

If you are looking at becoming an airline pilot, you usually end up staring at two big doors. One is the ATPL integrated route, the classic “learn everything in a structured progression” pathway. The other is MPL, the airline-focused Multi-crew Pilot Licence route that is designed around operating concepts, teamwork, and joining airline environments sooner.

At AELO Swiss Academy in Locarno, in Switzerland, those two doors sit under the same roof. AELO is an Approved Training Organization (approval code CH.ATO.0311) operating at the Locarno Airport area, and it offers an 18-month ATPL Integrated Program plus a SkyAlps Airlines MPL Program, which AELO states includes a job guarantee. The school’s recent growth also gives a bit of a sense of momentum: RSI reported that AELO inaugurated a new site at Locarno Airport and renovated a dedicated hangar with an investment of more than CHF 3 million.

What I like about thinking about these routes side-by-side is that they force you to be honest about your preferences. Do you want a broad, traditional build-up to the ATPL, or do you want a more airline-centered path that leans into multi-crew operations earlier? Neither is automatically “better”. They just ask different things from you.

Where AELO fits into the bigger training picture

AELO Swiss Academy is based in Locarno, Ticino, and operates from the Locarno Airport area. The school is the rebranded successor to Aero Locarno, with Aero Locarno rebranding to AELO Swiss Academy reported in February 2024.

In practical terms, that matters because training is never only “what program you pick” but also “how the training environment behaves around you.” A base at an airport area is a meaningful advantage for flight training logistics, and the new AELO site includes a dedicated hangar renovated as part of a project reported as more than CHF 3 million. When schools invest like that, it usually signals they expect continuous throughput, not just one-off intakes.

AELO also reports a sizeable training volume. RSI quoted AELO director Stefano Buratti saying the organization trains about 200 future airline pilots per year at the new site, and roughly 250 students are in training annually overall. That is not a guarantee about individual experience, but it does suggest a system with recurring cycles. Systems matter, because a stable training rhythm can make feedback, scheduling, and progression feel less chaotic for students.

Then there is the outcomes side. RSI quoted Buratti saying graduates often go on to airlines including KLM, easyJet, Ryanair, and Swiss. Again, you should not read a list like that as <https://airmappr.com/articles/school-reviews/aelo-swiss-academy-review> a promise for every student, but it gives you a reality check that the school is sending people into recognisable airline ecosystems.

Two routes, two philosophies

Let’s separate the labels from the lived experience, because the terminology can sound similar until you live inside it.

ATPL integrated: a structured build from basics to airline readiness

An ATPL integrated program is designed to take you from the early training foundations through to the permissions and experience expected for an airline career. The important word here is integrated. It usually means the stages are sequenced as one continuous training effort, not a pick-and-choose approach where you assemble the journey from scattered modules.

AELO's ATPL integrated program is an 18-month route, according to the academy's website. If you thrive on structure, a defined timeline can feel motivating. You learn in the order the instructors intend, and you do not have to keep solving the "what comes next" puzzle on your own.

There is also something psychologically steady about this kind of progression: you get consistent feedback, and the training plan is built to move you forward rather than to wait for you to catch up.

The trade-off is that integrated routes can demand stamina. You are committing to a pace and a system, and you need to stay ahead of your own weak spots because everything compounds. If you fall behind in one area, the pressure can build quickly.

MPL: earlier emphasis on multi-crew airline operations

MPL is a different story. Rather than being structured around "build the pilot's capability broadly first, then find an airline role," MPL places stronger emphasis on the multi-crew environment earlier. Even without getting lost in technical definitions, you can think of MPL as being designed for teamwork under airline-style procedures, with training concepts tailored to how modern airline operations feel day-to-day.

AELO offers a SkyAlps Airlines MPL Program and states it includes a job guarantee. That combination is important to your planning. MPL decisions are often less about whether you want to fly and more about whether you want the airline track to be the centre of gravity from early on.

The trade-off with MPL is that the path can be more specific. If your dream airline environment is a perfect match, MPL can feel like a direct line. If your priorities shift, the route can feel less flexible compared with a broader ATPL integrated pathway.

