"I was also able to improve my language skills"

"Moving to Switzerland gave me freedom"

"The job as language assistant is perfect for me"

"Be open to new experiences and ideas"

"I particularly enjoy the practical projects"

These are some testimonials from young Swiss abroad. On the next pages you can read the whole interviews and reports, including an interview with a vocational and career counsellor in Berne.

All texts were published by educationsuisse in the Swiss Review from 2018 to 2022.
Martina Boscaro, you are a Swiss Abroad from Italy. What made you decide to study in Switzerland?
I’ve dreamt of returning to Switzerland to study since my childhood. The sense of calm that Switzerland exudes held a magnetic appeal for me. The educational institutions are also of an incomparably high standard, in my view.

Did you settle in quickly at university?
I found it really easy to settle in at university, especially thanks to support from the professors and the welcoming family atmosphere. The fact that the University of Neuchâtel is quite small definitely helped me. I never felt lost. The first few months were tough as my French wasn’t good enough to begin with. But the language courses provided free of charge by the university enabled me to move from the B2 level required to the C1/C2 level within a few months. Sharing an apartment with young French-speaking women definitely also helped.

Are you a young Swiss Abroad interested in studying in Switzerland?
My advice is not to worry. I came to Switzerland on my own without much money but was determined to establish myself and achieve things. The grant from my home canton of Zurich enabled me to study here. education-suisse supported me with the grant application and handled it for me. Find out about possible sources of funding and give yourself the opportunity to do your dream course.

What advice would you give to young Swiss Abroad interested in studying in Switzerland?
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Leslie’s dream job in Switzerland

educationsuisse gives advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland. It is also involved in the placement of language assistants, as shown in the case of Leslie Schmid.

In Swiss upper secondary schools and vocational education and training schools, native speakers enrich language lessons and exemplify cultural aspects of their country of origin. These language assistants, usually young students from abroad, are placed by the national agency Movetia in collaboration with educationsuisse. Leslie Schmid, a Swiss Abroad from Canada, is one of them. She has been working since September 2018 as a language assistant at the Kantonsschule Zug upper secondary school and describes her experiences in an interview:

Leslie Schmid, what made you apply for the programme?
As a small child I already knew that I wanted to be a teacher someday. In Ottawa I studied German language and literature and got a teaching diploma for foreign languages. Since a large part of my relatives live in Switzerland, I decided to apply here for the position of English language assistant. Movetia helped me and my dream job – I love the work!

Were you able to settle in quickly at school and in Switzerland?
Yes, I settled in quickly at school and also get along well in everyday life in Switzerland. The teachers and students have accepted me very well. I feel at home here. It certainly helped that my parents and brothers in Canada always spoke Swiss German.

Are there any specific differences between Canada and Switzerland?
There are differences, such as in the school system. What I particularly noticed is that the Swiss engage in less small talk than we do in Canada. It also seems more difficult for me to find friends outside of my working environment. Life here is more expensive; the medical insurance costs were a huge shock for me. In Canada health care is free! What also astonishes me every day is how many people here smoke.

Is it difficult living so far away from your family in Canada?
Sometimes yes and sometimes no. I used to miss all my Swiss relatives. Now I miss my parents and brothers, who stayed behind in Canada. I grew up on a dairy farm, so whenever I pass by a farm here, I’m really homesick. Thanks to the new technologies though, I can give my family a short call at any time.

Applications for language assistants for the school year 2019/20 are being accepted until the end of March 2019.

For detailed information about the Language Assistance programme, kindly contact edith.funicello@movetia.ch or info@educationsuisse.ch, educationsuisse, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Schweiz, Telefon +41 (0)31 356 61 04, info@educationsuisse.ch, www.educationsuisse.ch.
A Swiss Abroad talks about studying medicine in Switzerland

educationsuisse advises young Swiss Abroad who come to Switzerland to study. Katia Steinfeld is one of them. She recounts her experience of studying at the University of Lausanne.

“I have Swiss and Brazilian roots, and I grew up in Rio de Janeiro. I began my medical studies there. I contacted educationsuisse because I was looking for a way to continue my studies outside Brazil. The organisation supplied me with information about studying medicine in Switzerland and assisted me with my grant application in my canton of origin. The University of Lausanne (UNIL) partially recognised my study time in Brazil, which meant I could continue my studies in Switzerland in 2016.

