Vocational education and training (VET) and military

This leaflet addresses the most common questions that arise in connection with vocational education and training (VET) and military training, both for the host company and the learner.

RS planning for learners

Learners usually complete VET at the age of 18 or 19. Swiss men required to do military service or Swiss women serving on a voluntary basis normally attend recruit school (RS) immediately after their initial VET programme.

If the VET programme has not been completed by the time RS starts, it is recommended to contact the district command of the learner's local canton at an early stage to enquire about the alternative options available. Completion of the VET programme should always take precedence over military training.

Can a VET programme start before the end of compulsory schooling?
No. Even though admission to RS usually takes place at the end of an apprenticeship, the start of the VET programme may not be brought forwards, i.e. the VET programme may not start before the end of mandatory schooling.

Can recruit school be postponed?
In exceptional cases, RS may be postponed following a reasoned request from the learner. This is particularly the case if the VET programme has not yet been completed. Any disadvantages that may arise for the learner at a later stage as a result of a postponement (a build-up of shifts, unsuitable working hours) should be accepted in the interests of ensuring a continuous training programme.

However, the host company cannot be required to postpone the summer RS, which usually begins around the end of June, if the learner is in their final year of training.

Is a termination of the apprenticeship contract required if the learner starts at the RS before the end of the apprenticeship?
The learner leaves the host company before the end of the apprenticeship contract, but because they are prevented from working, through no fault of their own, in order to fulfil a legal obligation (Art. 324a(1) and (2) of the Swiss Code of Obligations). A termination of the apprenticeship contract is not required.

© 2026 SDBB, Bern

Do the missed apprenticeship hours need to be made up?
The apprenticeship hours missed due to military service do not need to be made up; the apprenticeship contract ends on the scheduled date. By successfully passing the final examination, the learner has demonstrated that they have met the objectives and requirements in an apprenticeship.

If the entire duration of the RS falls within the period of the VET programme, it is advisable to undertake this training only after completing the VET programme.

In the event of a prolonged interruption due to military service, the VET programme may be extended only if the training objective cannot be achieved within the time remaining. An extension is possible by mutual agreement between the contracting parties and with the approval of the cantonal VET office.

Is leave granted for the final examination while attending recruit school?
If the final examination takes place during RS, the leave required to sit the examination must be requested from the relevant commanding officer. Learners are granted leave by the relevant RS commanding officers to sit their final examinations and attend official graduation ceremonies. A notice or an invitation must be submitted for this purpose.

Is the host company obliged to pay the wage until the contractual end of the VET programme?
The learner is entitled to payment of wages until the end of their VET programme because they are prevented from working, through no fault of their own, in order to fulfil a statutory obligation (Art. 324a(1) and (2) of the Swiss Code of Obligations). If the learner is required to undertake military service (RS, alternative service, refresher courses) during their VET programme, they are entitled to benefits under the income replacement scheme.

If the compensation for loss of earnings covers 80 per cent or more of the wage, the host company is no longer required to pay the wage (Art. 324b of the Swiss Code of Obligations). In this case, however, the learner is entitled to receive the full loss of earnings allowance.

Under the Loss of Earnings Compensation Scheme, recruits receive compensation of CHF 69 per day. If the learner's wage does not exceed CHF 2,000 and the learner is not employed by the host company after completing the RS, payment of the wage may be finalised on the last working day or holiday before the start of the RS. The host company's right to provide further services (e.g. in accordance with the provisions of the collective labour agreement) is reserved. An exception applies to recruits with children. They will receive the same benefits as people (those in work or not in work) who have completed their basic training.

Can holiday reductions be made?
As a general rule, the holiday entitlement of the learner remains in full. A reduction in the event of absence through no fault of their own, such as at recruiting school, is only possible if the absence has lasted two full months (Art. 329b(2) of the Swiss Code of Obligations). After that, each additional full month of absence gives the right to reduce the annual holiday entitlement by one twelfth.

According to the Swiss Code of Obligations (CO Art. 324a), an employee must be granted the time to fulfil their statutory obligation and wages must be paid for the corresponding time. Orientation day 6/7 is considered to be the official date. The person responsible for the position is therefore not paid for the orientation day and also does not receive any compensation for loss of earnings either.

