

## **Recent developments in the education and training of librarians in Switzerland**

Address to the 69th IFLA general conference and council on 7th August 2003 in Berlin.

*Written by Josef Wandeler, Trialog AG, Zurich ([wandeler@trialog.ch](mailto:wandeler@trialog.ch))*

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to report on the current developments in the education and training of librarians in Switzerland on the occasion of this IFLA conference.

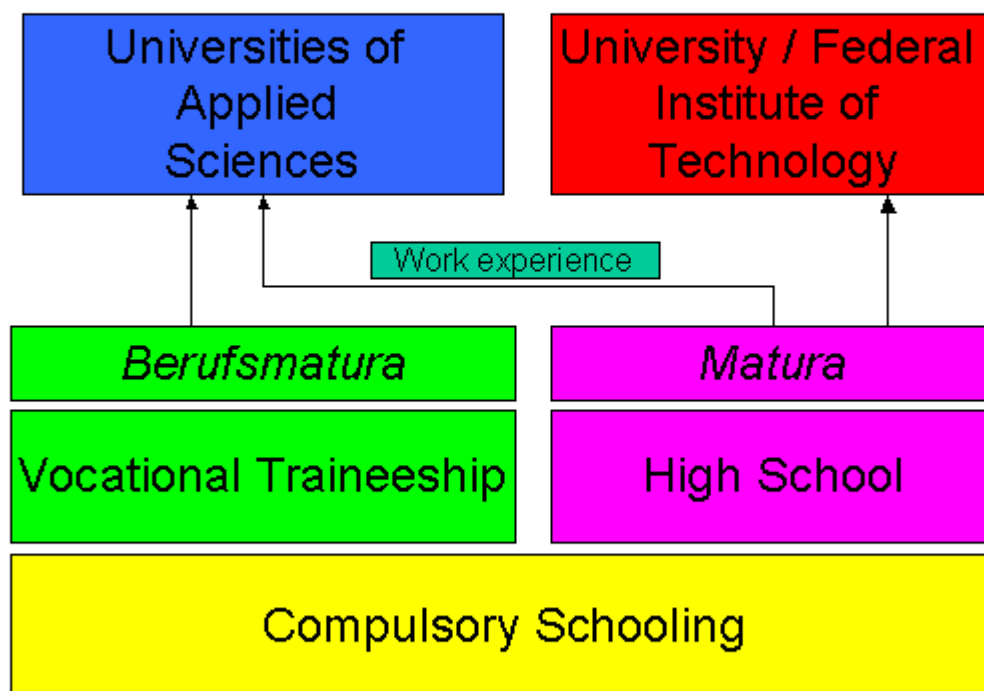
From Switzerland's point of view, this topic comes at an ideal time, since the training programme for librarians has undergone a fundamental reorganisation over the last few years. The most significant innovation is that the federal government now provides for a standardised course of study in this field with a state-recognised qualification.

Until these changes took place, librarianship training was largely the responsibility of the professional association BBS (Association of Swiss Libraries and Librarians). The 'BBS course' was a part-time programme run by various major university libraries on behalf of the association. This four-year programme led to the BBS diploma, which, however, was not a state-recognised qualification. Those who had completed this course tended to spend decades in middle-level administrative posts in libraries.

For a long time, there was a problem with the training programme for academic librarians - in fact, Swiss universities still do not offer courses in information science or librarianship. This meant that, in order to become qualified librarians, university graduates had to undergo on-the-job training at a library. In order to compensate for this deficit, the Zentralbibliothek Zürich (Zurich Central Library) has been offering a librarianship course since 1987 on behalf of the BBS and with the financial support of the Canton of Zurich. This course is open to university graduates who hold a position in an academic library. The part-time course consists of 400 taught hours and focuses exclusively on subjects specifically related to librarianship. In addition, the present-day University of Applied Sciences in Chur offered a postgraduate course in information science and documentation from 1992. This interdisciplinary programme, which concentrated on archives, documentation and librarianship, met with great scepticism from the established libraries. In the French part of Switzerland, the 'École des Bibliothécaires' was founded in Geneva; here, too, an integrated study programme covering archive studies, documentation and librarianship was developed.

