

Questions Every Prospective Student Should Ask Before Choosing AELO Swiss Academy

Somewhere between the glossy brochure and the admissions call, every prospective student hits the same moment. The website looks great. The photos of Switzerland do half the selling on their own, because let's be honest, that backdrop sells itself. And now someone from the academy has replied within hours, addressed you by name, and called you a "future leader."

That's exactly when you should slow down.

Choosing a school is one of the few big purchases in life where you can't test the product first, can't easily return it, and won't know whether it was worth the money for years. The only real leverage you have at this stage is the questions you ask, and most students ask far too few of them, because nobody tells them which ones matter. So here's a rundown of what to ask before committing to AELO Swiss Academy, what a good answer sounds like, and what a dodge sounds like when you hear one.

Start with the question that makes people uncomfortable

Ask this, word for word: "What exact qualification will I hold at the end, and who recognizes it?"

It sounds blunt. It's supposed to. Switzerland has one of the strongest public education systems anywhere, but the private academy sector is a different animal. Private institutions operate with varying degrees of oversight, and the credential you receive at the end can be anything from a fully accredited degree to a certificate that carries a lot of weight inside that school and very little outside it. Both can be worth having, depending on your goals. What you need to know is which one you're paying for.

A good answer names things. A specific accrediting body. A partner university. A cantonal license. A double-degree arrangement. Then you go verify it yourself, because most accrediting bodies keep public registers, and checking whether the name they gave you is real and current takes about ten minutes. A vague answer talks about "international standards" and "global recognition" and "excellence," none of which you can look up. If an answer can't survive a quick search, treat it as a no.

While you're at it, ask whether the qualification is the same for every intake and every location. Curricula and partnerships change, and the recognition somebody got in 2019 might not apply to the class starting next autumn. Get the answer in writing, in an email, not in a call. Phone calls evaporate. Emails don't.

Who's actually standing at the front of the room

Marketing copy loves the phrase "learn from industry experts." Ask what that means in practice.

Who teaches the core courses, and are they permanent faculty or visiting practitioners rotating through? What did they do before teaching, and how long ago? A hotel manager who left the industry fifteen years ago and one who consults on weekends are two very different teachers. Neither is automatically better, but you should know which you're getting, because it shapes whether the classroom feels connected to the real world or trapped in it.

Ask about the student-to-staff ratio in your specific program, not the institution-wide average. A school can honestly quote a lovely overall ratio while your particular course packs forty people into a room with one exhausted instructor.

And here's the question almost nobody asks: "Can I sit in on a class, or watch a recorded lecture?" Any school confident in its teaching says yes. Hesitation here tells you something no brochure ever will. If visiting isn't practical because you're applying from abroad, ask for a recorded session or a live online class you can observe. Teaching quality is the product. You'd test-drive a car for a fraction of this price.



What does a random Tuesday look like

Open days are performances. Everything is polished, everyone is cheerful, the sample class is the best one they run. So instead of asking about the highlights, ask for a sample weekly timetable from last semester.

Then interrogate it. How many contact hours are there really? How much is lecture versus hands-on work versus group projects? What's the assessment style, and how many graded moments exist across the term? Some people thrive on one big final exam. Others, and I'd count myself among them, do better with continuous assessment. Knowing this about yourself before you enroll saves a lot of pain.



Ask about the language of instruction and, if there's a bilingual setup, which language the exams are in. Ask about class sizes for seminars versus lectures, because those numbers are often wildly different. If internships are part of the program, and in Switzerland they usually are, ask the crucial follow-up: does the school place you, or does it merely "support" you in finding something? Those two words sound similar and mean completely

different things. Placement means staff with employer relationships who match students to openings. Support often means a folder of job listings and a pat on the back.

A friend of mine learned this distinction the hard way at a school I won't name. "Internship support" turned out to be a careers office that suggested she "try hospitality job boards." She found something eventually, but she spent two stressful months doing work the program had implied it would do for her. Ask directly: "What percentage of students on this program last year completed the internship through a placement arranged by the school?" A straight number, or an honest admission that it's mostly self-directed, both beat fog.

The money conversation nobody enjoys

Tuition numbers on websites are frequently incomplete, not because anyone is lying, but because the full picture is scattered across registration fees, exam fees, materials, deposits, and insurance requirements. So ask for the total cost of attendance for the full program, every year, itemized.

Then add the Swiss part. Living costs here are real. Depending on the town, budget somewhere in the range of CHF 1,500 to 2,500 a month for accommodation, food, transport, and the rest, with bigger cities like Zurich and Geneva pushing toward the top of that range and smaller towns sitting lower. Health insurance is mandatory for residents, and unless your existing coverage qualifies for an exemption, you're likely looking at a premium of a few hundred francs a month. These aren't scary numbers if you plan for them. They're brutal ones if you don't.