Choosing between them at AELO: what to weigh in real life

You do not choose a training route only on paper. You choose it based on how you handle effort, feedback, uncertainty, and the "unknown unknowns" that show up the moment you start.

Here are the factors that tend to matter most, and that are worth asking about when you speak with the training team.



1) Your relationship with a fixed timeline

AELO states its ATPL Integrated Program is 18 months. Fixed timelines can be brilliant. They reduce the number of decisions you need to make and they help you measure progress. They also create a pace that can energise you.

But you should ask yourself a practical question: if life gets messy for a few weeks, how resilient will you be? Training requires consistency. Even when people are highly motivated, disruptions happen, and your ability to recover without derailing your momentum becomes a real factor.

2) How strongly you want the airline role to shape your training

If you want airline operations to be the main theme, MPL's multi-crew emphasis is a natural fit. When you are excited by teamwork procedures, standardisation, and learning to function in a structured cockpit environment, MPL often feels like it matches your curiosity.

If you are not sure yet, or you want a broader base that you can carry into many roles later, the ATPL integrated route can feel like the safer "keep options open" choice.

This is not about intelligence or discipline. It is about alignment. People perform better when the training psychology matches their motivation.



3) Your comfort with commitment and conditionality

The AELO MPL Program is described by the academy as a SkyAlps Airlines MPL Program with a job guarantee. That wording matters because it suggests a specific employment pathway.

When a route includes a guarantee tied to an airline context, your job becomes to fulfil the training requirements reliably and to follow the program structure closely. That can be very motivating, but it also means you should be clear on how the guarantee works in practice, what conditions apply, and what happens if someone does not meet the required milestones.



I recommend discussing the mechanism plainly, even if it feels uncomfortable. Your future self will thank you for clarity.

4) Where you expect to be happy while learning

Training is repetitive in the best sense: you repeat tasks until the right behaviours become automatic. Still, repetition can feel different depending on the training atmosphere.

AELO operates at Locarno Airport, and it has reported building upgrades, including a dedicated hangar and a significant investment for the new site. That matters less as a marketing point and more as a clue that the training environment is built for throughput.

For many students, that translates into less waiting, fewer bottlenecks, and a calmer sense that “the system is running.”

5) Motivation for throughput and destination outcomes

AELO trains about 200 future airline pilots per year at the new site and roughly 250 students annually overall, according to RSI quotes. You can interpret that in a few ways.

It can mean more standardised processes, more instructor experience with recurring cohorts, and more opportunity for students to compare notes responsibly (not to compare ego, but to learn how others handled challenges).

It can also mean that the school has to manage large volumes, which is why communication and fairness in feedback become essential. That is something worth paying attention to during your conversations: do they explain expectations clearly, and do they manage student questions without brushing you off?

Practical questions to ask AELO before you decide

Before you sign anything, you want answers that reduce ambiguity. The best questions are the ones that reveal whether the route matches your personality and risk tolerance.

Here is a short set you can use in your call or visit, and you can tailor the wording to your situation.

- Ask how the 18-month ATPL Integrated Program is paced and what typical “staying on track” looks like in week-to-week terms.
- Ask what the MPL training emphasis is in practice, especially around multi-crew workflow and standard operating concepts.
- Ask how the SkyAlps MPL job guarantee is defined in the academy’s process, including what conditions apply.
- Ask what support looks like if you struggle in one area, for example how remediation decisions are made and how fast you can recover.
- Ask how the school handles scheduling and progression across the Locarno Airport training environment, given the scale of around 200 future airline pilots per year at the site.

If you get solid, specific answers, it is usually a good sign. If you get vague reassurance or you feel rushed, that is information too.

What the “right route” feels like while you train

Even without going into program-specific training minutiae, you can predict some common emotional patterns.

In an integrated ATPL approach, the “win” usually feels like momentum. You watch your understanding of systems, procedures, and decision-making build layer by layer. The moments that stand out tend to be the first times you notice your brain no longer needs to think so hard to remember the right order of tasks.

