

What is a pre-apprenticeship?

A pre-apprenticeship is a bridge-year option between lower- and upper-secondary school. Pre-apprenticeships prepare young people for enrolment in vocational education and training (VET).

Pre-apprenticeships are modelled after dual-track VET programmes: Learners work at a host company during 3.5 or 4 days per week and attend classes at a vocational school during 1 or 1.5 days per week. The work done at the host company is remunerated. At vocational school, learners are asked to pay only for learning materials and occasionally to cover the costs of field trips. A performance assessment is carried out at the end of each semester.

The alternative model to this type of pre-apprenticeships consists of pre-vocational courses at vocational schools, which combine full-time classroom instruction with short-term, full-time traineeships at various companies. Courses of this kind are typically offered in the French- and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland and are very similar to the pre-apprenticeship model common in the German-speaking part.

Is a pre-apprenticeship the right choice for you?

Pre-apprenticeships are geared toward young people who have completed compulsory education and:

- are between the ages of 15 and 18 (under certain conditions and in some locations there may be an upper age limit of 20).
- are still in the process of choosing an occupation or have already decided what occupation they wish to pursue but have not yet found a suitable apprenticeship position.
- still require a period of preparation to improve language or scholastic skills in order to successfully pursue VET.
- are motivated and willing to learn.
- have a basic knowledge of a local national language of Switzerland, which enables them to express themselves and keep up in class.

How to find a pre-apprenticeship

The first step is to find a company that offers the kind of pre-apprenticeship you're looking for. If a company considers your application, it will get in touch with the vocational school you would attend, which will determine whether you qualify for its programme. If you do, you will then sign a pre-apprenticeship contract with the host company.

In some cantons, vocational, educational and career guidance professionals work very closely with young people and help them prepare an application file and find a host company. But wherever you live, you can definitely get in touch with these guidance professionals for help and advice in finding either a pre-apprenticeship or a pre-vocational course.

Is a pre-apprenticeship possible for all occupations?

Generally, yes, so long as there are companies that offer such pre-apprenticeships.

What kind of salary will you receive during the pre-apprenticeship?

This depends on the company, the standards of its industry and the salary it normally pays in the first year of apprenticeship training. Generally speaking, learners are paid around 80-90% of the first year's apprenticeship salary. The gross salary is indicated in the pre-apprenticeship contract.

For pre-vocational courses based on attending school full-time and doing short-term internships, learners do not receive a salary.

Does a pre-apprenticeship contract automatically lead to an apprenticeship contract?

No. Ideally, however, you should try to get an apprenticeship with the same company where you do a pre-apprenticeship or traineeship. You will need to sign a new contract with the host company to start an apprenticeship.

What will you learn at the vocational school?

Vocational school starts in August/September and lasts until June/July of the following year. Learners are generally assigned to a specific class and receive personalised lessons, which cover language skills (depending on the region, this will either be German, French or Italian) as well as mathematics and general subjects. In pre-vocational courses, learners also undergo intensive preparation for pre-vocational traineeships and internships. You will also learn how to apply for apprenticeship positions.

Young people who experience learning difficulties will receive individual support from a tutor. There will also be homework assignments.

What will you learn at the host company?

At the host company, you will gain on-the-job experience and acquire basic skills. A person at the company will be assigned to guide and help you during the pre-apprenticeship (or traineeship).

Is there paid holiday time?

Yes. Young people doing a pre-apprenticeship are entitled to five weeks of holidays, which must be taken during official school vacation periods. During school vacations that are not part of your personal holiday time, you will work full-time at the host company.

Information

Contact a local vocational school in your canton for more information. They can also provide you with templates for pre-apprenticeship contracts.