

## **Education and the political framework. Options and requirements for vocational schools**

### **Referat anlässlich der 83rd International SIEC-ISBE Conference 2011: Business Education: Stakeholders' current and future requirements. Universität Basel, 27.Juli 2011**

I would like to thank you for the invitation to your conference. Let me seize this opportunity to talk about "current and future requirements for business education" from the perspective that characterizes my work. In addition I would like to confess, that the topic of my speech was given not very precisely, so I enjoy a kind of freedom to speak about the topics I want. And a last preliminary remark: I would like to apologize for my poor English. As a politician in Switzerland, you have to speak German, French, or Italian, but not necessarily English. And my school carrier prepared me for many things, but not for a globalized world, I had to study Greek and Latin, instead of English.

The topic of vocational school in Switzerland comes into consideration for me in the following three perspectives:

1. As a politician I take the interest that the Swiss educational system as a whole will enable our youth to persist in a globalized world also in the future. Furthermore a good educational system ought to aim at maintaining Switzerland at the top of competitiveness.
2. As the president of the association of Swiss private schools I have to look after the interests of private schools in a country that has a liberal attitude towards private schools. At the same time this country makes sure – with a high quality of state-run education – that equal opportunities are preserved. I would like to emphasize that I vigorously support these equal opportunities.
3. As the owner of private schools and a member of the Executive Boards of others private schools – from elementary school to a high school and college degree – it is my duty to consider how to position these businesses in the market to secure their success. So, due to my business activities, I have not a very high or precise knowledge of vocational schools, or business education.

But I can reassure you, that shouldn't be a bigger problem, especially not for a politician, and especially not in Switzerland. It is typical of the political system in Switzerland that members of Parliament are not exclusively politicians, but also have additional experiences - in occupations and in associations - which they can bring into politics.

Yet let me assure you that this idea has not harmed politics so far. I am convinced that our Swiss Parliament is one of the world's most economical parliaments. The decisions taken by this parliament are not much more stupid than – say – the ones of the Italian Parliament, which is one of the most expensive ones for the tax-payer. But the difference consists in more experience from the world outside politics, and I think, this is an advantage of our system. On the other hand, this systems alouds politicians to talk about things they don't understand at all or not exactly enough.

For the next thirty minutes I would like to talk to you about these topics and I am willing to admit that some of what I am going to tell you is not necessarily new to you as experts. I am not an expert on Business Education, though. However, I rather take an outside view on vocational schools in general and I have pointed this risk out to the people who invited me to this congress.

I would like to discuss the following topics:

I would like to begin with A long, or not so long, **preliminary remark: Education for a globalized world.** Although this has little to do with my topic in a narrower meaning, I deem it important to place it in the context. It could be useful to know some elements of the political and social framework in which education is situated, and to know what the main objectives of education could or should be.

Then I will make some remarks about **1. The competition between vocational school and high school.** The competition between these two systems is getting sharper and therefore there are bound to be consequences for the positioning of these two areas and their financing. Social attitudes have an increasing influence on the decision making of the young people, the parents and the society, which way to choose for a successful future and carrier.

In a second chapter, I'd like to discuss some **2. Challenges for vocational schools,** as I currently see them.

Only five years ago the Parliament still debated the problem of a lack of positions for apprentices in Switzerland. Today – or actually since the beginning of this year – the opposite has been on the political agenda: Certain areas of business are complaining that they cannot find enough apprentices, or rather, good enough apprentices. We have a development **2.1. From a lack of positions for apprentices to a lack of apprentices.**

*The so called* **2.2. Tertiarization of the working environment** is responsible for a decrease in young blood for certain areas of business. After all it is to be asked how long Switzerland can remain a production location or if it will have to develop even more into a service rendering location. Even though this kind of development may be quite profitable for you as the representatives of Business Education, yet politically speaking it is not really desired. There are some ideas making from Switzerland a kind of pure service location for Europe, an European Singapore. The consequences especially for the working middle class, and therefore for the political stability, an important advantage for our country, would be unfavourable. **2.3. Bologna or the international comparability of apprenticeships.** The Bologna system is a daunting challenge for the international comparability of apprenticeships. I personally eye this development quite critically. In a third part I would like to go into some **3. Prospects** as I see them for the vocational education. **3.1. Apprenticeships: equal but different.** In my opinion the principle “apprenticeships, equal but different”, is correct. However, it must not just remain a principle; it has to be put into practice again and again in its recognition and financing.

