

Background Information: Higher Education System in Switzerland



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Higher Education System in Switzerland

I. General Characteristics

Population	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) ¹	8.04
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) ²	202.3
Population Structure (2013) (share of total population %)³	
0-14 years	14.9
15-24	11.7
25-49	36.4
50-64	19.5
65 years and older	17.4
GDP	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 ⁴	163
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) ⁵	1.9
Education (2012) (All levels)⁶	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	1,540,880
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	269,573
Tertiary Education	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	37.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	44.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) ⁸	1.3

2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Switzerland offers higher education through a range of cantonal universities and Federal Institutes of Technology, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), and Universities of Teacher Education (UTE).

Tier-one Universities

¹ European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

² Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

³ Eurostat (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

⁴ Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0114>

⁵ Eurostat (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved on April 16, 2015 from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0115>

⁶ Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1rtl&lang=en

⁷ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

⁸ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

Switzerland's two Federal Institutes of Technology and its ten cantonal universities are referred to as the tier-one universities⁹. The tier-one universities focus on fundamental research. The Federal Institutes of Technology offer courses and research activities in science, engineering, mathematics, and architecture. They are the only tier-one universities in Switzerland that offer courses in engineering. Switzerland's ten cantonal universities offer degree programmes in a variety of disciplines – humanities and social sciences, business and economics, sciences, law, and medicine.

Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

There are seven regional universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Switzerland⁷. Unlike tier-one universities, the focus of UAS is on applied research and training. UAS offer courses in engineering, information technology, architecture, construction and planning, chemistry, life sciences, agriculture and forestry, business and services, design, health, social work, music, theatre and other artistic disciplines, applied psychology, applied linguistics, and sports. The full range of courses offered varies across UAS. The majority of programmes are offered at the Bachelor level. Music and artistic disciplines systematically include Master level programmes. Some UAS also offer programmes at the Master level that focus on research and advanced professional qualification. In addition to Bachelor and Master programmes, UAS also offer a wide range of continuing education and training courses, e.g., Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS), Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS), or Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) to cater to the needs of labour market.

Universities of Teacher Education (UTE)

There are 14 UTEs in Switzerland that are funded mainly by the cantons¹⁰. Like the UAS, UTE also emphasise practical training and applied research and offer a variety of continuing education and training programmes.

Professional Education and Training (PET)

Professional Education and Training (PETs) offering Federal and Advanced Federal Diplomas are an important component of the Swiss Tertiary Education (Type B) system. PETs strengthen the higher education system in Switzerland by offering courses for a broad range of populations and cater to the needs of the labour market.

3. Study Structure

As a result of the Bologna Process, a three-cycle structure has been adopted in Switzerland.

First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- A Bachelor degree typically requires three years of full-time studies.
- The credit requirement for a Bachelor degree is typically 180 ECTS credits. Bachelor degree programmes normally conclude with a Bachelor thesis.

Second cycle qualification (Master)

- In the one-and-a-half to two-year Master degree programme (full-time study) 120 ECTS points must be completed. Master degree programmes normally conclude with a Master thesis.

⁹ State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation, 2013, p.16

¹⁰ State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation, 2013, p.18

Third cycle qualification (Doctorate)

- The award of a Doctorate is subject to an independent scientific paper – the Doctoral thesis – and often an oral examination. Additional accomplishments (e.g. course attendance, colloquium, seminar, summer schools) may also be required, or there may be a need for a public defence of the thesis.

4. Admission Requirements^{11 12 13}

The admission decisions are governed by the specific institution's guidelines to which a student is applying to. Admission requirements vary across universities. Generally, students with a federally recognised baccalaureate or a comparable foreign certificate; with a Bachelor degree from a university, UAS, or UTE; or students with Federal Vocational Baccalaureate and a pass in the supplementary examination (*Passerellenprüfung*) are admitted by the universities without any additional conditions. Some universities admit students without a baccalaureate. Applicants with other qualifications may be required to take an aptitude test. For admission to UAS, applicants who have a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate and vocational education and training in the related field of study; or students with federally recognised baccalaureate with professional experience in the related field of study are admitted without any conditions. Sometimes an applicant may be admitted to UAS based on their performance in an aptitude or admission tests.

Students with a relevant Bachelor degree from a Swiss University are admitted to the Master programme in the same field without any conditions. Likewise, for admission to the Master programme at UAS, a student must have a relevant Bachelor degree or a comparable university degree. Completion of a Master degree is a pre-requisite for admission to the Doctorate programme.