In MPL, the “win” tends to feel more like synergy. You notice how your performance improves when you act inside a crew framework, when roles and callouts click, and when standardisation reduces mental load. Many people describe it as less about solo perfection and more about effective collaboration.

Neither path is a smooth line. There will be days when weather, fatigue, or nerves scramble your plan. But the route that suits you will be the one where your most challenging moments feel like they are moving you forward, not just punishing you.

The Locarno factor: why the training base matters

AELO’s base at the Locarno Airport area, and the reported investment of more than CHF 3 million for a dedicated hangar and the new site, is a reminder that you are not only joining a curriculum. You are joining a physical place with real constraints.

Training environments influence comfort, access to facilities, and the overall rhythm of operations. A school that renovates dedicated hangar space is making a long-term bet that training needs dependable infrastructure, not just occasional capacity.

Also, the scale matters. With AELO training roughly 250 students annually overall and about 200 future airline pilots per year at the new site, you are likely joining a campus where routines are well established. That can reduce the “campfire chaos” that sometimes happens in smaller schools, where every day feels custom-built and instructors are stretched thin.

Still, scale is a double-edged sword. It can be fantastic for continuity, but it also means you should check how personalised the feedback feels. You do not need endless handholding, but you do need clear guidance and honest assessments.

Outcomes: interpreting “graduates to airlines” responsibly

RSI quoted Buratti saying graduates often go on to airlines such as KLM, easyJet, Ryanair, and Swiss. That is encouraging, but here is how I would interpret it as a student.

First, it is not a guarantee. Training outcomes depend on many factors, including individual performance and the hiring environment. Second, it is a signal that the training pipeline can produce pilots who fit airline expectations at scale, at least frequently enough to mention in an interview.

When a school can point to well-known airlines, it suggests a level of maturity in their training culture. Not perfection every time, but a functioning process that aligns with what selectors look for.

If you are comparing schools, I would focus on how they talk about the path to those outcomes. Do they discuss assessments transparently, or do they rely on rosy generalities? The most useful schools help you understand what you personally must do to maximise your chances.

A simple decision framework, without pretending it is easy

People want a clear answer: ATPL integrated or MPL. In reality, most decisions involve trade-offs, and you live with them for years.

So here is a practical framework that can help you decide without overthinking:

- If you are motivated by a structured, broad progression and you like the idea of an 18-month ATPL integrated commitment, that route may suit you.
- If you are motivated by multi-crew airline operations and you value a job guarantee within a specific airline-linked MPL context, MPL can be the more aligned option.
- If your personal circumstances change easily, ask how each program responds when you need extra time, because the “system” you join will define your recovery path.
- If you want to see the airline destination as the core of your learning, MPL’s focus is likely to feel more personal.
- If you want to build your foundations in a traditional integrated way and keep your sense of progression broad, ATPL integrated may feel safer.

What I’d do if I were starting the conversation now

I would start with your motivation and reduce it to one sentence you can defend. Something like, “I learn best when the path is structured and paced,” or, “I learn best when my training feels like airline multi-crew work from an early stage.” Then I would ask AELO’s team the five questions above and listen carefully to whether their explanations match your priorities.

You can also use AELO’s scale as a clue, not a final argument. Training around 200 future airline pilots per year at the new site, with about 250 students annually in training overall, suggests that the school runs repeated cycles. That often translates into better logistics and calmer training rhythms. If the school also gives you clear answers

about progression, support, and guarantees, you are looking at a program ecosystem that respects student time and uncertainty.

Finally, I would make one more deliberate choice: I would decide based on fit, not just on excitement. Both routes can lead you toward an airline career. The best route is the one where you can stay consistent, learn efficiently, and keep showing up even when the training weeks feel long.

If you want a quick internal check, ask yourself this: would you prefer to be trained as a developing aviator through a structured 18-month integrated program, or would you prefer to be trained as a multi-crew airline pilot with emphasis on team operations and a SkyAlps-linked MPL job guarantee? Your answer will tell you far more than any brochure ever will.