Two questions matter more than most students realize. First: "What is the refund policy if my visa is denied or I withdraw during the first term?" Get this in the contract, in writing, before paying anything. Reputable schools have clear, fair policies and don't flinch at the question. Second: "Are there scholarships, and what are the conditions for keeping them?" A scholarship that evaporates if your grades dip below a threshold in year one is a discount with a tripwire, and you should know where the tripwire is buried before you step on it.

If you're planning to work part-time, ask about the current rules for your nationality. As a general guide, students from outside the EU and EFTA face real restrictions in Switzerland, often no work at all during the first six months and capped hours afterward, though the details depend on canton and permit type. The admissions team deals with these questions constantly and should give you current information. Verify anything important with the official migration authorities yourself, because permit rules shift and an admissions officer's memory isn't a legal source.

Where do graduates actually go

Every school shows you alumni success stories. The ones they show you are, by definition, the best ones. So flip the question: "What do your placement or employment statistics measure, and how are they collected?"

A school that says "92 percent of graduates find employment within six months" should be able to tell you whether that counts graduates who went home to a family business, whether it includes internships converted to jobs, and how many graduates actually responded to the survey. A response rate of 40 percent makes the number decorative. None of this means the school is dishonest. It means statistics are easy to frame. You just want the frame described.

Ask for the names of employers who hired recent graduates. Ask whether you can speak to a couple of alumni, and specifically ask for someone who graduated in the last two years rather than the star from a decade ago. If the school will only ever connect you with handpicked success stories, that's worth noticing. And do your own digging. LinkedIn is the most underrated research tool in education. Search the school name, filter by graduation years, and see where people actually ended up. It takes twenty minutes and tells you more than any prospectus.

The stuff outside the classroom

You're not just buying courses. You're buying two or three years of your life in a specific place, so ask about the place.

Where exactly is the campus, and where will you actually live? If the school offers housing, is it guaranteed for first-years, what does it cost, and how far is it from classes? A ninety-minute commute through mountain scenery sounds romantic for a week and gets old by mid-October. Ask about the student body: how many students total, how many in your intake, and what the mix of nationalities looks like. Some people want a big international crowd. Others prefer a small cohort where the professors know their names. Neither is wrong, but you should know which you're walking into.

Also ask the practical questions that reveal how well the school runs its operations. Who helps with the visa and residence permit process, and how? What happens on arrival day? Is there someone to call when the Wi-Fi dies or a landlord turns difficult? Schools that answer these crisply tend to be schools where the admin side works. Schools that answer vaguely tend to be schools where you'll spend your first month chasing email threads.

Red flags worth taking seriously

After years of watching people choose schools, and occasionally regret it, I've narrowed the warning signs down to a short list.

- A discount or scholarship that expires in 48 hours if you don't pay a deposit. Genuine offers survive a week of due diligence.
- A recognition or accreditation answer that can't be confirmed anywhere outside the school's own website.
- Refusal to let you speak with current students or recent alumni, or only offering ones chosen for you.
- Total costs that stay vague after two direct requests, or a large non-refundable deposit demanded before you've seen a contract.
- Employment statistics presented with no explanation of how they were measured or collected.

Any single one of these deserves a follow-up question. Two or more deserve a serious pause.

Before you pay anything

If you do nothing else from this article, do these five things before money leaves your account.

- Get the exact qualification and its recognition stated in writing, and verify the accrediting body independently.
- Get a full, itemized cost breakdown covering every year of the program, fees included.
- Get the refund and withdrawal policy, including visa denials, written into the contract.
- Talk to at least two current students and one recent graduate, ideally ones you found yourself.
- Confirm the intake dates, campus location, and language of instruction match what you were told in the admissions process.

None of this takes more than a week, and it protects an investment that will run well into five figures once living costs are counted.

Trust your gut, but calibrate it first

Here's the thing about gut feelings. They're only useful once they're fed real information. A gut feeling based on a nice brochure is just mood. A gut feeling formed https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ after a dozen pointed questions, two conversations with actual students, and a verified accreditation claim is judgment.

So ask everything above, and ask it pleasantly. Admissions teams at good schools enjoy students who probe, because those are the students who show up informed and finish what they started. If someone at AELO Swiss Academy answers your hard questions with patience and specifics, that tells you something valuable about the institution's culture. If they get defensive or rush you, that tells you something too, and possibly something more important.

You're about to spend serious money and a chunk of your youth on this. The school gets to interview you. You get to interview them right back. Use it.