**3.2. Coordination instead of competition.** The future of apprenticeships strongly depends on how independent they manage to remain, but also on keeping fair conditions in the competition for young people. The vocational education is in a competition, but it has also to be well equipped for a fair competition, financially and politically spoken.

**3.3 “Export” of apprenticeships.** On a political level I have also tried to boost and build up dual vocational education abroad, along with the Swiss economy. To me this seems an opportunity in different respects: in matters of economy and migration, but also regarding projects of foreign aid. But here we are just in the beginning of discussions, and it will be a long way to projects and money and a real commitment by the state.

**3.4 Apprenticeship/Swiss education and private equity.** After education has gradually become an investment aim of private equity especially abroad, we are discovering a growing interest also in

Switzerland. Also the vocational education can profit from this, mainly when it comes to financing. However, this development also constitutes risks.

**3.5. Integrating international businesses in apprenticeships.** If apprenticeships want to remain competitive along grammar schools or the Swiss Matura, we will have to bring about a transculturation with the many international businesses in Switzerland. Only by understanding the characteristics and the qualities of our system, will apprenticeships be in for a lasting future. We have more and more international companies in Switzerland, and they have poor or no knowledge of our successful vocational education. They don't educate apprentices, but they take already educated or qualified people from high schools or abroad. In my opinion this development is weakening the vocational education in Switzerland. **4. Prospects/summary.**

Before touching upon these points, I would like to make a longish preliminary remark. While I was thinking about what my talk should cover, I asked myself what the context of your question was. And to me as a politician, a businessman, as a person dealing with the education of our youth, this context means the following: What do we have to prepare our youth for and in what kind of world? And how can we manage to give them the best possible prerequisites to succeed in this world? We call this world a globalized world, yet it wasn't when I was educated.

My competitors were all Swiss. The competitors of our youth are people from Hanoi, Hongkong, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai. You and I, we don't exactly know who the people from these threshold countries are, but all we learn about them in the media makes us believe that they want to escape their hardships at all costs. Their ambition – compared to the ambition of our youth – will probably need no further incentives. The social rise through education means escaping poverty and illness. These people will work sixteen, seventeen or eighteen hours a day without grumbling, earning what a Swiss would work an hour for. What our youth is facing is a competition of a few hundred millions. Today ten thousand software developers in India are getting their diploma, and next week another ten thousand, half a million every year. Mind you, I'm only talking about software developers.

In this globalized world Switzerland has an excellent position yet. We are all competitors, though, and if we fall, another will take our position. Former generations did not use to have the difficulties our youth has to face. And if I am going to talk about Swiss education, vocational training and its relation to general education, then we ought to ask ourselves if what we do is good enough to enable our youth to succeed in the global competition which is becoming harder.

I am confident that we can do that, at least as well as other countries. Vocational training is one of the most successful factors for this success but I think that vocational schools must draw their conclusions from globalization as well, or else they will not reach their goals any more. Sometimes, however, it makes sense to put thoughts and discussions into a broader relation, or else one may lose oneself in minor details.

The framework for future politics of education is the world, and the competitiveness of our education system. In this framework the vocational education is an advantage over others systems, especially over high school focussed ones. But in order to keep this advantage the vocational education has to develop itself, has to adapt to the future requirements. How it should do that, this you know better than me, as experts.

## 1. The competition between vocational school and high school

Let's first have a look at the present. Type "dual education" into the internet encyclopedia "Wikipedia" and – after a short introduction – you will mainly find hints to problems. It says there that in vocational education is a lack of professional ability and a low level of knowledge of many graduates, that the costs of education are too high, that the young people are too much specialized and that the businesses are not prepared any more to invest into this kind of education. Some experts claim that vocational schools are outdated and ask for a raise of graduation rates at grammar school (Matura) from 20 to 60 per cent. In the cantons of Geneva and Ticino where the present number of graduations is 45 and 33 per cent respectively, this would lead to a rate of 90 per cent, much worse than in other countries.

According to the Federal Office for Statistics the demographic development is currently leading to a decrease of 11 per cent in vocational schools. In the canton of Zurich it is 2 per cent higher, in 10 other cantons up to 20 per cent lower. On the other hand the number of students at Swiss grammar schools will remain constant or rather increase.

However, this development is not desired because it does not correspond to the changing needs of the job market; much more, it only reflects the patterns of reaction of the different educational types to demographic fluctuations. Or to be more precise: This development is alarming if high schools are filled in favour of capacity utilization but at the expense of quality and at the expense of vocational schools. This development must be amended.