In the course of the 1990's, the establishment of the universities of applied sciences and the increased federal government control over vocational training programmes led to substantial changes in librarianship programmes, in particular. The federal law governing the universities of applied sciences, which came into effect in 1995, served to fill a significant gap in the Swiss educational system; since then, we have seen the establishment of seven universities of applied sciences, comprised of former technical colleges and organised according to standardised regulations laid down by the federal government. They supplement the degree programmes offered by the universities at the tertiary level. At the same time, the creation of the Berufsmatura, a secondary level vocational diploma which can be obtained parallel to a vocational training course, provides a new route for students to gain access to the universities of applied sciences.

# General Education System

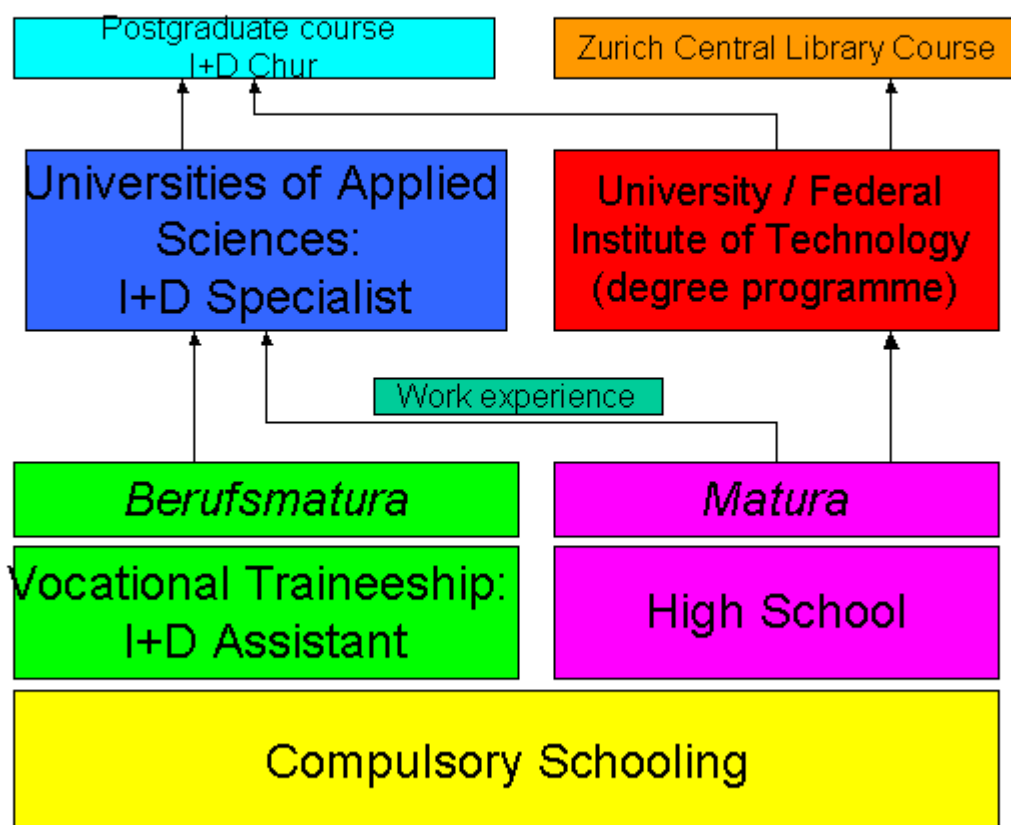


Within the framework of these changes, the three professional associations representing the fields of archives, librarianship and documentation were active in promoting an improvement in the training programmes in their areas. This was particularly essential in archives and documentation, since, in contrast to librarianship, very few relevant training courses had been offered in these fields. The most significant innovation was the decision not to establish three separate study programmes but to develop an integrated training concept for all three areas. This comprises three levels:

1. A three-year traineeship 'Information + Documentation (I + D) Assistant'
2. A three-year university of applied sciences degree programme 'Information and Documentation (I + D) Specialist'
3. Postgraduate courses

This means that all three areas are now covered by courses which offer state-recognised qualifications and whose quality is guaranteed by means of governmental regulations and control.

