

Some apprenticeship employers use aptitude tests to help them make their selection. They want to know how the applicants will handle tasks they haven't practised for and whether school marks reflect their true capabilities. As a rule, aptitude tests check how much they know at the end of the 8th grade (UK year 9).

Depending on the occupation, various skills are tested (German, foreign languages, mathematics, spatial awareness, technical understanding). General areas such as "problem-solving and logic" or "concentration and memory" are also tested. Most of the tests are entirely or partly carried out on a computer. The procedure can usually be practised on the Internet.

An aptitude test costs between 30 and 150 Swiss francs. It should not be taken until the career choice has been made and when it's clear that the employer requires a relevant test.
www.berufsberatung.ch > Lehrstellensuche (Searching for an apprenticeship position) > Eignungstest (Aptitude tests)

TIP

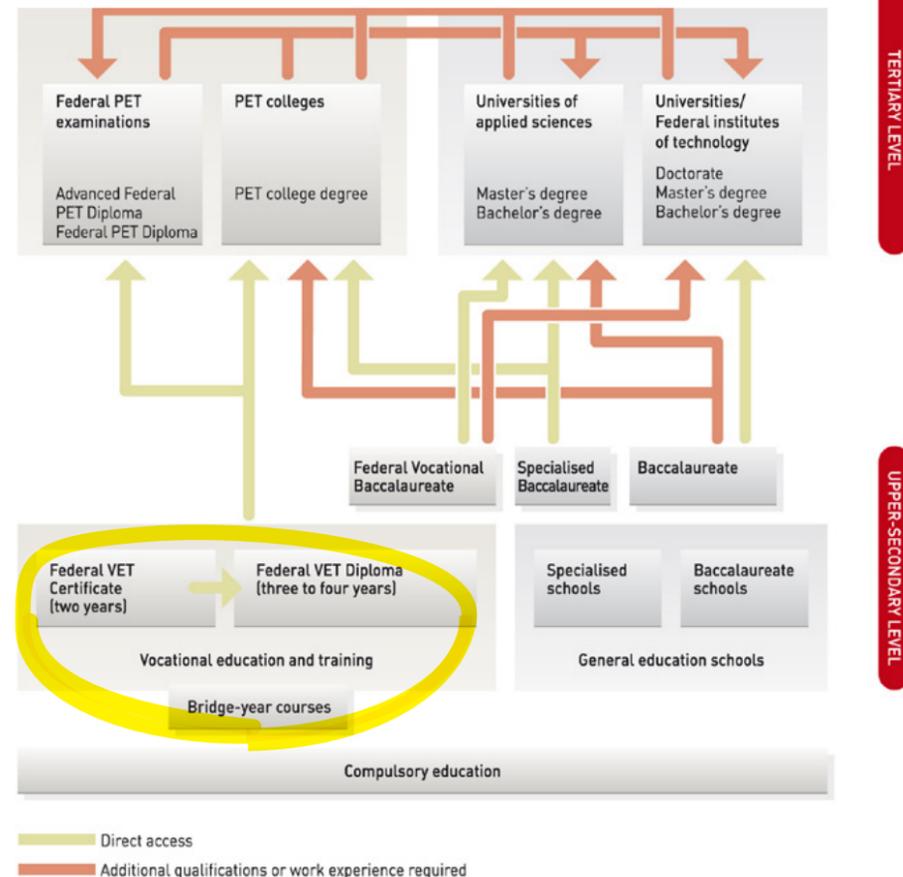
The brochure "What happens after school?" explains to parents which paths are open to young people after completion of their compulsory schooling. It also contains background information and tips on applying for apprenticeships. Languages: German, French, Italian, Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, English, Croatian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish. Price: CHF 10.00. Order from: www.shop.sdbb.ch > Erste Berufswahl (Choosing a first job) > Eltern (Parents)

Finding an apprenticeship position

Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised in the apprenticeship directory (www.berufsberatung.ch > Lehrstellensuche > Lena), on the websites of apprenticeship employers or in the appointments section of daily newspapers. It's also worthwhile for parents or teachers to activate their network of contacts (relatives, acquaintances, neighbours, etc.). Connections can often help in the process of finding a position as an apprentice.