The first six months in Switzerland were difficult. I first had to get used to the lifestyle, climate and being alone. I was also worried about the requirements of the university and my financial resources.

However, the quality of the teaching and the feeling of freedom motivated me anew every day. I enjoyed exploring the culture and country that is also mine, and building new relationships and strong friendships, which gave me the support that I needed.

I also threw myself into extracurricular activities that were important to me. For example, I took part in a competition advertised by the UNIL and the Clinton Foundation in 2017. I was selected to represent the University at the Clinton Global Initiative University in Boston (USA). Thanks to this competition, I was able to get my project Escolhares off the ground. It has now grown into an association that has organised ophthalmological screenings and supplied more than 2,000 students in deprived districts of Rio de Janeiro with spectacles between 2016 and 2019.

Recently, I took part in the UNIL World’s Challenge competition. My team’s project, EcoBlock in Burkina Faso, won the first internal selection phase.

On an academic level, I am continuously astounded by the wide variety of courses and internships on offer at UNIL. I had the opportunity to discover the world of research, primarily during my Master’s degree in the field of fundamental neuroscience. These experiences changed my future plans and led me to where I am today: planning a PhD.

To sum up, I can honestly say that my move to Switzerland contributed significantly to my personal development. I have rediscovered my roots and now understand a part of my identity better as a result. I have also gained in confidence. I have become more independent, been able to establish relationships and develop new prospects for the future – all the while completing first-class medical training. Therefore, I would like to encourage other young Swiss Abroad to take up such opportunities.”

Experience reports from young Swiss Abroad are regularly published on the Facebook page of educationsuisse, and on www.educationsuisse.ch.
“I particularly enjoy the practical projects”

Savian Scanu, a Swiss Abroad who grew up in Sardinia, talks about the challenges he has faced and his impressions while studying in Switzerland.

Savian Scanu, you are a Swiss Abroad who grew up in a village on the Italian island of Sardinia. What motivated you to study in Switzerland?

I decided to study in Switzerland due to the high quality of the education. I also wanted to learn German as I only spoke Swiss German. On top of this, the desire to see the world from another perspective was another factor in moving to Zurich after completing my university entrance examination in Italy.

You registered to study Mechanical Engineering at ETH Zurich. What were the biggest challenges you faced initially?

My two biggest challenges were following the lessons in German and the generally high standard of teaching. I had to provide a C1-level language certificate to gain admission to ETH. After a few months, I realised that the faculty was not meeting my expectations. I then discontinued my studies, worked in Switzerland as a gardener, among other things, learning the ins and outs of the working world in the process, and saved money towards further study. Finally, I registered to do a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Engineering at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

What do you like about your present study in particular?

I particularly enjoy the practical projects that we carry out with municipalities and tourist destinations. I am currently working on a concept for the sustainable development of tourism services in Scuol (GR). We have been discussing questions including: How can we retain the traditional Alpine landscape; and how can we provide incentives for people to use public transport?

What do you think of student life in Switzerland in general?

It’s awesome. There is a wide range of free sports-related activities for students on offer in Zurich. It is also absolutely stunning down at the lake during summer.

What are your future plans?

All being well, I will complete my studies in December 2020. Afterwards, I want to work. I will probably have to complete several internships initially. They are usually low-paid, but are important to gain a foothold on the employment ladder.

What advice would you give young Swiss Abroad who are thinking of studying in Switzerland?

The most important thing is to find an apartment in good time, particularly in Zurich. You may be able to share one with other students. You should also get information about health insurance. Considering the high cost of living in Switzerland, a scholarship may be helpful. educationsuisse assisted me with my application for a scholarship from my home canton.

(End)
A story of integration

Educationsuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad who come to Switzerland to further their education. Raquel Weidmann is one such expatriate. She talked to us about her experiences after arriving in Switzerland.

