

# accredited or not? how aelo swiss academy compares to unaccredited providers

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Last spring a woman called us, a little embarrassed, to ask whether our coaching programme would "count". Count for what, we asked. Well, she had paid just under a thousand francs a few months earlier for an online diploma from a school with a very Swiss-sounding name, glossier website than ours, faster promises. Her employer's HR department had looked at the certificate, smiled politely, and filed it under "nice try". Her health insurer had been even blunter. She wanted to know if she was about to pay twice for the same education.

The honest answer was uncomfortable for everyone: she probably was, though not because our teaching is necessarily better. It was because of what sits behind the certificate. That phone call is the reason we keep having this conversation, so here it is in full, with the trade-offs left in.

## what "accredited" actually means, and what it doesn't

Accreditation sounds like a marketing word, but it has a specific meaning. An external body, one the school does not control, checks the provider against a published set of standards: the curriculum, the qualifications of the trainers, how the school handles complaints, whether students get what was promised. The school passes or it doesn't. It gets checked again later or it loses the status.

A self-issued certificate has none of that behind it. The school writes the curriculum, teaches it, grades it, prints the certificate, and grades itself on the whole experience. That can work fine. It can also mean the trainer's main qualification is owning the domain name.



Here's the part that surprises people: in Switzerland, for most adult and continuing education, no law forces a school to be accredited before it sells you a course. The word "academy" is not protected. Neither is "diploma", "institute", or "certified", in most contexts. A handful of professional titles are protected by law and most are not, which means the market sorts this out rather than the regulator. So the burden of checking falls on you, the buyer, which is unfair and also completely normal.

The label you'll see most often in Swiss adult education is EduQua, the Swiss quality label for further education institutions. For higher education there's a different, heavier machinery involving the Swiss Accreditation Council

and its recognised agencies. Sector by sector, other bodies appear. The details matter less than the principle: someone outside the school has looked, recently, with the power to say no.

## **the honest price difference**

Let's not pretend accreditation is free, because it isn't, and pretending otherwise is how schools end up sounding evasive. External audits cost money. Annual fees cost money. Documenting your curriculum so a stranger can audit it costs staff time. Trainer qualifications have to be real, which costs more than trainers whose main credential is enthusiasm.

All of that lands in the tuition. Accredited providers are usually more expensive than unaccredited ones for comparable hours. Sometimes it's thirty or forty percent more, sometimes it's double, occasionally the gap is small enough that you wonder why the other school bothers existing. We're not going to claim there's a fixed markup, because there isn't.

But flip it around. When an unaccredited course is dramatically cheaper, the saving comes from somewhere. Usually one or more of: no external review, thinner trainer vetting, no real complaint process, and no infrastructure if something goes wrong. Some of those savings you'll never miss. One of them you will, at the worst possible moment.

## **where unaccredited training makes perfect sense**

We'll say something now that our marketing consultant would prefer we didn't: sometimes you don't need us, or anyone accredited.

If you're learning a software tool for a job you already have, and your manager only cares whether you can use it by Friday, buy the cheap course. If you're exploring a subject as a hobby, spend accordingly. If you work in a field where the portfolio matters more than the paper, where hiring managers open your work before they open your CV, a recognised certificate is a nice-to-have, not the gate. And in loosely regulated fields, coaching being the obvious example, most titles carry no legal protection in Switzerland anyway, so a certificate is really a signal to clients rather than a licence to practise. Some clients care about that signal a great deal. Others will judge you by your first session.

There are also genuinely excellent independent teachers out there, unaccredited, who built a reputation through results and word of mouth. Accreditation is a floor, not a trophy. A brilliant unaccredited trainer beats a mediocre accredited one every time, if what you're buying is pure skill.

## **where it bites you later**

The trouble is that you often can't know, at enrolment, which parts of your future will care about the paper. This is where the stories get expensive.

We've heard from students whose new employer's HR filter quietly skipped their application because the diploma came from a school nobody could verify. Others whose professional association wouldn't count the training hours toward membership. One person needed course documents for a visa-related purpose and discovered, at the counter, that only recognised institutions produce paperwork that counts. Another wanted her insurer to co-fund the training, which insurers here sometimes do, and learned that "sometimes" has a very specific list attached.

The pattern in all of these: the certificate looked beautiful. Embossed, even. It failed at the exact moment it was supposed to do its job. And the money was spent, the evenings were spent, and the fix meant starting again somewhere else.

