

Training: universities, universities of applied sciences and institutes of the financial centre

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Geneva trains the people of its financial centre in its own language. The University of Geneva has a faculty of law, a faculty of economics and management and a finance research institute. Its law faculty houses a centre for banking and financial law whose publications, in French, constitute one of the main sources of French-language legal scholarship on Swiss financial law.¹ The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, founded in 1927, trains in French and English the future executives of international organisations, diplomacy and non-governmental organisations, some of whom join the financial centre.²

Professional banking training has its own institution. The Institut supérieur de formation bancaire, founded in 1987 by the Geneva banks, today brings together more than fifty banking and financial institutions of French-speaking Switzerland, representing nearly 80 per cent of the sector's salaried workforce. It provides, in French, continuing education in wealth management, retail and corporate banking, law, risk and compliance, as well as professional certifications.³ The Haute école de gestion de Genève trains business economists and finance specialists in French, an offering complemented by private schools and continuing education programmes. This training in French produces professionals who are immediately operational with the French-speaking clientele and familiar with Swiss law in its French version.

Training also has its limits. A growing share of finance teaching is delivered in English, including in Geneva, because the scientific literature, the international certifications and employers demand it. Young Geneva graduates are bilingual, but their professional French becomes impoverished when textbooks, courses and examinations are in English. The institutions of the financial centre have an interest in supporting high-level training in French, particularly in law and taxation, where the

Training

precision of the language is the very substance of the profession, while guaranteeing English and encouraging German.

Worked example. A Geneva private bank with 600 employees devotes approximately CHF 1.2 million a year to training, or CHF 2,000 per employee. One third of this budget funds mandatory regulatory training, delivered in French and English. Another third goes to professional certifications, mainly in English, one sixth to language training, half of it in German for the control functions, and the remainder to management training. The bank finds that its advisers trained in French at the ISFB and at the university achieve better results in tests of their knowledge of Swiss law than those trained exclusively in English, and decides to make a banking law module in French compulsory for all new advisers.

1 Notes

1. Centre de droit bancaire et financier (cdbf.ch, “Le Centre” page): centre created in 2003 by the Faculty of Law of the University of Geneva to promote and publish research in banking and financial law; it publishes online case commentaries, surveys, articles and books as well as a blockchain lexicon, provides teaching and continuing education, and collaborates with the Geneva Finance Research Institute. ↩
2. Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales founded in 1927 on the initiative of William Rappard, with Paul Mantoux as its first director, merged in 2007-2008 with the Institut universitaire d’études du développement; Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement, “L’histoire de l’Institut”, graduateinstitute.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩
3. ISFB, “An association committed to the future of the financial centre”, isfb.ch (accessed September 2026): institute founded in 1987 by the Geneva banks, a non-profit association recognised as being of public utility, more than fifty member institutions, nearly 80 per cent of the sector’s salaried workforce in French-speaking Switzerland. ↩

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