“My grandparents emigrated many years ago from the Zurich Oberland to Argentina. Consequently, my father grew up in a Swiss colony. Together with my mother, my family later settled in Puerto Rico Misiones. I was born in 1995, the youngest of two sisters. Our parents told us that going to school was very important. For my six years of secondary school education, I moved 45 kilometres away to a private school in my father’s home village of Ruiz de Montoya. In addition to classroom learning, we always did lots of practical work during my time there.

The opportunity to come to Switzerland presented itself after I finished school. My parents’ former neighbours, who had remigrated from Argentina to Switzerland, offered to let me live with them. I therefore decided to move to Switzerland without any knowledge of the language or culture.

I had great expectations of what awaited me, but quickly realised that things would not necessarily be so easy. At the beginning I found it hard to accept that my good school qualifications counted for little in Switzerland. The culture and the language were new to me, the world of work even more so. My parents had always impressed on us the importance of getting a university degree that would stand us in good stead for the future. It was in Switzerland that I learned that doing an apprenticeship was a viable alternative. Starting from square one was not what I had planned, but that is exactly what I did. During my integration year, I picked up the language and learned a lot about Swiss culture and the work environment. My teachers were very helpful and committed to each and every student. Time in the classroom was supplemented by weekly one-day work placements in various professional settings. The integration year was very useful, and I am grateful that Switzerland offers it as an option.

I got to know my current employer during a trial traineeship. I did an internship in my first year, followed by a three-year apprenticeship as a childcare specialist – which I finished in summer 2019. Not only do I still work as a childcare specialist at the nursery school that took me on as an intern, but I am also preparing to study as a social education worker. This two-year course will take place at the Agogis training centre in Olten, culminating in a Federal Diploma HF (College of Higher Education).

I would not have been able to do vocational training without the support of educationsuisse and a scholarship from my home canton of Zurich.

I very much appreciated the individual advice and assistance that I received from educationsuisse.”

Testimonies from young Swiss Abroad are regularly published on the educationsuisse Facebook page and at www.educationsuisse.ch.

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“Be open to new experiences and ideas”

Swiss Abroad Angela Meraviglia on the opportunities and challenges of studying in Switzerland.

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

Angela Meraviglia you are Swiss and grew up in Australia. Why did you decide to study in Switzerland?

In Australia, I completed my training as a florist but I always knew I wanted to study. I just never found the right subject. During a holiday stay in Switzerland, I discovered the study programme in Design Management at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Initially, it was just an exciting idea that I had and not a firm plan. However, I applied. Thanks to my application dossier including my work, my high school diploma and my professional experience, I was accepted. Only when I received the official confirmation did I realise that my life would change completely within a few months.

Tell us more specifically about your Design Management degree programme at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

The degree programme is entirely in English. I am now in my third and final Bachelor’s year. I particularly love the breadth of the field of study. It is not just about creating physical things or designing them, but it is always about the whole mind-set. That helps to understand complex problems, to communicate with people and to create solutions that are better for people and our environment.

What language do you speak when you are not in class? And how have you settled in in Switzerland?

I speak a mixture of English and Swiss German with my university friends and Swiss German, which I learned at home, with my relatives. Now I also want to attend a German course at university. Building up a good group of friends in Switzerland was more difficult than I thought. However, a small job in the hospitality industry helped me to get to know the local way of life and to make new friends.

Was the “small job” alongside your studies enough to cover the high Swiss cost of living?

I have always worked alongside my studies, in hospitality and now at a design agency in Zurich. However, the intensive studies do not allow me to work enough to be financially independent. I have been fortunate to receive a scholarship from my home canton of Zurich, which makes my life a lot easier. I also benefit from a reduced health insurance premium. Switzerland is expensive, but it also has quite a fair social support system.

How is the Corona pandemic affecting your studies?

I studied online for most of last year and it will probably stay that way for my last semester. Studying online works relatively well, but it has significantly changed my university experience. There are both ad-
“I grew up in France, not far from my country of birth. I used to be able to see Switzerland on the other side of Lake Geneva from my bedroom window! Growing up on the “wrong” side of the border is strange, because you never really feel at home, however much you identify with either country. But it also throws up opportunities and gives you plenty of life experience.