Apprenticeship / trainee position

Taking the step into vocational education leaves many roads open.



“GOOD PREPARATION IS EVERYTHING”



Apprenticeship at the Swiss Post



Pierre Marville (Head of Vocation and Professional Education and Training).

Die Swiss Post receives 10,000 applications for apprenticeship positions from young people every year. 750 are selected by Pierre Marville's team (Head of Vocation and Professional Education and Training).

Mr Marville, what's the first thing you look at in an application? At the overall impression: does it look appealing and carefully prepared? Then, I'm interested in the covering letter: is it clear why someone has their sights set on that occupation and our company? Standard, mail-merge letters give a very bad impression – especially when they contain the name of a different firm.

Is it only young people with good school marks who have a chance with the postal service? No. What is decisive is for the school results to match the requirement profile of the desired profession. An apprenticeship for a logistics technician EBA does not require the same school report as one for an IT technician EFZ.

What purpose do aptitude tests serve? They are, first and foremost, an aid to comparing certificates from the various schools. A 5 in mathematics doesn't mean the same thing in every school.

As a rule, copies of certificates and reports from the last four half-year terms are enclosed with the application file. Why is that? Because we also look at how the marks have evolved. A falling average mark gives a rather negative impression – and vice versa. For us, the assessments of the teachers regarding conduct and enthusiasm are just as important as the marks.

What purpose do the work experience 'taster' days serve? They clarify suitability in practice. We want to know whether someone comes with the prerequisites for the job they want and whether he

or she suits our company. Conversely, the young people can settle the same questions for themselves. That's why we invite all suitable applicants to take part in work experience taster or apprenticeship 'taster' days.

Whoever performs well on the work experience taster day is invited to attend a job interview. What's important in that? Good preparation is everything. Interviewees must explain convincingly why they're interested in the chosen occupation and why they're the right candidates. In addition, they should be well informed about the relevant company. And, of course, clean clothing and proper behaviour.

The confirmation of an apprenticeship position comes several months before they leave school. Can young people "switch off" a bit then until the apprenticeship or training starts? That would be a big mistake. The specialist vocational school builds on the material of the 9th grade (UK year 10). If they master that, they'll find the next stage easier. In addition, it's difficult to get out of the habit of "switching off" again. And another thing: the apprenticeship starts with a three-month trial period. Anyone who doesn't come up to scratch can expect their contract to be terminated.

What do you expect of the parents in the application process? They should discuss the process of choosing a career with their children, encourage them to take the initiative and ask them key questions: why are you interested in this particular job; why do you think you would be the right person for it; what did you like about the work experience taster days? Although, supporting young people in the process of choosing a career and applying for jobs is not just the task of the parents – teachers should also play their part.

The Swiss Post trains around 2 000 apprentices and trainees in 15 different occupations. www.post.ch/apprenticeship

FROM SCHOOL TO THE WORLD OF WORK

The transition from school to vocational education and training often involves a number of challenges. Long working days, a new environment, not much free time – and that's only three of the stress factors. Parents, young people and heads of training explain how to deal with those pressures.



CATHERINE MEIRICH
Mother of three and teacher

The transition from secondary school 'A' student to trainee chef was a big step for my son. As I understand it from what he tells me every day, he needs a certain amount of instinct and tact and has to put up with a bit of frustration in order to get the hang of the adult world,

particularly in this environment. Not only he but also the whole family has had to get used to the irregular working hours. Often he's missing when we're eating together and even at family celebrations, which I think is a real shame. But I'm pleased that he likes the practical work and creativity in the kitchen. He manages his trainee's wage himself. He thought my suggestion to deposit half of his trainee's wage into a savings account made sense. He spends the other half in his leisure time.



