

From Internship to Employment: How AELO Swiss Academy Work Placements Become Job Offers

An internship is the only job interview that lasts three to six months, pays you a modest wage to attend, and lets you take lunch breaks. That is the good news. The better news, and the thing most interns figure out roughly two months too late, is that the interview never actually pauses. Every task you accept, every question you ask, every arrival at 8:52 when the office opens at 9:00 gets quietly logged in the collective memory of the company. Not out of cruelty. Companies do it because hiring is expensive and risky, and an intern is a rare commodity: a candidate they can test-drive for an entire season before committing a salary, a desk, and a probation period to the decision.



That is the whole game. A work placement is not a box to tick on the way to a diploma. It is an audition for a job that may not even be advertised yet, and the interns who understand this behave completely differently from the ones who don't. The ones who get it treat the placement like the first months of employment, because in every way that matters, it is.

The interview that forgot to end

Hiring managers have a problem, and the problem is you. Well, not you specifically. It is every stranger whose CV claims "excellent team player with strong attention to detail." A CV is a self-portrait, and self-portraits are famously generous. An interview is forty-five minutes of performance. Neither tells a company what a person is actually like at 4:45 on a rainy Thursday when the printer is jammed and the client has moved the deadline forward a day.

An internship tells them exactly that. Over months, a company watches how you handle boredom, criticism, ambiguity, and praise. They see whether you ask questions or guess. Whether you own a mistake or quietly fertilize it. This is why, from the employer's side, converting a good intern is one of the safest hires available. The usual risk of recruitment, that the polished candidate turns out to be a mirage, has already been paid down. A company that has watched you work for a season knows things about you that your own mother doesn't.

Which is why the math favors conversion. Replacing a departed employee costs a company anywhere from a healthy chunk of annual salary to multiples of it, once you count recruiting, onboarding, and the months before a

new hire produces anything. An intern who already knows the systems, the people, and which coffee machine is the good one starts producing on day one of the real contract. Any manager with a functioning calculator prefers that.

Why Switzerland makes this easier than almost anywhere

Switzerland has a cultural head start here, and it matters. The country runs on a dual-education tradition where learning by doing is not the consolation prize for people who couldn't hack university. It is a respected career path that produced a startling share of the country's executives. The apprenticeship mentality is baked into the professional culture: the expectation that a newcomer will be trained, corrected, handed real responsibility in small doses, and grown into the role. A Praktikant is not a coffee-fetcher here. It is a career stage with dignity and, usually, an actual contract.

There is also the Swiss approach to time. The probation period, the Probezeit, is a national institution, typically running around three months, and everyone treats it with appropriate seriousness. Punctuality is not a nice-to-have, it is a personality test you pass before anyone reads your work. And then there is the Arbeitszeugnis, the Swiss reference letter, which deserves its own section later because it is written in a secret code that you should absolutely learn before you set foot in the building.

Add the multilingual reality of the Swiss workplace, where a single office might cycle through German, French, and English before lunch, and you get an environment where adaptability is priced into the culture. Interns who show up curious rather than entitled fit in fast. The ones who don't, don't last.

How AELO Swiss Academy designs placements to convert

Here is the difference between a placement that becomes a job and one that becomes a paragraph on a CV: design. A placement converts when three things line up. The student is prepared, the company is genuinely hiring-minded, and somebody is coaching the student through the process in real time. Remove any leg of that tripod and the whole thing wobbles into "we'll keep your file on hand," the corporate equivalent of "let's stay friends."

At AELO Swiss Academy, the placement is treated as part of the curriculum, not a gap in it. That shows up in several ways. Students are prepared before they arrive: application documents built to Swiss norms, because a Swiss application has its own conventions and woe to the applicant who ignores them, plus interview practice that includes the delightfully direct Swiss style of questioning, and a realistic briefing on what the industry actually pays and expects.

The matching matters more than most students realize. A placement aligned with what you actually want to do converts far more often than one you accepted because it was available on a Tuesday. Placement advisors who know both the student and the partner companies can make that match properly, and the advisors at AELO Swiss Academy maintain those employer relationships over years. That longevity is invisible to the student but decisive for the outcome: when a company has taken interns from the same academy several times and been happy each time, trust in the pipeline transfers to the individual intern before they've said a word. You inherit a reputation. It is the best possible luggage.

The coaching continues during the placement, which is the part most institutions skip entirely. Someone

Someone checking in at week four catches problems while they are still small and fixable. The intern who has been quietly underloaded, which happens far more often than the reverse, gets renegotiated into real work before half the placement evaporates. The intern who is drowning gets a life raft and, more importantly, a tactful

conversation with the supervisor about expectations. And when things are going well, the advisor opens a different file entirely: what would it take to keep this person? That question, asked early and by someone the company already trusts, does more for conversion than any amount of hopeful waiting. Companies rarely create jobs out of sentiment. They create them out of planning cycles and budgets, and a good advisor makes sure you are inside the planning window before it closes.

There is a debrief afterwards, too, and it matters more than students expect. Whether or not an offer materializes, the placement gets dissected: what you did, what the supervisor said about you when you were not in the room, what to fix, what to lead with in the next interview. A placement without a debrief is a vacation with homework.

