



## ADVICE & TIPS – SWITZERLAND



In Switzerland, non-nationals typically work either as seasonal workers in tourism or, if highly qualified, in IT and financial services.

- *Typical problems encountered:* there are restrictions on permits to work in Switzerland for non-nationals, but these have been waived for citizens of EFTA and EU17 countries
- *How to improve your chances:* it is highly recommended that graduates be able to use the language of the canton where they work.
- *Language requirements:* Out of the 26 cantons that make up Switzerland, 17 cantons are monolingual in German; four cantons are French-speaking: Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud; and three cantons are bilingual: Bern, Fribourg and Valais (both French and German are spoken). Italian is spoken in Ticino and four southern valleys of Canton Graubünden. Romansch (Rhaeto-Roman) is spoken in a number of isolated valleys once colonised by the Romans. Many Swiss do speak English and about 15% of the workforce use English at work. Employers actively encourage employees to learn the language of the canton, with many large companies providing in-house language tuition or offering to pay employees' course fees.

### The application letter

The cover letter of your application is an essential tool to announcing yourself, your educational and professional experience and availability to a potential employer. You should therefore express your interest in the post for which you are applying as briefly and precisely as possible.

The aim of a cover letter is to convince the person you are writing to that you are the best person for the job advertised. What you write should therefore be informative, convincing, show genuine motivation and make the person to whom it is addressed want to know more about you. Don't forget to add a personal touch.

Feel free to express your expectations regarding the job you apply for. Show your strengths in relation to this job and, if the occasion arises, explain why you want to change jobs. Finally, do not write more than one A4 page (a letter of application should only be written by hand if the employer expressly requests this) and make sure to check your grammar and spelling very carefully. Careless errors will not make a potential employer motivated to find out more about you.

## **The Curriculum Vitae**

A Swiss CV is similar in structure to a German CV, so detailed and precise. A photo is usually attached (or scanned in) to the top right corner. The CV can either be chronological (which is most common), reversed chronological or functional. It should include personal detail, your education and qualifications, and practical experience. Swiss recruiters attach great importance to work experience, so mention all of your practical experience. Include with your CV two or three references (notify the people in advance) on a separate sheet and copies of your diplomas and testimonials from former employers.

You should create two versions of your CV: a local-language CV (German, French or Italian) and an English CV. When applying to international companies, it is advisable to submit your CV in English, or if no language has been specified, English and the local language of the area where the organisation is based.

As Swiss employers attach great importance to work experience, you should mention all practical experience, including apprenticeships. Language skills, computer literacy and extracurricular activities/interests should also be included. A photo is often attached to the top left-hand corner.

## **The application procedure**

- Psychological and psychometric tests are sometimes used.
- Ensure you arrive at least 15 minutes before an interview is scheduled to start.
- There are two CV formats in Switzerland: English and German. Use the English version for international companies, unless they specify otherwise. German CVs are lengthy (two to three pages), and very detailed; they use a chronological order, and have a number of attachments, such as diplomas, references and a photograph. English CVs are shorter (one to two pages), in reverse-chronological order, with less detail and usually no attachments.
- Check in advance which of the three main languages (French, German or Italian) are spoken within the organisation, and translate your CV accordingly.
- Swiss recruiters attach great importance to work experience, so highlight any placements or temporary jobs you've had.
- Covering letters should be well structured, formal and short (a maximum of one page in length).

## **Where can I work?**

- Major industries: banking, insurance, tourism, pharmaceuticals, watch production, electrical and mechanical engineering, and logistics.
- Recent growth areas: microtechnology and biotechnology.
- Shortage occupations: communication system engineers, biotechnologists, economists, finance specialists, lawyers and German language teachers.
- Major companies: include Nestlé, Credit Suisse, Glencore, Novartis, Roche, ABB, Adecco, UBS, Swiss Re, Swatch and Zurich Financial Services.
- Major cities: Bern (capital), Zurich (largest city), Basel, Geneva and Lausanne.

## **What's it like working in Switzerland?**

- Average working hours: about 42 per week (Swiss World, 2008).
- Holidays: full-time employees are entitled to 20 days of paid leave per year, plus 8 or 9 public holidays (this varies according to the canton).
- Average graduate starting salary: 85,000 Swiss francs (FH Schweiz, 2007).
- Tax rates: rates are low in Switzerland, but all residents must arrange healthcare insurance within three months of arriving in the country. It is also compulsory to insure against unemployment, occupational accidents and occupational illness. A 2005 survey by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office calculated that the average Swiss spends just over a third of their household budget on taxes and insurance.
- Swiss companies are generally traditional and hierarchical, with workers normally expected to project a low-key, modest image in the workplace.