5. Enrolment Levels

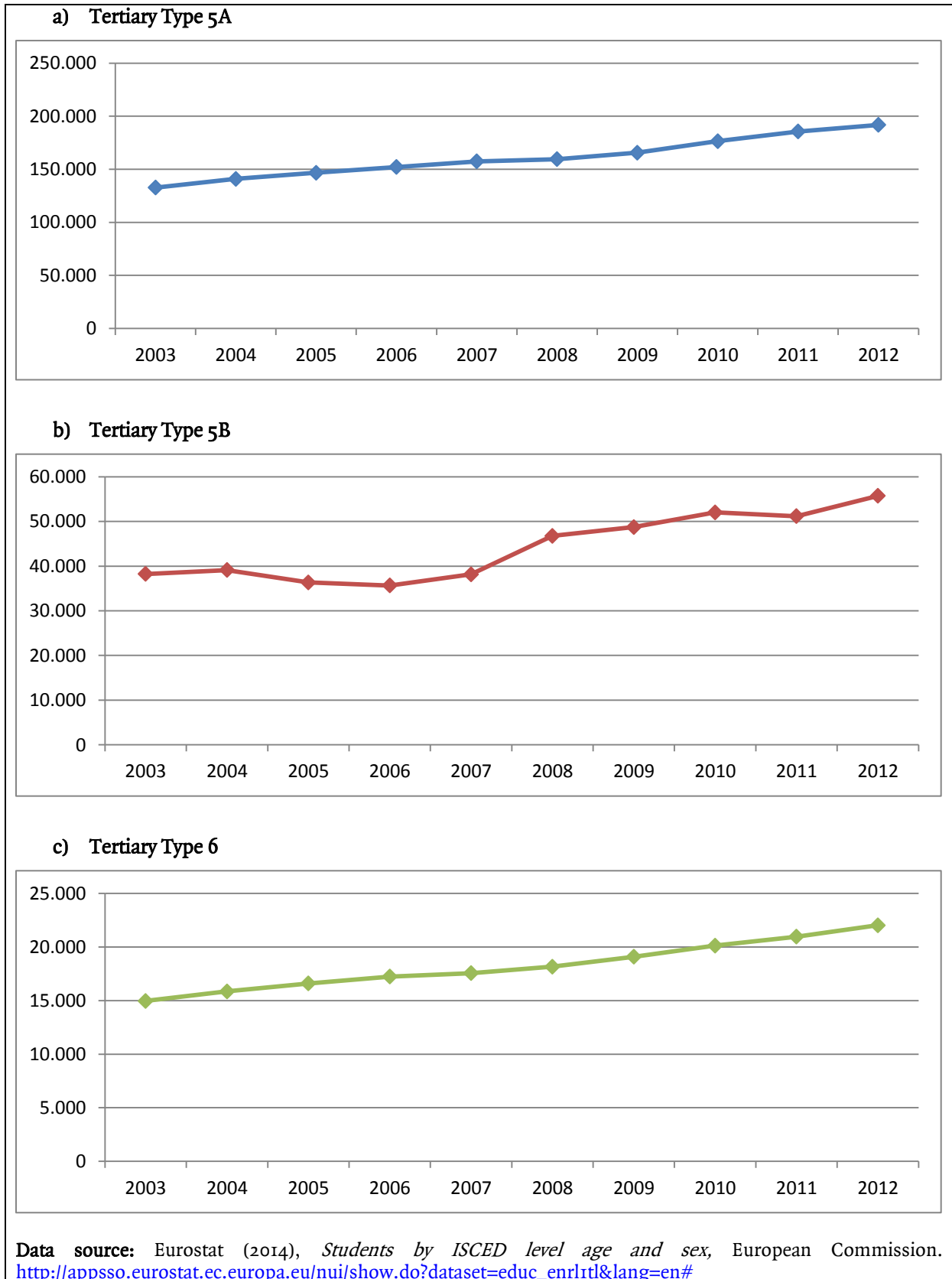
Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5A, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in Switzerland between 2003 and 2012. The number of entries in Tertiary Type 5A, 5B, and 6 has increased steadily between 2003 and 2012.

¹¹ Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Switzerland:Bachelor>

¹² Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Switzerland:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹³ Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Switzerland:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels



6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees

Higher education is not free of charge in Switzerland. Fee for higher education varies by the type of institution and ranges from 812 Euro (CHF 1000) to 3250 Euro (CHF 4000) per annum¹⁴. Furthermore, PET institutions show a wide range of fees.

7. Financial Support for Students

The financial aid system in Switzerland is made up of grants from 26 cantons. The amounts, coverage, and type vary from canton to canton. Parents have an obligation under Article 276/277 ZGB to provide children with financial support during the first programme of education¹⁵. Students may apply for grants or training loans when parents have limited financial resources. Cantons are responsible for awarding educational allowances and deciding the amount of educational allowances to be provided to each student. Each canton is governed by its own grant legislation. In order to standardise the process and decision making for grant allocation, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education has drawn up an Intercantonal Agreement on the Harmonization of Education Contributions. On an average, a student at a higher education institution may receive 6500 Euro (CHF 8000) per year¹². Students who are employed, specifically Tertiary Type B students, also receive financial assistance from their employers in the form of contributions to training or continued payment of wages during absence from work.

8. Note on the Swiss data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

The Swiss data was collected by means of an online survey during Spring 2013. A random sample of more than 26,000 students, stratified by higher education institution and field of study, was asked to fill out the questionnaire. The return rate amounts to 70 %.

The population of students surveyed consists of students of tier-one universities, UAS and UTE. Professional Education and Training (PETs) are not included in the Swiss survey.

This report is based on the following sources:

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http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Governance_Autonomy_Funding/June_2012_report_FINAL.sflb.ashx

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State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation. (2013). *Higher education and research in Switzerland*. Retrieved from www.sbf.admin.ch/campus-switzerland-e.html

¹⁴ Eurydice. (2013). *Higher education funding: Switzerland*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Switzerland:Higher_Education_Funding

¹⁵ University of Zurich. (2013). Student Financial Aid Office. Retrieved from http://www.studienfinanzierung.uzh.ch/finanzierung_en.html