I have the firm belief that vocational education has to react to this. On the one hand it has to put more emphasis on general knowledge, on the other hand one should refrain from becoming more academic and scholarly. Good examples of this are professional schools, which cover the practical part of the dual education with practical training or training methods at school.

The competition between high schools and vocational schools will become tougher. Vocational schools must keep practical training as their central mission and at the same time maintain their high quality, and yet it will have to acknowledge that general knowledge is getting more and more important.

This does not only *sound* like the quadrature of the circle, it *is* the quadrature of the circle. On one hand to become more competitive vocational schools must increase the skills in general knowledge, on the other hand doing so, the difference to grammar schools is becoming unclear. And the advantage of vocational schools over grammar schools, the practical education, is getting shorter time and in consequence is getting less important.

Intensifying the prestige of a purely academic education even more at the expense of a higher vocational education is wrong. Believing that a grammar school guarantees success in life is still a common mistake with many parents. What is needed is a consolidation of vocational education, also financially speaking. The OECD is consistent also in this point, as it calls for a standardized financial structure for both vocational and academic education.

In politics, unfortunately, this way of thinking has not been reached yet. The authorities are not yet ready to finance study courses at academic level and preparatory courses for vocational examinations and higher proficiency certificates equally. Business associations in Switzerland are exerting pressure, yet in my opinion some spokesmen make the mistake of playing vocational education off against general education.

But the solution may not lie in transferring money from general education to vocational education; the key is providing more money for the whole system. But the business associations are completely right in pointing

out the necessity of a better financment of the vocational education. I'm quite confident of the future possibilities for more money in vocational education. Swiss people are normally very economical when it comes to decisions on spending money or not. But a few weeks ago it came out as a result of a poll that education is the only subject matter with a majority of people consenting to an increase of spendings. The whole system needs more money, especially the part of vocational education, but not at the expense of other ways of education.

## **2. Challenges for vocational schools**

### ***2.1. From a lack of positions for apprentices to a lack of apprentices***

Only five years ago the lack of positions for apprenticeships was one of the most serious challenges. Whereas/ 33 per cent of all the businesses still had apprentices in the year 1985, in 1995 it was only 20 per cent and in 2002 only 16. I am not sure if currently a reversal of the trend is taking place at a low level. However there are more frequent reports that there are apprenticeships available, yet the vacancies cannot be filled.

I can see two reasons for this, although I cannot prove them: on the one hand there is a trend towards general education and grammar school. On the other hand there is a development that can also be detected in the working world: in certain areas of business we have a lack of qualified personnel – despite large-scale immigration and freedom of movement and residence for people from the European Union. Currently foreigners make up twenty three per cent, the second highest rate in Europe behind Luxembourg. With a rate high like that, you always have to take care about social stability and integration, especially considering the population growth Switzerland caused by the immigration. And on the other hand we have workers who lack the appropriate qualifications necessary for the job market. For this reason it becomes more and more difficult to manage the right young people to the right jobs or the right way of further education.

### ***2.2. Tertiarization of the working environment***

A further challenge for vocational education is the tertiarization of the working environment. In the different areas of business the incongruity between offered apprenticeship positions and actual employees could turn out to be a huge economic setback. The structure of the apprenticeship positions corresponds to a structure of the areas of business of the eighties.

There are more apprenticeship positions in the traditional areas of industry and trade than in the areas of services, although the latter have increased considerably. Prof. Sheldon proved that way back in 1990 42 per cent of the people educated in the secondary sector could not be absorbed by this sector, whereas in the tertiary sector there was a lack of 21 per cent of workers that had not been trained in the same sector.

The rotation of occupations and areas of business is remarkable. The rate of rotation of all the working people is about fifty per cent.

Such high mobility and adaptability are economically pleasing; on the other hand it is claimed that the vocational sector does not educate adequately where the job market necessitates it. Tomorrow's places of work will be based more on knowledge, innovation and even more on foreign languages and communication. There will not be a lack of positions for cooks or construction workers, but in science

technology businesses, bio-tech laboratories, and insurance, finance and banking companies. It is these areas of business that have grown considerably in the past few years in Switzerland, yet there is a lack of well-trying vocational traditions, and workers are recruited from abroad or from grammar schools.

