

academic onboarding at aelo swiss academy: meeting advisors and building your timetable

Arrival season carries a particular rhythm at AELO Swiss Academy. The boarding houses open their doors a day before classes, families carry luggage up stone staircases, and by evening the corridors settle into that half-quiet state of new students learning each other's names. Behind the scenes, a quieter process is already under way: the assembly of each student's academic programme. Onboarding here is https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advice/ not a ceremonial welcome followed by an administrative afterthought. It is a design exercise, solved with people rather than paperwork, and its two central instruments are the advising meeting and the timetable itself.

Having spent several admission cycles on the advising side of this process, I can say that the families who understand how these two instruments work move through the week with noticeably less anxiety than those who arrive expecting a form to sign. This account sets out what actually happens, in what order, and where judgement matters most.

Arrival Week in Practice

The sequence has been broadly stable in recent years. Day one is arrival and residence check-in, with house mentors handling keys, routines, and the pastoral side of settling in. Day two belongs to placement diagnostics in mathematics and in languages of instruction and acquisition. These assessments run sixty to ninety minutes each, are deliberately low in stakes, and exist for one purpose: to place students into teaching sections that fit their current level. A student who arrives having studied German for two years and French for none will not sit in the same language group as a native speaker of either.

Day three is given over to advisory meetings. Day four, in most cycles, ends with the release of draft timetables. Day five, the first lessons begin. Depending on the term start and the size of the entering cohort, which has ranged in recent cycles from roughly sixty to about one hundred and twenty students across the grade levels, the sequence can shift by a day. The order, however, rarely changes: assess first, advise second, schedule third, teach fourth. Reversing that order produces timetables that unravel within a fortnight.

Who Advises Whom: Separating the Roles

New families frequently conflate three distinct roles, and the confusion is understandable because all three involve conversations. The academic advisor, assigned by grade and pathway, owns the study plan. This is the person who reviews placement results, discusses elective choices, and signs the final programme. The house mentor looks after daily life: sleep, homesickness, laundry, friendships, and the hundred small adjustments of boarding. Subject leads, finally, confirm placements within their disciplines. The head of mathematics, for instance, will want to see the diagnostic result and any prior coursework before a student enters an advanced section, and no advisor overrides that signature.

The registrar holds the master grid and operates the scheduling system, but students and parents rarely need to speak with the registrar directly in the first week. Requests flow through the advisor, who knows both the student and the constraints. The separation matters because pastoral notes and curricular records serve different purposes, and keeping the channels distinct protects both. One family I remember arrived convinced that the

mentor controlled subject choices; the mentor, to her credit, redirected them within five minutes and sent a note ahead so the advisor was already prepared.

The First Advisory Meeting

The meeting is scheduled for thirty minutes and usually runs to twenty-five once the administrative preliminaries are done. It takes place in the advisor's office, not a hall, which signals its purpose: this is a working conversation about one student, not a group briefing. On the table sit four documents: the placement results, the prior school records submitted at admission, the pathway declaration signed during the admission process, and a language history. The advisor's method is consistent: begin from the fixed points, the core subject placements, then move to electives, then agree on alternatives for anything that may clash.

Students who get the most from these meetings arrive prepared. A folder with transcript copies, certificates from any external examinations, and a short written note of academic intentions does more than an eloquent conversation. Ambitions stated aloud evaporate; ambitions written down survive the week. Just as valuable is a set of questions asked on paper, because the meeting moves quickly and memory is an unreliable filing system under pressure. Five questions earn their place on that page almost every time.

1. Which of my placements are provisional, and what evidence would move me up or down a level?
2. How many periods does each elective cost, and what preparation load accompanies it across the week?
3. Where do my preferred choices collide with laboratory sections or language levels?
4. What does the adjustment window allow after term begins, and whose signature does a change require?
5. If a clash proves unavoidable, which alternative protects my pathway with the least damage?

The last question is the one students most often forget and most often need. Timetable construction is, in practice, an exercise in ranked preferences, and the advisor can only honour a ranking that has been stated.

Pathways and Their Timetable Consequences

The curriculum architecture has a direct effect on what fits into a week. In the first year, a common core occupies the majority of the grid, which means most placement decisions concern levels rather than selections. Pathway specialisation increases in later years, and with it the number of genuine choices. Families arriving from other school systems should raise credit conversion early and bring syllabuses from previous schools, because a transcript that reads well abroad may map imperfectly onto the internal scheme, and an advisor can resolve ambiguity far more easily in week one than in week ten.



Language is the other structural force. Instruction is conducted in English, with German and French programmes placed according to diagnostic results rather than age. A student who elects to continue two foreign languages at demanding levels will find that this consumes elective capacity that a science-oriented peer would spend on an additional laboratory subject. Neither choice is wrong. The advisor's job is not to argue but to lay both versions of the grid on the table and let the student see what each costs. Seeing the trade-off rendered in periods and days changes decisions in ways that verbal warnings never do.