MAX DERENDINGER
Training Manager
Vogt-Schild Druck AG,
Derendingen

15 apprentices are shaping their future with us in five different occupations. They comprise more than 10% of the total workforce. As the person responsible for the apprentice print production technicians, I have, for more than 12 years, been organising

the work schedules and internal training, and supporting them through their time as apprentices. To help ease them into the job, before the start of the apprenticeship a meeting is held between the future apprentices and their parents, the head of human resources and myself. This meeting builds a valuable basis of trust. On the first day of work, the apprentices are shown around their place of work and introduced to colleagues. We're very pleased when an apprentice finds full employment following our training. In any event, it pays to invest in our shared future and integrate young people into the world of work through good training.



TINA LAPPERT
Childcare worker EFZ

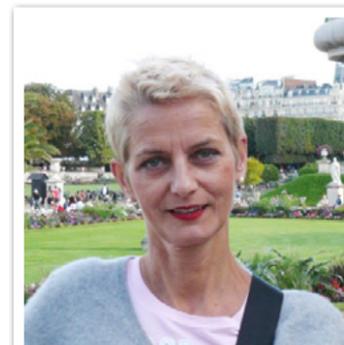
I had to travel to my place of training by train. That was new for me and I had to get used to it. The long working hours were also a problem for me in the first few months. By evening, I was very tired and my legs hurt. But, with time, I got used to the new situation. Also because my family gave me

a lot of support and were always there if I was uncertain about something or had questions. A highlight was, of course, the first wage packet. I was very proud of that. Although it wasn't much, I paid my bills myself. I didn't have to contribute anything to my keep at home. But my parents did tell me that I should save something so that later, for example, I could go away somewhere.



CHIARA PANCISI
Beautician EFZ

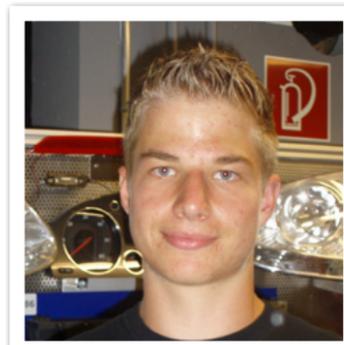
The transition from school to working life was a big challenge: 34 hours suddenly became 45. Instead of listening to the teacher, I had to get on with things myself and take on responsibility. With wages of CHF 400.00 I couldn't consider moving out – on the contrary. Because the apprenticeship employer didn't cover any costs for the work clothing, tools, food and travel to the compulsory classes at the vocational school, my parents supported me financially. In addition, I didn't have to give them any money for my keep. I'm very grateful for that. My apprenticeship master set very high standards for us trainees. For example, working in a disciplined and independent way was part of the course – that still benefits me today, both in my working and private life.



MAYA FÉVRIER
Mother of three and
photographer

When our son started his apprenticeship, he was still a child. I worried how things would be for him in the adult world. No more larking around, instead of school colleagues, he'd be working alongside adults. Becoming part of the new group, he was probably quiet

and feeling his way around at first. He very soon had to take on responsibility. This encouraged him to be independent. The long days, demanding a lot of concentration, were very tiring for him initially – but, after half a year, the new work had become routine. As parents, we noticed that he grew with his work. In the evening, he would tell us proudly about various tasks and, compared to his student sisters, felt like a man to be taken seriously in the working world. The apprenticeship also brought a pay packet with it. This led to negotiations with us, his parents. He didn't have to contribute anything to his keep. But we did insist that part of the money be saved and set aside for taxes. My experience with the apprenticeship compared to university shows me that particularly boys (who are often still rather childlike at the end of the compulsory school years) who do an apprenticeship become independent and grow up more quickly. Because in four years, our son became a man.