And it is here that I see the most ambitious challenge for you who are involved in business education to comply with your task and maintain your profile and to be able to convince our society that you are important. A good answer in Switzerland is or could even become more and more important the so called “Berufsmatura”, the vocational school leaving certificate, allowing the admission to universities of applied sciences.

### **2.3. Bologna or the international comparability of apprenticeships**

The Bologna system forces harmonization on apprenticeships that are difficult to accomplish. There may well be some advantages for universities in this system, especially as far as coordination is concerned, but for vocational education Bologna represents an element alien to the system. It fails to assess vocational education adequately. Bologna is bound to downgrade Swiss alumni of advanced technical colleges. Assuming there will really only be two titles in the future, the “bachelor of arts” and the “bachelor of science”, titles like that of an “engineer”, which have been protected titles so far, are going to be endangered.

The established Swiss principle “equal but different” will be lost. Sooner or later the economic practice will claim a title in terms of an “applied science”. I doubt whether the so called Copenhagen Consensus can be an adequate alternative. Once the hitherto existing titles such as “engineer”, “technical engineer” or “architect” have disappeared from technical colleges, the damage will be irreparable. I do not know, what this looks like exactly in your area, but I could imagine that it would probably be advisable not to surrender such specific quality of practicality.

But again, I can fully understand that we take an absorbing interest in displaying our system of vocational education also internationally. I am not opposed to this aim, if it is an aim of Bologna or Copenhagen. This display, however, should not lead us to giving up what has been tried and tested. I think it’s better to enforce the efforts to explain the qualities and characteristics of the vocational system than to give up the qualities under the pretext of harmonization.

## **3. Prospects**

### **3.1. Apprenticeships: equal but different**

In the third part, I would like to go into the prospects for the vocational education.

You all know the article in the Swiss Constitution that stipulates that the Swiss confederation and the cantons must make sure that both general and vocational education receive equal recognition. This mandate is binding, but it is endangered. Social recognition is quite different from legal recognition. In Switzerland general education has a higher prestige than vocational education. I need not tell you that from an economic point of view this is a basic mistake.

Furthermore I need not tell you either that the OECD categorically refuses to take back their criticism that Switzerland has too low a rate of high school graduates. This permanently requires more detailed explanations and communication from Switzerland with regard to foreign affairs. Even politicians – as far as they are interested in education anyway – misjudge the value of vocational education.

Only slowly do people start to realize that there is a marked relation between a good vocational system of education, a low rate of high school graduates and a low youth unemployment rate. The OECD has also begun to deal with employability more intensively by making international comparisons based on indicators such as labour force participation rate, rate of unemployment or success rate of training courses. Switzerland and its vocational educational system comes off very well in these indicators.

Even a cost comparison clearly speaks for consolidating vocational education. A study in veterinary medicine costs 700.000 Swiss francs, a study in literature 140.000 and a study in advanced training at a technical college amounts to 15.000 to 30.000 francs. And all the same, the basic principle of "equal but different" is not accepted by the society.

From my point of view, those features have to be emphasized that make vocational education more attractive. It remains to be seen how social prejudices can be amended effectively, and simple recipes don't work. It's difficult and challenging to change social attitudes. Regulations by laws or just putting more money in the system or in the marketing aren't effective means.

### ***3.2. Coordination instead of competition***

The future of vocational education depends on how far it can manage to keep its originality, but also on maintaining fair conditions when it comes to competing for the youth. This competition is bound to increase. High Schools have been greatly expanded in the past years as a result of demographic development, but also as a result of the still rising prestige of general education and the migration of the privileged classes, who do not know the qualities of Swiss vocational education at all.

There is no comparable/ mention of vocational studies in international OECD statistics. It can be proved, however, that a business school graduate of a mediocre American university has hardly any more knowledge than a Swiss graduate of a commercial apprenticeship regarding foreign language competence and even less regarding practical skills.

If we want to keep up the originality of vocational studies, we will have to build up a strong profile first. On the other hand we will also have to ensure the coordination between vocational and other types of education. Currently the Swiss Parliament is debating the act on the coordination between technical colleges and universities. In my judgement the technical colleges have to be careful not to be dominated by the universities and to be downgraded to some kind of second-class universities.

Yet they should not forget that they are responsible for this, too. They must underline and cultivate their practical relevance. It would be wrong to do just anything out of some kind of sense of inferiority to be able to adapt to university structures. Much more, they should disassociate themselves consciously without inhibiting the necessary coordination.