Can the learner's vocational trainer refuse to allow the learner to take the remaining days of holiday leave before they start recruit school at the end of June?

In principle, the company determines the time of the holiday leave, but takes into account the wishes of the learners as far as possible, whereby requests should be submitted two to three months before the start of the holiday. Since recruitment generally takes place no earlier than twelve months and no later than three months before the start of recruit school, it should be possible to plan holiday leave at an early stage. It is not recommended to pay out the unused holiday days on the basis of the apprentice's salary.

A learner will start recruit school using the 300-day model but did not pass the final examination? Can they retake the examination later?

Different registration periods apply for repeaters depending on the canton (usually in autumn). If a learner did not pass the examination, it is necessary to contact the competent cantonal VET office (or the qualification procedure department there, the registered office of the host company is decisive) in order to be able to participate in the final examinations of the following year.

A learner will be starting recruit school at the end of June but failed the final examination? What can they do?

If it is possible to take the examination one year later without attending vocational school, the learner can start RS. If the learner has to continue to attend VET school and has already started RS, they may upon request discontinue the course and restart RS after retaking the examination.

Completion of the VET programme should always take precedence over military training.

Can the recruit school start date be selected during recruitment?

Those liable for military service are generally called up for recruitment no earlier than twelve months and no later than three months before the start of recruit school, but no later than the year in which they reach the age of 24. Persons liable for military service who have not been called up for recruitment by the age of 21 are contacted annually by their district commander regarding the date of recruit school.

During recruitment, the candidate is assigned to a specific role within the army, and the start date (year, start of winter or summer RS) and the location of military training as well as the service model (WK model or continuous service) are determined.

Can the refresher course (WK) be postponed?

After RS and/or further military training, men liable for military service are called up annually for refresher courses until they have fulfilled their total service obligation. Refresher courses can be postponed following a reasoned request. The postponed refresher course must be completed. Applications must be submitted to the competent military authority (district command).

Civilian service

Military service can give rise to insurmountable conflicts of conscience. In these cases, the Federal Constitution guarantees an alternative with Art. 59: the alternative civilian service.

The duration of the alternative civilian service is 1.5 times the usual military service obligation. As with military service, there is also a duty to provide services in civilian service. If a vocational apprenticeship has not yet been completed, assignments must therefore be coordinated with the training. Like members of the army, civilian service providers are also entitled to compensation for employment.

Legal basis

VPETA, Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (Federal Act of 13 December 2002 on Vocational and Professional Education and Training, SR 412.10)

CO, Swiss Code of Obligations (Federal Act of 30 March 1911 on the amendment of the Swiss Civil Code – Part Five: Code of Obligations, SR 220)

EOG, Loss of Earnings Compensation Act (Federal Act of 25 September 1952 on Compensation for Loss of Earnings for Persons on Military Service or Maternity Leave, SR 834.1)

BV, Federal Constitution (SR 101)

Cantonal decrees

(Laws can be accessed with SR numbers at: → *fedlex.admin.ch*)

Important links

→ *vocationaleducation.ch/addresses*
List of cantonal VET offices. Point of contact for initial information and referral to specialist units.

→ *vocationaleducation.ch/glossary*
All important VET terms are described in short and informative texts.

→ *vocationaleducation.ch/handbook*
The "Apprenticeship Handbook" is intended as a practical orientation guide for contracting parties during an apprenticeship. The statutory provisions on vocational education and training (VET) are explained in simple words.

→ *armee.ch*
Information for preparing for RS

→ *zivi.admin.ch*
Information on civilian service

Further literature

→ *shop.sdbb.ch*
The official brochure of the cantons on the apprenticeship contract is intended as a practical orientation guide for contracting parties during an apprenticeship. The legal basis of the apprenticeship contract is explained in simple words.

→ *ahv-iv.ch*
AHV, Fact sheet on compensation for loss of earnings, 6.01 EO/EMSE benefits, 2015 (in German)

→ *bundespublikationen.admin.ch*
"Your opportunity – our army!" flyer. (in German)

July 2026 edition
This and other fact sheets can be found at:

→ *vocationaleducation.ch/factsheets*

© SDBB Bern
Reproduction in whole or in part, including use in digital media, is permitted for non-commercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.