JONAS KOFLER
Apprentice Motor Mechanic
EFZ, 2nd year of apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is very different from school. In school, for example, I had Wednesday afternoons free and, otherwise, more holidays and free time too. So, from one day to another, I work in a firm, learn practical things in the training centre and

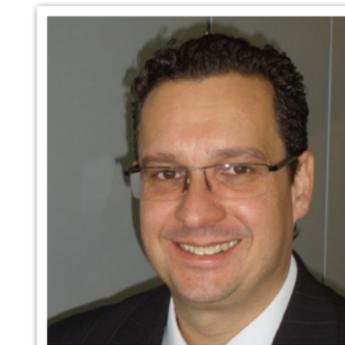
gain theoretical knowledge in the specialist vocational school. After secondary school, this was a big adjustment, because completing an apprenticeship successfully sometimes means sacrifices too. With 1-2 days vocational school there's also homework to do too and, then, you do have to put it before sport or even friends sometimes. But I like the physical work and you can also see what you've achieved at the end of a working day. A big advantage compared to school is, of course, getting paid a wage. From the beginning, I've always put as much as I can aside. Which means I've always been able to have a holiday and, recently, even buy my first car!



MARIE-CLAIRE VUILLE
Mother of three and
qualified nurse HF (UAS)

When you leave school and do an apprenticeship, suddenly, when you're still young, you have to work like an adult. So, we talked to our son a lot about it: What should he expect, how can he prepare himself, how can we support him? It was also important to us that he was

still able to properly enjoy the last weeks of holiday after the 9th grade (UK year 10). To prepare himself for the apprenticeship, our son had a week's placement with the future apprenticeship master. So, he could already get to know the work and the environment. Before the start of the apprenticeship, the master sat down with our son to discuss everything: what is expected of him? What should he do if he has any problems (e.g. feels tired)? What is our son worried about? The master is very good but also strict. So, at first, it was important for us to talk to our son about how to plan his holidays, how to reduce overtime or obtain preparation time for examinations.



ANDREAS R. BILLETER
Head of AMAG Training
Centre, Zurich Region

Almost 2,000 school students apply for more than 50 apprenticeship positions in the region of Zurich in various car-related jobs at AMAG. As we set very high standards for our future apprentices, they have to satisfy our requirements not just with the

usual school qualifications but also prove themselves in an aptitude test, a round of interviews and a successful work experience 'taster' period. Nevertheless, anyone who receives confirmation of an apprenticeship position when they're in upper secondary school should not take their foot off the pedal in school. Because without the knowledge they should have acquired from the 9th school year (UK year 10), it's very difficult to start the apprenticeship successfully. Therefore, we emphasise, not only to the future apprentices but also to their parents, that, even with a signed training contract, the students must stay on the ball until they leave school!

WEBSITES

Berufsbildungplus.ch: The vocational education and training page provides information on starting working life. Seven tips to achieving a successful start in vocational education and training. www.berufsbildungplus.ch → **Berufliche Grundbildung (Basic vocational education)** → **Einstieg ins Berufsleben (Introduction to working life)**

Berufsberatung.ch: The Apprenticeship search page provides information on apprenticeship vacancies, gives tips on searching for an apprenticeship, shows examples of aptitude tests and applications, provides useful advice on pay and other information. www.berufsberatung.ch → **Berufswahl (Choosing a career)** → **Lehrstellensuche (Searching for an apprenticeship)**

Berufsberatung.ch: The portal for career choice and course-related questions supplies helpful tips for your child's successful start in an apprenticeship. www.berufsberatung.ch → **Berufswahl (Choosing a career)** → **Tipps für Eltern (Tips for parents)**

Missionfuture.ch: Apprentices report on their experiences in working life. Questions can be asked on the bulletin board, the two games show the various career paths in a fun way and the collection of links provides further help. www.missionfuture.ch

SDBB: The official brochure of the cantons provides information on the apprenticeship contract and acts as a practical guide through apprenticeship/occupational training. www.shop.sdbb.ch → **Berufsbildung (Vocational education)** → **Hilfsmittel für die Praxis der Berufsbildung (Practical vocational education aid)** → **Wegweiser durch die Berufslehre (Roadmap through apprenticeship)**

