

Life after graduation: how aelo swiss academy continues to support its alumni

Graduation day has a cruel punchline. For two, three, maybe four years, your life runs on deadlines: the reading you haven't done, the presentation on Friday, the exam you're fairly sure is in room B12 but might be in B21. Then someone shakes your hand, hands you a folder, and the deadlines simply stop. Nobody warns you about the silence.

I work on the alumni side of AELO Swiss Academy, which makes me the person who emails you about six weeks after you graduate to ask how things are going. Roughly half of you never open that email, and I respect the honesty. The other half write back with messages that range from "I got the job!" to "help, I have no idea what I'm doing." Those are the ones that keep me employed and, frankly, the ones I like best.

Because here's the thing we figured out a while ago: the diploma is not the product. The product is what you do with it, and the first two years after graduation are where most of that doing happens. So the academy treats graduation less like an exit and more like a handover. Here is what that actually looks like, from the desk of someone who reads the replies.

The quiet after the ceremony

Ask any graduate about month three after graduation and you'll hear a version of the same story. The structure is gone. Friends have scattered to cantons and continents. Your student email, which quietly organized your entire life, is on borrowed time. The industry you trained for turns out to be less like the brochures and more like weather: changeable, occasionally hostile, hard to predict.

Institutions historically handled this with a shrug and an alumni newsletter full of buildings named after donors. We took a different view at AELO Swiss Academy, partly because we're small enough to know our graduates by name and partly because Swiss pragmatism tends to frown on elaborate gestures that don't work. If our alumni struggle, our reputation struggles. If they thrive, our admissions inbox fills up. Call it enlightened self-interest. It functions the same as loyalty, and it's easier to budget for.

We still answer our emails

The alumni office is not a monument. It's a small team, a database we actually maintain, and a policy that messages from graduates get answered within two working days. Not a form letter. An answer, from a person, who remembers which thesis you nearly abandoned.

A favourite example: a graduate wrote to us at eleven at night from Toronto, three days before an interview for a role she wasn't sure she wanted. She didn't need a miracle. She needed someone to tell her which questions were likely, which of her projects to lead with, and whether her salary expectation was delusional. We spent an hour on a video call the next evening. She got the offer, negotiated a bit more, and took it. We claim no credit for her performance. We claim credit for not leaving her alone with her nerves.



The check-in rhythm is simple. Six weeks out, we ask how the search is going. Six months out, we ask again, with less formality. A year out, we invite you to the autumn reunion and pretend we're not checking whether you've moved countries. Some graduates never reply, and that's allowed. The door doesn't close just because you didn't knock.

Mentors, minus the cold message

Every career guide tells you to "find a mentor," which is advice roughly as useful as "be tall." Nobody explains how. The standard method is to send a stranger a stiff LinkedIn message and wait to be ignored, which builds character, not careers.

We shortcut that. Graduates who want a mentor fill in a short form about their goals, and we match them with an alum or an industry contact a few years ahead of them, often in a different city entirely. The commitment is deliberately modest: an hour a month for six months, then both parties decide whether to continue. Low stakes make people say yes.



The pairings aren't always obvious, and that's on purpose. One of our hospitality graduates was matched with an alum working in logistics because she wanted to run operations, not stand behind a desk. He had made every scheduling mistake there is, in three countries. Two years later she's running a site and still calls him when

something goes sideways. The lesson I'd offer from watching these matches: a mentor two steps ahead of you is more useful than one fifty floors up. From fifty floors up, your problems look like trivia.

https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/

A fair warning, because I promised honesty: mentors are volunteers, not magicians. They can open doors and tell you which doors are painted on the wall. They cannot do the walking for you. The graduates who get the most out of the programme arrive with questions, not with a request to be rescued.

Your career support didn't graduate with you

The career office doesn't confiscate your access on graduation day. CV and portfolio reviews, mock interviews, and negotiation prep stay available to alumni, free, indefinitely. Use them at three months or at three years. People do come back at three years, usually before a big internal promotion, slightly embarrassed, and we pretend not to notice the gap.

The reasoning is unglamorous. Our outcomes are our advertising. When a hiring manager in Geneva thinks "AELO graduate," we want that thought followed by a memory of someone prepared, not someone who once confused revenue with profit in a case study and tried to argue the point. Your success is our marketing department's favourite statistic, and we don't have to pay for it.