If vocational education wants to preserve its originality and if its social prestige is to increase, it has to underline its own value and refrain from trying to adapt to rivalling structures.

### ***3.3 "Export" of apprenticeships***

Sometimes it should also be possible for politicians to have ideas without really yet knowing how to put them into practice concretely. So I recently made an advance in Parliament to examine how the system of

Swiss vocational education could be exported. This idea originated from several projects of Swiss businesses abroad, for example in India. If such businesses open up subsidiaries they might have a lack of qualified personnel. Now there are businesses abroad that organize production and also the education of their apprentices according to Swiss standards.

I am of the opinion that this could be a promising perspective not just for individual businesses, but also for vocational apprenticeships. Our dual system can also be exported by educating the apprentices abroad and possibly allowing them to come to Switzerland for their practical training, provided that the job market needs them and is in a position to enable them to get a good education and thus build up new horizons in their home country.

I therefore believe that such models could sensibly support Swiss businesses abroad and add to foreign aid. Moreover they could contribute towards countering the brain drain from threshold countries and developing countries. In the foreseeable future Switzerland will not be able to find enough workers for definite job even in European countries which is best perceivable in the caring business.

Migratory partnerships with countries outside Europe might lead to the institution of vocational apprenticeships in such countries, which would then allow these workers to come to Switzerland for a limited period of time for their practical training. Migratory partnerships– at least for a small country like Switzerland – could be a challenging possibility to try and regulate global migration from poor to rich countries. Those who want to work towards a system where refugees are also taken back to their countries without reasons for asylum, should offer good reasons to those countries, why they should do so. Instituting educational structures in these countries seems to me a sensible thing to do, for those who have valuable opportunities at home will not emigrate.

As I have mentioned/ before, however, this idea has only been carried out by a few individual companies. Yet if we are convinced that vocational education is a reliable thing, and if we see that – if faced by general education – it gets under strong pressure, then we must develop new ideas to strengthen vocational education. To me, exporting this system means consolidating it.

As a result, also Swiss apprentices could profit from this: During their apprenticeships – or after completing them – they could have access to an international network of businesses or internship positions. They could thus gather experience or get some additional qualification abroad, which could mean a competitive advantage not only in today's, but also in tomorrow's working world.

Moreover vocational education could create a distinctive personal name for themselves in the area of practical training, which is not really attainable for high school graduates because the Swiss Matura does not have enough international equivalents. There is, though, a condition which is not simple in matters of domestic policy: For the Swiss vocational education to be exported, English should be a possible teaching language, but in our country, where peace amongst the languages is vital this is not easy to attain. We are not that far yet.

### ***3.4 Apprenticeship/Swiss education and private equity***

There is a further tendency that I can make out in the job market and that could be of interest also for vocational education. It is a development which is more advanced in the US and Asia than here. Private Equity firms are discovering education as a global area of investment.

As it has been happening for quite some time in the private caring market, international schools are purchased and brought together with standardized international curricula, for example the International Baccalaureat. Both for teachers and students this can be quite appealing, as one can go through his apprenticeship or occupation in different continents, without any problems of coordination or acceptance.

Such Private Equity businesses make use of the fact that in threshold countries and countries belonging to the former Eastern bloc, there is an almost insatiable hunger for education, good education. In such markets motivation and commitment are huge and education is one of the most appealing possibilities for social advancement.

This is of course less the case in Switzerland so far, as the Swiss society is rather saturated. Here the state provides an excellent range of education. Such high quality of Swiss education is extremely appealing to investment companies, and thus there are several private schools that have been taken over and are financed by Private Equity companies.

I can see both risks and opportunities for vocational education, or even for the whole Swiss educational system. The risks are that Swiss educational institutions, which are amply financed, can compete with state schools, first financially, but then also in terms of quality. The opportunities are that Switzerland realizes that what the state offers could also be a highly appealing export product; the state is also actively trying to shape this.

Dubai, for example, has a burning interest in Swiss educational know-how, especially in know-how in vocational education. The Swiss would not even have to organize it; they could regulate the quality, the standards and recognition by performance-related mandates to private organizations; operative matters, however, would be left to private organizations.

Private Public Partnerships also in vocational education? So far still a utopian dream, but I simply see that Private Equity companies take a normal interest. Before all is left to the open market, we should ask ourselves whether we should not examine how our successful system of education could be made to resist a globalized world. At any rate I would keep an eye on this development and try to control it before the two-tier society becomes a reality in education, which would be fatal for Switzerland.