The five things that actually convert

Most of what separates a hired intern from a warmly thanked one is unglamorous. Watch enough placements go by and the pattern gets hard to miss:

- **Treat small tasks as auditions.** Nobody hands the intern the merger on day one. They hand over the mailing list, the meeting minutes, the spreadsheet nobody wants. The interns who get hired treat the spreadsheet like it matters, because to the person who assigned it, it does.
- **Attach a proposal to every question.** "How should I handle this?" is fine once. "I think we should do X because Y, does that sound right?" is what a future colleague sounds like. The difference is one sentence.
- **Be boringly reliable.** On time, every time, and deliver when you said you would. In a Swiss office this is not a bonus, it is the entry ticket, and its absence is remembered longer than any brilliance.
- **Keep a record.** The intern who tracks what they did, what they learned, and what they improved walks into the conversion conversation with evidence instead of adjectives. It also makes your reference letter write itself.
- **Say the words.** At some point, out loud, to an actual human: "I would like to stay." An astonishing number of interns never do this and then wonder why nobody offered.

That last one deserves its own section, but first, a detour into the strangest artifact of Swiss working life.

Your report card is written in cipher

Every employee in Switzerland is entitled, on request, to a written reference, the Arbeitszeugnis, and interns get their own version of it. The document looks warm and generous. It is actually a report card written in a code standardized enough that career guides publish decoding tables for it. A phrase like "er hat stets mit grossem Fleiss gearbeitet", he always worked with great diligence, can be the polite wrapper around "results were average." The top grade hides inside a formulation like "zur vollsten Zufriedenheit", to the fullest satisfaction, while plain "zufriedenstellend", satisfactory, is the polite C. Two sentences that read as near-twins to a foreigner can sit several grades apart to a Swiss HR manager.

The code is not law and interpretations vary between firms, but the hierarchy is established enough that you should never just file the letter away. Read it. Compare it against a decoding guide. If it reads lukewarm, that was not an accident.

Two practical moves follow from this. Ask for the reference before your last day, because it is your right and it costs nothing. And never leave a Swiss placement without it, because in Switzerland this letter travels with you for years. A strong internship reference from a real company is a skeleton key for the next door.

Timing the ask, or why Swiss directness is your friend

Switzerland is not a country of professional subtext. The dance of hinting that you would like to stay, then hoping someone decodes the hint, works here about as well as showing up twelve minutes late. Somewhere around the two-thirds mark of the placement, once you have proof of work and before the exit paperwork starts, say it plainly: you would like to stay, you would like to know whether that is possible, and what would have to happen. Then ask what the timing would look like, because headcount in Swiss firms is planned, not improvised, and a request made in the final week is a request made into a budget that was locked for the season months ago.

If the answer is no, do not slink off. Ask two follow-up questions instead. What would need to be true for a role to open, and may you stay in touch for when it does. Then actually stay in touch, which means a short email every couple of months with something useful in it, not a birthday greeting to the department printer. A respectable share of conversions happen two or four months after the placement ends, when a resignation lands on the wrong desk and a manager remembers the intern who wrote the handover document without being asked.

When it doesn't convert, and why that is not the disaster it feels like

Sometimes there is no job. The team is frozen, the budget went to a software license, the person you would have replaced decided not to leave. This happens to excellent interns too, and it is not a verdict on your worth. A placement at a company that cannot hire is not a failed placement. It is a placement with a different payout.

That payout comes in three currencies. The first is the network: the supervisor who liked your work knows other supervisors, and Swiss industries are small enough that a warm referral crosses the country in one phone call. The second is the paper: the Arbeitszeugnis, plus a named referee who will actually pick up the phone, which is worth more than any LinkedIn endorsement ever minted. The third is the fluency. You now know how a Swiss office actually runs, the meeting culture, the written follow-up, the way disagreement is expressed at a volume outsiders mistake for anger. Students coming out of AELO Swiss Academy placements interview differently from that point on, calmer and more concrete, because nothing about a Swiss workplace is theoretical to them anymore.

The genuine failure mode is not the non-converting placement. It is the intern who treated the placement as a formality, coasted for three months, and left with a lukewarm letter they did not know how to read.

The last week is an interview too

The final stretch of a placement is where reputations get sealed. Hand over your work as if the next person matters, because they do, and because the handover document is the single most forwardable piece of paper you will produce all placement. Tidy your files. Route the passwords through the official channel rather than a sticky note, which in a Swiss office is treated as a small crime scene. Thank people individually and specifically, not in one blast email that reads like a seasonal greeting card.

Then, after you leave, stay visible. A short note two months later mentioning where you landed or what you are [Reddit](#) working on keeps you in the mental folder marked "hire when possible." That folder is where job offers come from.

Because that is the honest version of the whole story. A work placement is the only job interview that lasts months, pays a stipend, and lets you take lunch. It is also the only one where you can influence the result every single day. Treat it as the first months of employment rather than the last months of study, and the question stops being whether an offer arrives and becomes, mostly, when.