

Do you need work experience to apply? Entry requirements by program at AELO Swiss Academy

The question lands in our inbox more often than any other, and it usually arrives before a candidate has even settled on a program. "Do I need work experience to apply?" The worry behind it is understandable. Swiss academies carry a reputation for selectivity, and applicants assume there is a hidden wall of requirements standing between them and admission.

The honest answer at AELO Swiss Academy is that it depends entirely on which door you are walking through. The foundation year and the bachelor's degree are built for people starting out, and neither asks for prior work. The postgraduate diploma asks for roughly a year of relevant experience. The master's-level track expects two to three years with something substantial behind that number. Executive certificate courses assume five or more. None of this is arbitrary, and the reasoning is worth understanding before you apply anywhere.

One principle applies across every program: admissions weighs the quality and relevance of your experience far more heavily than the raw count of months. A [reddit.com](#) focused year running a hotel breakfast shift teaches more than three vague years of "assisting with general duties". Keep that in mind as you read what follows.

Why some programs ask for experience and others do not

The difference comes from how each program is taught, not from prestige. Undergraduate teaching at AELO Swiss Academy assumes no prior knowledge. The fundamentals of service, operations, finance and languages are taught from zero, and two paid industry placements are built into the degree, typically two blocks of around six months each. A student who has never worked a service shift in their life is exactly who [flight training](#) the bachelor's was designed for.

Postgraduate teaching works differently. Seminars are case-based and discussion-driven, and assignments routinely ask participants to critique or redesign operations they have personally worked in. A cohort where nobody has managed a shift, handled a guest complaint or watched a budget would flatten the discussion for everyone. We could, in theory, admit fresh graduates straight into the master's track, but experience has shown us what happens: they struggle in the first term with assignments that assume operational memory. Holding them to an experience threshold is not gatekeeping. It is placement.

Entry requirements by program

What follows reflects the current admission cycle. Minimums shift slightly from year to year depending on cohort composition, so treat these figures as a reliable guide and confirm your specific case with admissions before finalising an application.

| Program | Minimum work experience | What admissions weighs most |

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| Foundation year | None | School record, motivation interview |

| Bachelor's degree | None | Academic readiness, interview |

| Culinary arts diploma | None, three to six months preferred | Kitchen exposure, realism about the trade |

| Postgraduate diploma | About 12 months | Relevance and specificity of duties |

| Master's-level track | About 18 to 24 months | Evidence of leadership or project ownership |

| Executive certificate | Five or more years | Management scope, a live business problem |

| Short courses | None | Age and English only |

Foundation year: no experience required

The foundation year exists precisely for applicants who lack something, whether that is grades, English or clarity of direction. There is no work experience requirement of any kind. What we ask for is a secondary school transcript, an English level around IELTS 5.0 to 5.5, with in-house language support available for those slightly under, and a motivation interview of twenty to thirty minutes. The minimum age is 17, and candidates who turn 18 during the first term are accepted without issue.

Most foundation students fall into two groups: school leavers who need a bridge into the bachelor's, and career changers arriving from unrelated fields who want a structured landing before committing to a full degree. Both are welcome, and neither is asked what they did last summer.

Bachelor's degree in international hospitality management: experience welcome, never required

The bachelor's runs three to three and a half years, with two paid placements woven into the schedule. Applicants straight from secondary school are accepted every intake. Prior work experience appears nowhere on the mandatory list.

What I will say, from reading hundreds of files, is that customer-facing part-time work tends to surface in interviews in a useful way. Retail, cafés, a season at a lakeside resort, none of it is required, but it gives candidates concrete material. One first

year student who had worked weekends at a bakery could describe a festival rush in precise detail, and that specificity did more for her file than any certificate would have. Applicants with a few months of café or retail work gain no formal advantage, but they interview better because they have already felt what a queue, a complaint and a closing shift actually do to a person.

Culinary arts diploma: no requirement, but be honest with yourself

The culinary diploma carries no formal work experience bar. We do state a preference for three to six months of kitchen exposure, and that exposure can be humble. Washing dishes counts. Prep work counts. What admissions is really testing is whether you understand the physical reality of the trade before committing a year to it. Kitchens run hot, late and on your feet, and the candidates who thrive are the ones who arrive knowing that and wanting it anyway.

