In virtually no other country does vocational education and training (VET) have such a strong position at upper secondary level as in Switzerland. The majority of Swiss VET students spend most of their time in companies, acquiring skills relevant to the needs of the labour market. This book provides an overview of the main systemic elements of the Swiss model, including the role played by the private sector, governance and financing. In addition, it provides insights into the pedagogical approaches used in Swiss VET.
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Foreword by Rudolf Strahm

The high rate of youth unemployment, up to 20 or even 30% in many countries, is a social and economic problem of great concern. Unemployment at such an early stage in life is a humiliating experience for young people: instead of being able to start a career, school leavers and university graduates feel as though they are absolutely no use to society whatsoever. The challenge may become greater in the near future: according to a recent UN forecast, more than 600 million new jobs will be required over the next decade to provide school leavers with a perspective in the labour market.

Vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role in the transition of young people into the world of work, and policy makers in different parts of the world have, therefore, started reforms to strengthen it: many of them are looking at countries with dual-track VET. This form of VET combines company-based apprenticeships (with a special type of employment contract) with school-based learning, which is one of the reasons why these countries have comparatively low rates of youth unemployment. Dual-track VET is a particularly effective way of acquiring both practical vocational skills and theoretical know-how. Practical intelligence and cognitive, theory-oriented intelligence thereby reinforce each other.

In Switzerland, two thirds of all young people start their career with dual-track VET lasting two to four years. With their VET qualification and the skills they have developed they are fully employable. Nevertheless, a growing number of VET graduates subsequently participate in some type of tertiary education, be it at a PET college, a university of applied science or a regular university.

Given the interest of many countries in dual-track VET systems, there is a need for publications that provide a broad overview of these systems. This book explains – in a highly accessible way – both the systemic elements as well as the key pedagogical approaches upon which the Swiss model of vocational education and training is based.

Rudolf H. Strahm, Dr h. c.
Former Swiss Member of Parliament/Former Price Supervisor of the Swiss Confederation
Lecturer in Professional and Vocational Education, Universities of Berne and Fribourg
Foreword by the editor

Dear readers

This book is part of a series edited by the Zurich University of Teacher Education (PH Zurich) that is dedicated to the essentials of teaching and learning and has a specific focus on vocational education and training. All books in the series present their contents in a highly condensed way, in order to be easily accessible by teachers, instructors and other professionals involved in education and training. Whereas other books in this series are dedicated to issues that are closer to the classroom, this contribution covers the more underlying systemic elements of teaching and learning in Swiss vocational education and training (VET). It is addressed, on the one hand, to all those in Switzerland who look for information in English that can help them to present key features of Swiss VET abroad. On the other hand, it also addresses VET professionals from other countries who want to better understand our country’s approach to prepare learners at upper secondary level for the world of work. In contrast to other existing publications on Swiss VET in English, this one – while discussing systemic elements in depth – pays additional attention to underlying pedagogical concepts and provides readers with a number of concrete examples.

This publication in English also expresses our university’s dedication to deepen our cooperation with international partners. Given the growing interest in the Swiss VET model, our university already now plays a role in providing expertise to other countries that are interested in improving their VET systems. Although we are convinced of the many advantages of the system that is portrayed in this book, we are equally convinced that reforms of other VET systems cannot rely on simply importing models from abroad. Rather, such reforms need to be based on a serious understanding of how the education system and the labour market interact in the particular context, on sound political judgement and on a solid approach to implementation. It is in this way, at least, that VET in Switzerland has been evolving.

Prof. Christoph Städeli
Head of the Department of Upper Secondary Education, PH Zurich
Editor-in-chief of the series
# Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FVB</td>
<td>Federal Vocational Baccalaureate</td>
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<td>ISCED</td>
<td>International Standard Classification of Education</td>
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<td>LCS</td>
<td>Language, Communication and Society</td>
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<td>PET</td>
<td>Professional education and training</td>
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<td>SDBB</td>
<td>Swiss Service Centre for Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>SERI</td>
<td>State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>Universities of Applied Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
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<td>VPET</td>
<td>Vocational and professional education and training</td>
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1 Why this book?

In recent years, international interest in the Swiss system of vocational education and training (VET) has grown. Key reasons for this are: VET is very important in Swiss education and training, and the system design has some striking features; and the country’s low rate of youth unemployment is seen by many to be a result of the country’s VET system.

In line with this growing interest, the English literature on Swiss VET in English has also been growing. Apart from publications for a mainly academic audience that cover different aspects of Swiss VET, most other English publications focus on the system. In this book, however, we aim to cover both systemic and pedagogical aspects of Swiss VET but obviously in very condensed format. The focus here is on dual-track VET. School-based VET and professional education and training (PET) are covered only very briefly. In all those cases, where we focus on the overall system, we make use of the term ‘vocational and professional education and training’ (VPET) that has become somewhat common in English literature on Swiss VET.