# I and D Education System



The first of these, the three-year traineeship, is a practice-oriented training course; most of the trainees work in libraries, but there are now some trainee positions available in the areas of documentation and archives. The trainees receive their practical training in their workplace and, at the same time, attend general and vocation-specific courses at a vocational school one day a week. At the moment, courses for I + D assistants are offered at the vocational schools in Zurich, Berne and Lausanne. During their traineeship, all trainees have periods of practical training in other companies so that they can gain concrete work experience in the areas of archives, documentation and librarianship. On passing their final examinations, the trainees receive a state-recognised and protected qualification. With the development of this training programme, the professional association BBS decided to stop offering the former BBS diploma librarianship course. The experience of the first two years have demonstrated that the new training programme is a suitable replacement for the former BBS diploma and that the I + D assistants can be successfully employed in middle-level administrative posts in libraries.

During their three-year traineeship, trainees can also attend courses at a vocational school for an additional day's study per week. This allows them the chance to obtain the Berufsmatura (a vocational diploma which provides access to the universities of applied sciences) in addition to their traineeship qualification. High school leavers who have gained the Matura (the high school diploma which qualifies them for admission to university) are also admitted to the universities of applied sciences if they have acquired one year's work experience in the information field. The three-year I + D Specialist programme at the universities of applied sciences is also an integrated course of study covering all three areas - archives, information and librarianship. Students on this programme have the opportunity to select one of these three areas as a specialist subject during their studies. The programme is currently offered by two universities of applied sciences, one in the French-speaking part of the country, in Geneva, and the other in the German-speaking area, in Chur. In Geneva, the former École des Bibliothécaires has been

integrated into the new university of applied sciences, while in Chur, the programme has been newly developed. In addition to the three-year full-time programme in Chur, the German-speaking part of Switzerland also has access to a part-time programme in Zurich lasting four years.

As I already mentioned, the university of applied sciences in Chur has offered a postgraduate course in information science and documentation for ten years. Over the last few years, this programme has been redeveloped and adapted to conform to the changed environment. It is still an integrated training programme for the areas of archives, documentation and librarianship but it has recently been extended to cover museums as well. During their studies, students have the chance to select one of these areas as their specialisation. This part-time course comprises 600 taught hours distributed over a one year period and a dissertation. Students who complete the course successfully gain a state-recognised and protected qualification. The target group for this course is not (yet) university of applied sciences graduates - too few of whom are interested in continuing their studies. Course participants tend to be graduates who have completed their studies in some other discipline, either at a university or a university of applied sciences, and who are looking for an additional qualification in the area of information and documentation. In earlier times, the students often had many years' practical experience in the information field and wanted to complement their practical knowledge with a formal training course. Nowadays, they tend to be people from completely different professions who want to explore a new direction and see this programme as a chance to acquire a sound basis for the information sector.

Alongside the postgraduate programme offered in Chur, the course for academic librarians run by the Zurich Central Library continues. This programme has also been adapted to the new requirements: the fields of information science and management have been expanded at the expense of subjects covering the history of books and libraries. This course of study concentrates on librarianship, rather than archives and documentation, which have only a marginal share of the programme. Only graduates from a university, not from a university of applied sciences, are eligible for admission.

The new vocational training course and the university of applied sciences degree course are now well established and much in demand. At the same time, however, we can already see that, in the current economic climate, graduates have difficulty finding a suitable position on the job market. This is mainly due to the fact that public institutions like libraries and state archives cannot absorb all the graduates, while the private sector has few positions to offer in this area.

The whole area of postgraduate training programmes is still very much in a process of development; here, too, the economic crisis has had a very clear impact, in particular on student numbers, since employers have become less willing to finance or support such a training course for their employees.

I would like to thank you all for your attention. If any of you are interested in reading this address at a later date, you will find English and German versions of the text on the Trialog AG website.