As the daughter of German- and French-speaking bilingual parents, I was able to maintain a connection with my home country because I could speak Swiss German. I left Switzerland and the canton of Berne when I was seven – and returned in 2015 at the age of 21. After studying for two years in France without any great conviction, I wanted to do something meaningful as a career. I felt I wanted to use my hands to make things that were aesthetically pleasing and worthwhile. I therefore decided to learn a trade and ended up at a fashion school in Valais to do an apprenticeship as a clothes designer specialising in women’s fashion. This after studying Arabic linguistics! At first glance, the work seemed fairly straightforward for an “egghead” like me. But I really had to put everything into getting a qualification at the end of my three years there. Afterwards, I decided to go one step further and do a textile diploma at a college of higher education. I had two options: Zurich or Lugano. Without speaking a single word of Italian, I chose Lugano – or the STA Lugano fashion school (Scuola specializzata superiore di abbigliamento e design della moda), to be precise. It was certainly one of the best but also one of the most difficult decisions of my life. Luckily, I was able to fit very easily and quickly into Ticino life. At the end of my two years there, I was completely bilingual and had a group of Italian-speaking friends.

Six years on since returning to Switzerland, and I still have no regrets about coming back. Coping with change is always a challenge, and you often need a helping hand. Over the years, my family and I have always been supported by Swiss institutions and the Swiss community abroad.

I am now proud to be teaching clothes design at the same school at which I did my apprenticeship. Thanks to grants from my home canton of Berne and to the people from educationsuisse who assisted me during those years, I was able to complete my training and find my own purpose in life with a career that suited me. I now enjoy helping to train young men and women and giving them a chance to strike their own path.”

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"The job as language assistant is perfect for me"

Isabelle Bucher, a Swiss living abroad, uses her English skills as a language assistant at a Swiss upper secondary school. Her class benefits from the young teacher from Australia – and she herself is getting to know Switzerland better.

Isabelle Bucher, you grew up in Australia. What were your motives for gaining work experience in Switzerland?

I was looking for a new, challenging job in Switzerland, also to get to know the education system better. The job as a language assistant, which I found through Movetia, is perfect for me. It allows me to gain experience in teaching English outside of Australia. At the same time, I have enough time to finish my bachelor’s degree. I also like living in Switzerland.

Are you still studying?

Yes, I am completing my Bachelor of Social Science and Behavioural Studies online, which includes a lot of social pedagogy and psychology, at the University of Melbourne.

Were you able to settle in quickly at the Kantonsschule am Burggraben?

It was easy to settle in. The teachers are very welcoming and helpful. The students were at the beginning surprised to have a teacher all the way from Australia. We have good opportunities to learn from one another’s culture and language.

How do you cope with everyday life in Switzerland?

Switzerland is not entirely new to me, as I was already here as an au pair a few years ago. But certainly, at the beginning it is difficult to get along in a new country. Since I knew only a few people and like to do sports, I looked for sports clubs nearby to build up a network. That helped me! Now I play football and also rugby and touch football – both very popular in Australia and therefore a little piece of “home”.

Are there any differences between Australia and Switzerland that strike you particularly?

I like the completely different lifestyle in Switzerland. For example, there is less pressure to get through the day quickly. There is the lunch break during which you can eat and chat with colleagues. Some people even go home to have lunch with their family! That would be unthinkable in Australia. There, we often eat while working at the computer and find therefore little time for rest. That’s why I appreciate things like that in Switzerland. And Switzerland has a great landscape! However, it is very cold here and I miss the Australian weather and the beach, but I also find it nice to be in the mountains. It would be wonderful to have a white Christmas. We celebrate Christmas in summer with a barbecue and 35 degrees.

What are your plans for the future?

I would like to continue working in Switzerland in the field of education. I have been glad to work as an English assistant and I feel confident in finding the next professional step for me in Switzerland.

What tips would you give young Swiss Abroad who would like to work in Switzerland?

I recommend this programme from Movetia to young people looking to gain professional experience but also for general life experience and immersing themselves in another culture and language. I found Movetia, educationsuisse and the school to be very supportive.

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INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

In Swiss upper secondary schools and vocational schools, native speakers enrich language lessons. They not only teach language skills, but also cultural aspects of their country of origin.