A short conversation with the culinary programme lead usually settles the question. Never having stood in a professional kitchen is not disqualifying. It simply means the first weeks will be steeper, and we would rather you hear that from us than discover it in week three.

Postgraduate diploma: about twelve months, and relevance beats duration

The postgraduate diploma asks for roughly twelve months of relevant work. Internships can count, in whole or in part, depending on duties. A candidate who spent a year as a front office trainee at a 120-room property,

rotating through reservations, guest relations and night audit, brings more to the seminar room than someone with twenty-four months of generic administrative support far removed from operations.

Career changers ask about this constantly. If you are moving in from finance, retail management or healthcare, your background does not need to be hospitality-specific to be useful, but it needs to be operational. Supervising staff, owning a budget line, handling customers at scale, all of that translates. What translates poorly is time spent strictly on back-office tasks with no service interface, and we will probe for that in the interview rather than guess.

English sits around IELTS 6.5 or equivalent for this track, with an internal assessment available for borderline cases.

Master's-level track: eighteen to twenty-four months with evidence of ownership

The master's-level track expects somewhere between eighteen and twenty-four months, but the number matters less than what the months contained. We look for ownership. Did you design the rota or just follow it? Did you handle the supplier renegotiation or watch someone else do it? Did a project fail under your watch, and can you explain why without blaming the weather?

Titles mislead. A 24-year-old assistant F&B manager who rebuilt a breakfast operation and cut waste by a measurable margin is a stronger candidate than a 29-year-old with a grander title and a hand-off role. When we say leadership, we mean moments where the outcome was yours, including the failures.

Executive certificate: five years or more, plus a live problem

Executive certificate courses assume five or more years in the industry, most of it with management scope. The average participant is in their mid-thirties, typically a department head, general manager or founder. Cohort learning is the entire point here: case discussions draw on the room's accumulated experience, and a participant without real operational scar tissue reduces the value for everyone else.

We also ask executive applicants to bring a live business problem to the first module. A property losing group bookings to a new competitor, a restaurant whose labour cost keeps drifting upward, a family hotel facing a succession question. The coursework works best when it can be aimed at something real.



Short courses: age and English, nothing else

Short courses of a few weeks carry no experience requirement at all. Minimum age 18, conversational English, tuition settled. These exist for people sampling the field, upskilling quickly or bridging toward a longer program.

What counts as experience, and what does not

Applicants overthink this more than any other part of the file. Paid hospitality roles count fully. Internships count, usually at partial weight, depending on how much you actually did rather than what the contract said. Volunteering counts when it involved genuine responsibility; a volunteer who coordinated catering for 300 people at a community event has real material to draw on. Family business experience counts too, provided you can describe your own duties specifically, because "I worked at my parents' hotel" is an interview dead end until you can unpack it into shifts, tasks and decisions.

What does not count, or barely does: unpaid observation, shadowing a relative for a fortnight, online certificates with no practical component. These can appear on your CV, but they will not move an experience-based decision.

If you are just under the threshold

Being slightly short of a stated minimum is not automatically fatal, and it is worth knowing how admissions tends to treat these cases before you spend another year working purely to qualify.

- A dense, relevant twelve months can outweigh a vague eighteen, so apply and let the file speak.
- A reference letter that itemises duties carries more weight than an extra three months of the same job.
- Deferring one intake to complete a focused internship is often the cleanest fix, and admissions will say candidly whether it is necessary.
- Requesting a short conversation before applying formally costs nothing and resolves most borderline questions in twenty minutes.

That last point deserves emphasis. A pre-application discussion is the single most underused resource in this process. Tell us your age, your background and your target program, and we will tell you where you stand, including the cases where the honest answer is "not yet, and here is what would change it."

How to read your own file before you apply

Before sending anything, audit yourself the way an admissions officer would. Write down every month of work since school, with duties attached. Mark which of those duties involved service, supervision or money. Then compare that honestly against the table above. Candidates who do this exercise usually discover one of two things: they qualify more comfortably than they feared, or the gap is specific and fixable, one focused role away rather than years away.

Admissions at AELO Swiss Academy is not hunting for reasons to refuse people. Every requirement described here exists because the teaching in that program assumes it, and the fastest way to waste a year and a tuition payment is to enrol somewhere you are not yet equipped to benefit from. Match yourself to the program that fits the experience you actually have, and the experience you need will follow faster than you expect.