Budgetberatung: The Guidelines / Instructions page provides information on the income and expenditure of apprentices living with their parents. www.budgetberatung.ch

CAREER COUNSELLING CENTRES

Aargau

Beratungsdienste für Ausbildung und Beruf
Herzogstrasse 1, 5000 Aarau
Tel. 062 832 64 00
www.beratungsdienste-aargau.ch

Appenzell Ausserrhoden

Fachstelle Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung
Regierungsgebäude, 9102 Herisau
Tel. 071 353 67 19
www.berufsberatung.ar.ch

Appenzell Innerrhoden

Amt für Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung
Hauptgasse 51, 9050 Appenzell
Tel. 071 788 93 70
www.ai.ch/de/verwaltung/aemter

Basel Land

Amt für Berufsbildung und Berufsberatung
Rosenstrasse 25, 4410 Liestal
Tel. 061 927 28 28
www.afbb.bl.ch

Basel Stadt

Basler Berufsinformation
Rebgasse 14, 4058 Basel
Tel. 061 267 86 92
www.bbe-bs.ch

Bern

Zentralstelle für Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung
Bremgartenstrasse 37, Postfach, 3001 Bern
Tel. 031 633 81 00
www.be.ch/berufsberatung

Fribourg

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1700 Freiburg
Tel. 026 305 41 86
www.berufsberatungfr.ch

Geneva

Office pour l'orientation, la formation professionnelle et continue
Rue Prévost-Martin 6, case postale 192
1211 Genève 4
Tel. 022 388 44 00
www.geneve.ch/ofpc

Glarus

Berufs- und Laufbahnberatung
Gerichtshausstrasse 25, 8750 Glarus
Tel. 055 646 62 60
www.biz-gl.ch

Graubünden

Amt für Berufsbildung
Rohanstrasse 5, 7000 Chur
Tel. 081 257 27 72
www.berufsbildung.gr.ch

Jura

Centre d'orientation scolaire et professionnelle et de psychologie scolaire
Chemin des Arquebusiers
2900 Porrentruy
Tel. 032 420 34 70
www.jura.ch/cos

Lucerne

Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung
Obergrundstrasse 51, 6002 Luzern
Tel. 041 228 52 52
www.biz.lu.ch

Neuchâtel

Office cantonal de l'orientation scolaire et professionnelle
Rue du Parc 53, 2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds
Tel. 032 889 69 59
www.ne.ch/orosp

Nidwalden

Berufs- und Studienberatung
Robert-Durrer-Strasse 4, 6371 Stans
Tel. 041 618 74 40
www.netwalden.ch

Obwalden

Berufs- und Weiterbildungsberatung
Brünigstrasse 178, 6061 Sarnen
Tel. 041 666 63 44
www.berufsberatung-ow.ch

Schaffhausen

Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung
Herrenacker 9, 8201 Schaffhausen
Tel. 052 632 72 59
www.biz-sh.ch

Schwyz

Amt für Berufs- und Studienberatung
Huobstrasse 9, 8808 Pfäffikon
Tel. 055 417 88 99
www.sz.ch/berufsberatung

Solothurn

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Bielstrasse 102, 4502 Solothurn
Tel. 032 627 28 90, www.biz.so.ch

St. Gallen

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Davidstrasse 31, 9001 St. Gallen
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www.berufsberatung.sg.ch

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Am Marktplatz, St.Gallerstrasse 11
8510 Frauenfeld
Tel. 052 724 13 81, www.abb.tg.ch

Uri

Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung
Klausenstrasse 4, 6460 Altdorf
Tel. 041 875 20 62, www.ur.ch/berufsberatung

Vaud

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Rue de la Borde 3d, 1014 Lausanne
Tel. 021 316 11 70
www.vd.ch/orientation

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Issue 2: Main theme - Educational value of practical experience

Issue 3: Main theme - Higher vocational school-leaving certificate

Issue 4: Main theme - Choosing a career