These language assistants, usually young students from abroad, come to work through the Movetia agency in cooperation with educationsuisse. Isabelle Bucher is one of them: The Swiss Abroad from Australia is currently working as a language assistant at the Kantonsschule am Burggraben in St. Gallen.

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“I was also able to improve my language skills”

The young Swiss Abroad Pol Giralt from Spain was a student at the Swiss school in Barcelona, like his grandmother and father. During the last long summer holidays, he visited Switzerland and worked on a farm.

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

Agriviva was founded over 75 years ago. The organisation aims to build a bridge between town and country and different cultures by arranging placements of several weeks for young people from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you will help a farming family with their daily work. Ideal for all those who like to be active, like nature, and want to get to know a new family and life on a Swiss farm.

Pol Giralt, how did you find out about the Swiss organisation Agriviva?
My father read an article in the “Swiss Review” by educationsuisse on the subject of “Gaining work experience in Switzerland”. Agriviva was also mentioned in it. I thought working on a farm was a good idea and I really wanted to try it out. I found all the necessary information on the Agriviva website and so I signed up.

How did you like it on the farm in Switzerland?
I spent a whole month on the farm in the village of Bözberg in the canton of Aargau and experienced a lot. I liked it very much, although it was sometimes exhausting work.

Describe for us your typical day on the farm.
I got up at 7 am and had a big breakfast with the family. At 8 o’clock we went to the field to pick cherries. Every day there were about 15 people working, but sometimes there were 30 people. The cherry trees are about four metres high. So, we climbed ladders or picked from the ground more than 500 kilos of fruit every day. After the lunch break, I either helped pick cherries again or was in the barn milking cows.

Were there any language problems or other problems of understanding?
I learned German at the Swiss school in Barcelona and at home with my grandmother. So, there were few misunderstandings. The farmer’s family knew that I didn’t understand Swiss German. There were also some employees from Germany, so we always spoke German. And I was also able to improve my language skills.

What did you like most on the farm?
It was very interesting to meet many new people and the different cultures. It was also interesting to see how the farmers market the fruit and to follow the path of the cherries from the field to the supermarket.

Will you return to Switzerland to work on a farm again?
I would like to go to a farmer’s family again next year. However, in September I started my studies in chemical engineering at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya - UPC. I am not sure whether I will have enough time for Agriviva.

Would you recommend a stay with a farm family to your friends?
Yes, for sure! And not only to my friends, but to all young people, I recommend helping on a farm. It’s not only a great experience, but you also learn new things. To experience yourself the hard work that is done so that we have food on the table every day teaches us to have respect for the farmers.

Pol Giralt: “To experience hard work yourself teaches us to have respect for the farmers.”

Photo donated

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“Moving to Switzerland gave me freedom”

The Swiss Abroad Brigitte König came to Switzerland from Latin America for her education. Here she talks about her experiences.

“I grew up in Paraguay, South America. My father had met my mother on a trip around the world and so he emigrated to Paraguay. However, it was very important to him that we grew up speaking German. That’s why I spent my school years at a German school. The school holidays allowed us to travel to Switzerland often to visit my grandparents. This familiarised me with Swiss traditions at an early age.

When I was 16 years old, my father thought it was time for me to move to Switzerland to start professional training. However, I didn’t feel grown up enough and wasn’t ready to leave my life in Paraguay behind. In 2016, at the age of 18, I flew to Switzerland alone with mixed feelings. Only when I arrived in Switzerland did I realise that I was facing a completely new phase in my life. I had left my friends and family behind in South America.

The traditional Paraguayan lives in the here and now and does not give much thought to tomorrow. Spontaneity is one of his strongest qualities and punctuality in South America means “I’m only one hour late.” Swiss punctuality was difficult for me at first. However, like other Swiss characteristics, I have come to appreciate it because it simplifies everyday life.

I also quickly became aware that Switzerland is a country full of different cultures. People from all over the world, with different religions and languages, can be found in this small country. I liked this multicultural diversity and was always discovering new things.

When I arrived in Switzerland, I worked in a restaurant in Bettmeralp during the winter season. Many of the staff on the alp came from all over the world and I got little of the Swiss culture. When the season ended, I moved in with my grandparents and slowly I made contacts through work and sport. I was also able to make friendships, which made my path easier and continue to this day.