The short version of what you can ask us for in year one out:

- A second pair of eyes on any application that matters to you, however late you've left it
- A mock interview, recorded if you can bear watching yourself back
- An honest read on a salary expectation, before you say it out loud in a negotiation
- An introduction to an alum in your target industry, with a warm sentence attached instead of a cold one
- A reality check on a job offer, because panic-accepting is a tradition we'd like to end

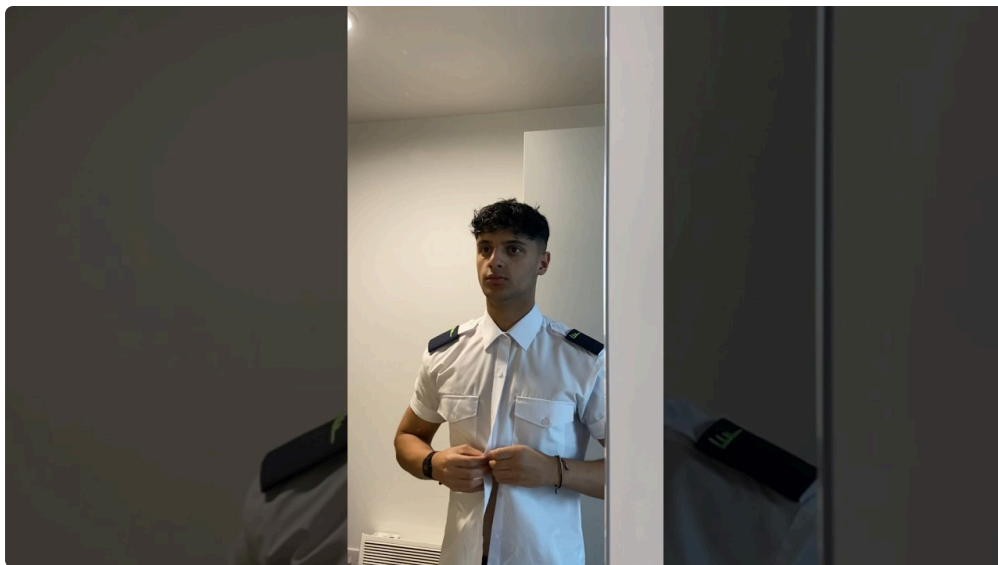
The library door stays open

Everything at the academy runs on schedule. Classes start on the minute. Grades arrive when promised. It's almost irritating. But alumni access to the learning platform is the one deadline we refuse to set. Your course materials stay where you left them, and guest lectures are streamed to graduates who can't fly in.

Better still, when a short course or a masterclass has empty seats a week out, alumni can claim them at a fraction of the normal fee, sometimes nothing at all. Refresher seats are first come, first served, and yes, there's a waiting list, and yes, some of you have turned waiting-list management into a competitive sport. Industries drift. Tools change. We would rather you refresh with us than relearn from a forum thread of questionable authority written by someone with strong opinions and no credentials.

Reunions, chapters, and networking without the name-tag dread

Once a year, in autumn, we hold the reunion on campus. There's a programme, there are speakers, and there is, inevitably, someone who gives a twenty-minute talk that should have been eight. Then the useful part happens: aperitifs, and the conversations nobody scheduled. A disproportionate share of our alumni job changes trace back to that afternoon. I once watched a graduate mention a problem over a glass of white and leave with a business card and, eleven days later, a contract.



For those who can't make it back to Switzerland, regional meetups have formed wherever enough graduates cluster: Zurich and Geneva, obviously, but also London, Singapore, and a stubbornly loyal group in Dubai. They're organized by volunteers, they're low on ceremony, and they operate on one rule: nobody has to pitch anybody. If a recruiter shows up, they come as a person first. Somehow this produces more hiring than the events designed to produce hiring. Draw your own conclusions about human nature.

The loop closes itself

The part of this job I didn't anticipate is watching alumni become the institution. Former students return as guest lecturers, and a healthy share of our visiting speakers each term are people who sat in those same chairs five or ten years ago. They host interns. They take the mentor calls. One graduate now hires from her old programme on something close to a standing basis, on the grounds that she knows exactly what the coursework covered and, more usefully, what it didn't.

This isn't charity. It's the same enlightened self-interest, one generation on. Every graduate who helps a current student is quietly improving the value of their own credential. A degree doesn't age well in a vacuum. It ages well in a network.

What we can't do

I'll be straight about the limits, because overselling support is how institutions lose trust. We can't place you in a job. We can introduce you to people who might hire you, but you still have to be worth hiring. We can't fix a slow market, though we can tell you which corners of it are moving and which are performing a very slow collapse. We're not career therapists, although on certain Tuesday afternoons the distinction gets philosophical.

And the support requires one thing from you: a pulse. Update your email when you move. Reply once in a while. Ask before the situation is on fire rather than after. Alumni who stay loosely in touch get disproportionately more out of us than those who surface every four years in a crisis, and that's not policy, that's just how relationships work.

A relationship, not a farewell

The folder you're handed at graduation contains a diploma, a transcript, and, if you're lucky, a mint. What it should contain is a note saying the relationship has changed form, not ended. AELO Swiss Academy is small by

design, Swiss by habit, and stubborn about its alumni for the simple reason that your trajectory is the whole point of the exercise.

So ignore the six-week email if you like. We'll still be here at month six, year one, year ten, probably with the same coffee machine and a slightly updated database. Graduation is the last deadline we set together. Everything after that is just staying in touch, and the Swiss are famously reliable about that sort of thing.