None of this is a scare tactic. It's a sequencing problem. Decide first what the credential needs to unlock, then check whether the provider can actually unlock it, then pay. Most people do it the other way round and find out at the counter.



## how to check any provider in about ten minutes

Including us. This works for aelo swiss academy, for the glossiest competitor, for the school your cousin recommends. Ten minutes, no specialist knowledge needed.

- search the accrediting body's own public registry for the school's name, not the school's website, the registry
- ask for the certificate number, the issuing body, and the validity dates, in writing
- ask how often an external auditor visits and what the audit actually covers
- ask what happens to your fees and your progress if the school closes halfway through your course
- send a sample certificate to one employer or professional association in your target field and ask, plainly, whether it means anything to them

That last one feels awkward and takes one email. It has saved more people from bad decisions than every other check combined. If a school hesitates to give you a sample certificate before you pay, that hesitation is information.

## side by side: what you're actually paying for

Here's the comparison in its least romantic form.

| what you're weighing | accredited provider | unaccredited provider |

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| curriculum | externally reviewed against published standards | set, and changed, at the school's own discretion |

| trainer vetting | qualifications checked at audit | varies wildly, from excellent to thin air |

| third-party recognition | frequently accepted by employers, insurers, associations | hit or miss, and you only find out after paying |



| complaints | an escalation route beyond the school | usually, the school itself |

| if the school folds | some external framework, however imperfect | your tuition and your progress, gone with it |

| price | usually higher | usually lower |

Read that price row carefully, because it's the one everyone obsesses over and it's the least interesting. The real difference is the complaint row and the recognition row. Those only matter when things go wrong, which is exactly when you can't buy your way into them retroactively.

One more nuance, because life refuses to be a table: accreditation says nothing about whether you'll enjoy the course or whether the teacher can actually teach. It guarantees a floor. A warm, rigorous, unaccredited weekend workshop can change your career. A sleep-inducing accredited one can waste six Sundays. What accreditation buys you is protection against the bottom of the market, not a guarantee of the top.

## red flags worth walking away from

Most providers are honest. The ones that aren't tend to signal it early, if you know what to look for.

- "accredited" appears on the site but no accrediting body is ever named
- guaranteed job placements or income figures are tied to the certificate
- full payment is required upfront with no written refund or deferral terms
- everyone gets a certificate on completion day, regardless of any real assessment
- nobody at the school can explain, in a plain sentence, who reviewed their curriculum

Any single one of these is a question. Two or more together, and we'd tell you what we tell our own enquiries: keep your money, keep looking.

## where aelo swiss academy stands in all this

Since the title asks the question directly, here's our position, stated the way we'd state it across a table.

We chose external quality review because we wanted the floor. We wanted someone outside the building to look at our curriculum and be allowed to dislike it. We wanted our trainers' qualifications checked by people who

don't owe us anything. That's the whole reasoning. It wasn't nostalgia for stamps, it was a bet that being checkable would matter to the people we want to work with. So far it has.

Practically, this means a few things. Our accreditation details, the certifying body, the current validity, sit on our website where anyone can find them, and if you read this some day and can't find them, treat that as a red flag against us, same as anyone. We hand out sample certificates on request without a sales call attached. Our refund and deferral terms are written down before you pay, not negotiated afterwards. And when someone enquires about a full programme and we think a short unaccredited course would serve them better, we say so. It loses us tuition and gains us a peculiar kind of reputation, the kind where former students send their colleagues.

What we won't do is tell you accreditation makes us better teachers. It doesn't, not automatically. What it does is make us verifiable. In a market where anyone can print the word "academy" above their logo, verifiable is the part worth paying a little more for. The teaching still has to win you over on its own, and it should.

## **before you click pay**

One question does most of the work here, and it isn't "is this school accredited". It's "what does this certificate need to unlock for me". Write the answer down before you compare schools.

If the answer is a regulator, an insurer, an employer's HR filter, a professional association, or any kind of official paperwork, then recognition is not optional and you verify before you pay, every time, no exceptions for charm or discounts. If the answer is "I want to actually learn this and show I can do it", then the quality of the teaching outranks the label, and you should sit in on a session, talk to past students, and judge the school like a craftsperson rather than an auditor.

And if the provider can't answer, in one plain sentence, what their certificate unlocks that a self-study project wouldn't, you [https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone\\_from\\_aelo\\_swiss\\_any\\_advices/](https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/) have your answer anyway. It's the same answer that woman got from her insurer's counter, except this time you get it for free.