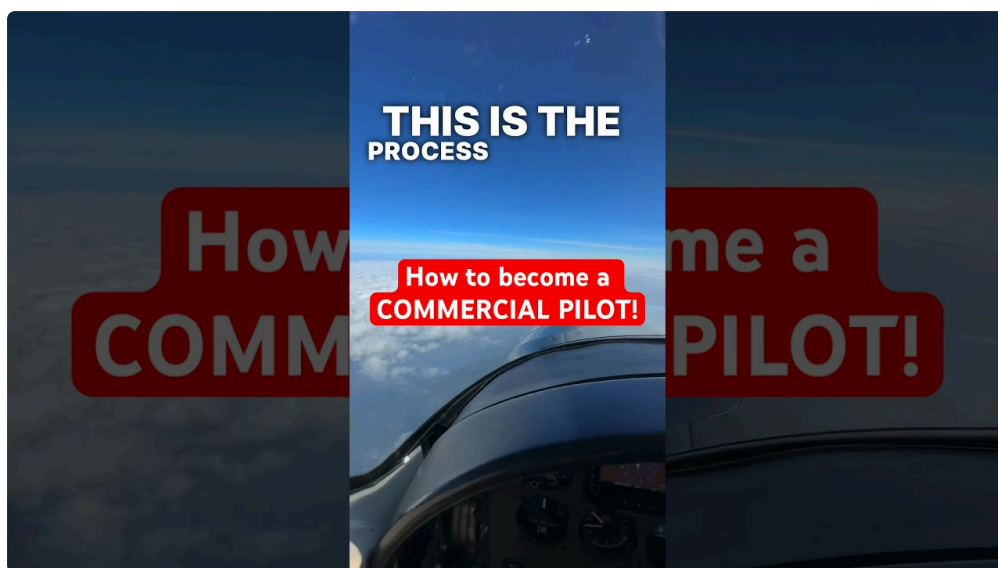
How the Master Grid Works

The scheduling system runs on a rotating six-day cycle rather than a fixed Monday to Friday pattern, a detail that surprises newcomers and occasionally delights them, since a lesson that falls at an awkward hour one week moves to a reasonable one the next. Periods run forty-five minutes, six on most days, with laboratory blocks and the fixed sports afternoon occupying longer arcs of time. Tutorial periods are attached to core subjects rather than offered as generic study time, which keeps the help connected to the course that generates it.

Conflict resolution follows a stated priority: examined core subjects first, laboratory sections second, language levels third, electives fourth, personal preferences last. The registrar's software produces a first draft, but advisors hand-check every draft for anomalies, because a solver optimises constraints and cannot weigh a student's stated reasons. When two electives compete for the same slot, the advisor does not decide abstractly; the student sees both options in context and chooses. This is slower than an algorithm acting alone and markedly better.

A Sensible Order of Decisions

Students who build their programme in a deliberate sequence almost always end up with stronger timetables than those who choose electives first and discover the consequences later. The order that has proven reliable, and which advisors walk through in the meeting, runs as follows.



1. Confirm core placements before touching electives, since everything else is built on them.
2. Rank pathway electives in genuine order of preference, not alphabetical politeness.
3. Name two acceptable alternatives for every elective, so a clash has a ready answer.
4. Distribute assessment-heavy subjects across the week rather than concentrating them.
5. Leave at least one period unassigned, because a completely full grid has no room to absorb the unexpected.

That last step looks like weakness and functions as strength. The students who fill every slot in September are, in my experience, the ones requesting relief by November.

The Adjustment Window

Onboarding does not end when the timetable is printed. A defined adjustment window, typically the first ten teaching days, allows changes with the advisor's signature and, for examined subjects, the subject lead's consent. This window exists because placement diagnostics, for all their care, are single measurements, and a fortnight of actual lessons is a better instrument. One student two years ago entered with four laboratory sciences, a programme she had chosen with total sincerity in June; by the second week's workload review, she and her advisor had restructured to three, and her remaining grades that term were the strongest she had produced at the school. Another student, a violinist, discovered in week two that his Thursday afternoons held unexpected slack and added the orchestra he had assumed was impossible.

Contact load deserves a word here. A full programme generally lands between thirty-two and thirty-six timetabled periods per cycle, and the advisory conversation treats this as a planning guideline rather than a target to maximise. Students arriving from systems with lighter contact weeks sometimes read a fuller grid as a sign of seriousness. The advisor's counterpoint is practical: preparation hours at home, particularly in the upper grades, are part of the true load, and the grid that looks full is not always the one that teaches most.

Habits That Make Onboarding Easier

A few small practices separate smooth onboardings from difficult ones. Bring a folder and keep every signed document; the study plan is a reference document for the whole term, not a form to be filed and forgotten. Reply to advisor emails within a day or two, since the scheduling process moves quickly and a late answer can cost a preferred section. Parents in distant time zones should book a call with the advisor inside the first week rather than waiting for a scheduled parents' occasion, because questions about pathway recognition or language levels are best asked while options remain open. And ask for the timetable in printed form as well as in the application; a paper grid pinned above a desk does more for a new student's orientation than any screen.

What a Finished Onboarding Looks Like

By the end of the week, a well-run onboarding at AELO Swiss Academy produces four concrete things: a signed study plan, a timetable in hand, three named contacts with faces attached to the names, and a map of the first assessments. The term then begins with attention where it belongs, on the work itself, rather than on logistics still being negotiated. That outcome is not accidental. It comes from a deliberate order, assessment before advice, advice before scheduling, and from advisors who treat the timetable as what it really is: a promise the school makes about how a student's days will be spent, fitted carefully to the person who must live inside it.