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do professionally or in which areas I saw my future. So, I decided to do an internship in service at a retirement home in Rheinfelden. After my internship, I did my apprenticeship as a hotel manageress in Basel, where I was able to build a life for myself, make contacts and cultivate friendships. The apprenticeship allowed me to grow as a person, to discover a passion for the organisational side, to create daily routines and to help with the scheduling of staff.

Since I could not finance myself during the apprenticeship, I had to inquire about a scholarship. I contacted various institutions, including my home canton of Aargau, but unfortunately, I only received rejections. Through my grandfather, I became aware of educationsuisse. This organisation supported me in obtaining scholarships from the Willy Müller Foundation and the Hans Freiburghaus Fund of the Foundation for Swiss Abroad. Thanks to educationsuisse, I became independent and was able to successfully complete the training of my choice.

Moving to Switzerland gave me freedom, in the truest sense of the word, and allowed me to find and go my own way. The various encounters have shaped me and helped me find my own identity.

In September, I started part-time studies in social work at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern FHNW in Muttenz. Meanwhile, I continue to work 50 percent as deputy chef de service, breakfast.”

Educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad counselling related to education in Switzerland.

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“Choosing a profession or course of study is always a lengthy process.”

Educationsuisse speaks to Francesca Kirchhofer, a vocational and career counsellor in Berne.

Francesca Kirchhofer, you work at the Career Guidance Centre (BIZ) Berne. What do you enjoy about your work?

Having the opportunity to inform, advise and support people in a wide range of life situations is very exciting. It begins with students who are contemplating what to do when they leave school. Then we have young adults who have completed an apprenticeship or upper-secondary-level school and intend to work, study or divert from their original chosen path. We also offer career guidance to adults who are thinking of doing continuing education or changing profession.

What is the biggest challenge that you face?

Firstly, the wide range of education, training and continuing education opportunities that are currently available in Switzerland. The educational landscape is continually changing. Keeping track is easier said than done. Secondly, the sheer variety of personal situations with which we are confronted. It requires a lot of empathy. Unfortunately we cannot satisfy everyone.

When is the right time to seek advice?

As soon as you feel ready to weigh up the available options. Young Swiss Abroad often complete their first school qualification in the country in which they live. If they are intending to study or train in Switzerland thereafter, we would advise them to work out in good time what they want to do and the prerequisites that they need to fulfil. One or preferably two years beforehand is a good time to start planning.

Do you have any tips for Swiss Abroad?

Thank goodness for the Internet! Our website, www.berufsbewerbung.ch, includes information about the Swiss education system, preparatory and integration courses, vocational education and training opportunities, fields of study, continuing education, and job-hunting. Our “Berufe-Explorer” tool and “Studien-Interessen-Check SIC” check are two platforms that can help you work out which professions or higher education courses appeal to you the most. Our website contains photos and video clips about vocational education and training that provide an insight into the world of work.

How important are skills in the relevant language?

They are vital. At the very least, you need to have reached level B1/B2 to do vocational education and training, and level C1 for universities studies. You should try and shore up these skills in good time.

Educationsuisse arranges personal consultations with the Career Guidance Centre BIZ-Berne. In a personal dialogue, a qualified expert will answer all individual questions.

Consultations are available in English, German, French, Italian or Spanish, and may be conducted via Skype or face-to-face in Berne (or in Biel for French speakers). One consultation costs CHF 130 (duration: approx. 60 minutes). You can enrol for a consultation via educationsuisse. (RG)

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And how many young Swiss Abroad come to you for advice?

Almost 20 were referred to us last year by educationsuisse – a relatively small number for our staff of more than 70 here at the Career Guidance Centre in Berne.

Do you have any tips on how young people can make the right choice?

On the one hand, they should think about their own interests, strengths, motives and aspirations. On the other, they need information about what is available and routes to get there. Choosing a profession or course of study is always a lengthy process. You need to invest time in it. Gathering experience is the way to get this process moving. Experiences can be information events, conversations with professionals, or taster courses.