### ***3.5. Integrating international businesses in apprenticeships***

If we still want vocational education to remain competitive with the high school, the Swiss Matura, we will have to bring about a transculturation with the many international companies in Switzerland. Only by understanding the characteristics and the qualities of our system, will apprenticeships be in for a lasting future.

I have just talked about the problem that it is not the right areas of business that offer enough apprenticeship positions. In my view, in Switzerland this has to do with the difficulty that it is those areas that boom, which are knowledge-intensive or high-tech-intensive. Such new jobs do not have a true and living vocational tradition, nor any departments of coordination in the vocational area.

As I see the situation, this is also a problem in your area, economic education. I come from the canton of Zug, which has felt the full force of what this means, like hardly any other location in Switzerland in the past decades. We have had a considerable increase in international companies in the service trade, yet none of these have any relation to the tradition of vocational education, or to the humane capital side, and often little or no relation at all.

And it is just these international companies and their managers that are actual free-riders of the Swiss vocational system of education. They recruit trained personnel or they withdraw them from our high schools, and that is exactly the reason why they enjoy coming to Switzerland: it is easier to find such personnel here in Switzerland.

Such firms may well demand a quota of numerous extra-European workers and hire a lot of locally trained workers or Europeans, but they are not ready to offer a single apprenticeship position. Such a lack of dedication to vocational education will further be on the increase if we do not take countermeasures.

It will strengthen the trend towards the Matura. In my opinion the political system ought to take measures that ask for more dedication to vocational education from such companies, for one of the reasons why they come to us is the high level of education. If this, however, is one of the factors for the choice of location – as well as low taxes – then Switzerland should be determined to demand from these companies to accept not only our low taxes but also our educational system, to integrate and to adopt elements of it.

If we want to strengthen our vocational education, we definitely have to make it clear to them. Why do we not ask a certain amount of apprenticeship positions from all those companies planning to move to Switzerland due to other factors of location? Actually it can only be in the interest of both parties, if vocational education continues being strong.

#### ***4. Prospects/summary***

In conclusion I would like to point out that I am convinced that there is a future for vocational education in Switzerland. However, it will only have a prosperous future if it can manage to adapt to what we call globalization. Accepting globalization means that we have to bear comparison with the international community. I am also convinced that vocational apprenticeships entail an advantage of location for Switzerland, which means that we will have to ensure that this originality is interpreted as quality. First of all this lies in the responsibility of communication.

It will be our domestic task to make sure that the social recognition of vocational education does not diminish when compared to general education. In my view this is only feasible if we adopt a somewhat paradox strategy: On the one hand general education will have to be intensified in vocational studies – to me something indispensable – on the other hand the practical side will also have to be underlined, as it is this feature that sharpens the image of vocational education.

The most immediate danger is much less the situation on the job market, that is, available apprenticeship positions, but the impending subordination to Bologna or Copenhagen, that is, the acceptance of the logic and supremacy of academic education.

Globalization – to me – is also an opportunity for vocational education, as it could make our system of education export-worthy. And making it export-worthy could lead to international recognition and eventually a gain in prestige at home, and thus it could be strengthened against grammar schools / high schools.

And let us not forget about private public partnership, migratory partnerships, development cooperation, corporate welfare; this could be a huge field to be ploughed through. Similar to the field of high schools, where there is an International Baccalaureat dominated by the Anglo-Saxon system of education, there could also be an international diploma for vocational studies, in which Switzerland has a considerable lead in know-how that it could make use of.

I have not talked about money a lot. The question of how to finance vocational education is one that Switzerland will have to answer for themselves. Compared to general education and universities, vocational education in Switzerland still has a weak lobby. An apprentice causes expenses that are way lower than what a student at high school costs, and who will then attend a university. Vocational education must be strongly supported at all costs, however not at the expense of general education, but additionally.

Professor Strahm, a former colleague of mine in Parliament, who I owe a lot to in this speech and who I have borrowed from, once said: "One always has to take into account the opportunity costs, that is the costs of alternatives. The costs of doing nothing are always higher".

Or as I would like to state as a conclusion: If we as the politicians are wont to get up on our soap-box from time to time and say that education is the only raw material we have, then we should also have the courage to invest into our education and to make a profit from it, as it is done by countries rich in raw materials. Or to put it simply: Who believes that education is expensive, does not know how expensive stupidity is.