In the preparation of this book, some publications have been of particular importance. For the current terminology and data on Swiss VET, the SERI’s (2016) ‘Facts and Figures’ publication on Swiss VPET (updated on a yearly basis) and the database of the Federal Statistical Office were enormously helpful. Data and other information from these two sources are cited without explicit reference in the text. We also would like to direct readers of this book to the rich online VPET-glossary by the SDBB, which is in large part also available in English,¹ as well as to the comprehensive work by Wettstein, Schmid and Gonon (2014) on Swiss VPET.

¹ See http://www.berufsbildung.ch/dyn/20850.aspx [18/10/16].
2 Key characteristics of Swiss VET

Swiss VET consists of different programmes at the upper secondary level (ISCED level 3). From an international perspective, three characteristics of Swiss VET are clearly most important:

→ VET as the predominant form of education at the upper secondary level
Looking at all new entrants to upper secondary education, a large majority of them (72% in 2013) start a VET programme. If one focuses only on the qualifications achieved at this level of education, the VET share is even higher (76% in 2013).2

→ Dual-track VET as the predominant type of VET
Though school-based VET plays a certain role, more than 85% of VET students at the upper secondary level enrol in dual-track VET. This implies that they undergo apprenticeship training at a host company – accounting for the majority of total time spent in VET – and go to school part-time, in many cases 1 to 1.5 days per week. The pervasive role of dual-track VET is only possible thanks to those approx. 40% of all companies in the Swiss economy that get involved in training VET students.

→ Broad range of occupations
At upper secondary level, there are VET programmes in approx. 230 occupations which prepare students to achieve two types of VET qualification (i.e. VET certificate and VET diploma). These programmes cover all sectors of the Swiss economy – including construction, engineering, health and social sectors, and banking – and they are designed in strong cooperation with the representatives of these sectors. The programmes cater for all kinds of students (including high achievers) who enrol in the more demanding programmes (and also have the option of passing the Swiss Federal Vocational Baccalaureate), as well as those who have difficulties at school. Still, only ten occupations account for over 50% of all entrants into upper secondary VET.

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2 Included in the VET share are VET programmes of 2–4 years, without FVB. The remaining 24% include all baccalaureates (national, international, specialised) except the FVB. Source: Federal Statistical Office.
Work-based learning of a VET student in a large mechanical engineering company
3 The Swiss education and training system

VET in Switzerland is closely linked to the other sectors of the education and training system. Illustration 1 provides an overview of this system. It shows that VET is an integral element of this system and that there are various pathways from VET to different types of tertiary education.

In the following pages, we outline the different sectors of this system.

3.1 Compulsory education and baccalaureate schools

In most cantons, compulsory schooling lasts for nine years and is free of charge. Six years of primary education are generally followed by three years of lower secondary education (for the ages of approximately thirteen to sixteen years), which are characterised by performance-based tracks with either basic or more expanded curricula. In order to prepare students for their transition to upper secondary VET, vocational guidance plays a key role.
in lower secondary education. It is provided both by the teachers and by centres for vocational guidance (Berufsinformationszentren, BIZ). Academically able lower secondary graduates who do not wish to enrol in VET after nine years of compulsory education continue their education at baccalaureate schools, and this leads to the Federal Academic Baccalaureate. This qualification allows direct entry into cantonal universities and into the federal institutes of technology (ETH). After an internship of one year, access is also possible to the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). In 2015, only 20% of qualifications at the upper secondary level were Federal Academic Baccalaureates. By international standards, this figure is very low. However, highly selective access to the baccalaureate schools is one of the key reasons why VET in Switzerland also caters to academically very able graduates from lower secondary education.

3.2 VET at upper secondary level

VET programmes at upper secondary level prepare learners for three types of qualifications:

Federal VET Diploma
This qualification can be achieved after three to four years of formal VET. Specifically the VET programmes for trades (e.g. carpentry, electrical wiring) and industry (e.g. mechanical engineering) are four years long. Out of all VET graduates in 2014, approx. 91% achieved a Federal VET Diploma. This qualification prepares for direct labour market entry but also provides access to professional education and training (PET) at the tertiary level.

Federal VET Certificate
Programmes that lead to this qualification take two years. They mainly cater to students with difficulties in meeting the exigencies of the more demanding programmes for the VET diploma. In principal, this certificate allows one to enrol in the second year of programmes that lead to the VET diploma. This depends, however, on the availability of apprenticeship positions in host companies. In 2014, approx. 9% of all VET graduates achieved a VET certificate.

Federal Vocational Baccalaureate
Provided they have the support of their host company and they meet the entry requirements, VET students that prepare for the Federal VET Diploma can enrol in additional preparatory classes to study for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB). This qualification provides access to the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). The FVB has existed, in this form, since 1994, and has contributed considerably to the permeability and the attractiveness of VET for students. Students who have already obtained a Federal VET

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3 Basis of the calculations is all VET qualifications of 2–4 years (without FVB) plus all baccalaureates (national, international, specialised), again except the FVB. Source: Federal Statistical Office.

4 Calculation excluding the FVB and VET qualifications that are not in line with the current version of the VPET Act.