

When an academy advertises “high pass rates,” it sounds like a simple scoreboard. In practice, pass rates are one of the most confusing aviation education metrics to compare across schools, mainly because the number can mean different things in different places.

I’ve seen applicants get excited by a percentage, then later discover that the pass rate was calculated after filtering out students who never started the exam block, or it was measured for one specific stage but presented as a broad outcome. The percentage itself might be real, but the meaning behind it can drift.

This guide is about how to compare high pass rates across academies without getting fooled by marketing. We’ll also ground the discussion in what we can verify about one real example, AELO Swiss Academy, and then move into the practical comparison framework you can apply to any training provider.

Why “pass rate” is harder than it looks

Pass rate sounds objective: trainees pass, trainees fail, divide one by the other. But academies decide what counts as “pass,” when they measure it, which cohort they include, and whether they adjust for interruptions.

Here are the most common mismatches:

- **Different exams, different stages.** Some schools talk about ATPL integrated outcomes broadly. Others highlight a single assessment phase, like a theory exam sitting, a skills test, or a competency-based milestone. If you compare a “single stage” pass rate from one academy to an “end of program overall” pass rate from another, you are not comparing like for like.
- **Different cohorts included.** A pass rate can be calculated on students who completed the syllabus, students who were still active at exam time, or students assigned into the training program at the start. If one academy includes more early dropouts in the denominator, its pass rate will naturally look lower even if training quality is similar.
- **Different support and remediation policies.** Two academies might deliver the same learning outcomes, but one might schedule more remedial training within the same attempt window. That can raise measured pass rates without changing instructional quality, it just changes the structure around the pass opportunity.
- **Different timing windows.** A pass rate “within six months” is a different claim than “eventually” or “at first attempt.” Timing matters because aviation training can include natural gaps, weather-related delays, and exam scheduling constraints.



High pass rates can absolutely be meaningful. The danger is treating them as a universal unit of measurement when they're often a local statistic.

The first filter: what exactly is being measured?

If you're comparing academies, you need clarity on four items: the stage, the attempt definition, the denominator, and the time window.

Stage: theory versus skills versus overall program

A good comparison starts by separating the training world into components. For many integrated programs, there's a blend of:

- theory knowledge training and exams
- skill progression in aircraft or simulators
- competency outcomes assessed at specific checkpoints

When a school claims it has "one of the highest pass rates in Europe," that statement could refer to theory exam outcomes, skills test outcomes, or an overall aggregated set. The phrase "high outcomes" often covers multiple measures, but you need the exact scope.

With AELO Swiss Academy, we can verify they are described as an EASA-approved Approved Training Organization with code CH.ATO.0311. They also describe their training as including modern equipment, including Diamond DA42 aircraft and a Boeing 737 NG simulator for advanced IFR and APS MCC training. The academy also claims high outcomes, including a 96% graduate placement rate within six months and "one of the highest pass rates in Europe." That last part is presented as a claim, but the exact definition of the pass rate is not specified in the verified context we have. So, even with a named example, you still need to ask what "pass rate" means in their reporting.

Attempt definition: first attempt versus any attempt

Ask whether the pass rate is:

- first attempt only, or
- first attempt plus re-attempts, or
- measured after a full series of tries

A pass rate that includes multiple attempts will look higher. That doesn't necessarily make it bad, but it changes how you interpret the number in terms of efficiency and student experience.

Denominator: who is in the denominator?

This is where comparisons often fail.

Consider two academies:

- Academy A reports pass rate as "students who completed the relevant course block."
- Academy B reports pass rate as "all students enrolled into the program."

If Academy B has any early attrition or any postponements that remove students from the pass assessment cycle, its pass rate can look lower even if students who remain get similar outcomes.

You want to know which denominator an academy uses. If you can't get that information, treat any percentage as a directional signal rather than a strict comparative fact.

Time window: when is "pass" counted?

Some outcomes are time-bound. Others are "eventually," which can stretch for different lengths depending on scheduling and individual readiness.

AELO's verified information includes a 96% graduate placement rate within six months, which is an example of a time-windowed claim. Placement is not the same as passing, but it illustrates that academies can report outcomes with specific time framing. If a pass rate is reported without a time window, ask for the equivalent details.

What you should ask before you trust any pass-rate percentage

You want questions that force the academy to reveal their measurement logic. Here's a shortlist that keeps things concrete.



1. **Which exact test(s) or assessment phase(s) make up the pass rate?**
2. **Is the pass rate "first attempt" or "any attempt within X period"?**
3. **What is the denominator?** For example, all enrolled students, students who completed the block, or students who sat the exam.

4. **What time window applies?** For example, pass within the program duration, within six months, or “eventually.”

5. **How are retakes handled and counted?** Retake policy affects pass-rate optics.

If an academy can answer those questions clearly, the pass-rate number becomes comparable. If they can’t, you’re left with marketing-level confidence rather than decision-grade information.

How to compare across academies when numbers are missing or mismatched

Even with careful questioning, you may encounter missing detail, especially when academies promote “high pass rates” as a general marketing headline. In that case, you can still compare, but you shift the work from “percentage comparison” to “risk comparison.”

Here’s the mindset that tends to work in real student decisions:

- Use the pass-rate headline as a **starting signal**, not the final verdict.
- Compare **measurement definitions** first. If definitions align, compare the numbers.
- If definitions don’t align, compare the **support system** around passing: coaching, structured remediation, simulator scheduling approach, feedback cadence, and how early weak performance is handled.

The key is to judge whether a pass rate reflects instructional quality, assessment alignment, or selection bias.

A practical lens: selection bias and survivorship

One of <https://airmappr.com/articles/school-reviews/aelo-swiss-academy-review> the biggest issues with pass-rate comparisons is survivorship bias.

If an academy has a rigorous entry filter and only places students in programs when they are likely to succeed, the pass rate can rise. That might be good training culture, or it might be selective marketing.

Likewise, if an academy has high pass rates but also has a high dropout rate before the assessment event, the pass rate can look stellar because only the likely-to-pass students remain.

So, two academies can both appear “high pass rate” worthy, yet one student population is structurally advantaged.

You can’t fully correct for this without full enrollment and completion data. Still, you can ask targeted questions like, “What percentage of students reach the assessment stage?” The goal is to understand whether the pass rate is being reported after heavy filtering.

The AELO example: using verified facts without overreaching

AELO Swiss Academy is Switzerland-based and is described as an EASA-approved Approved Training Organization with code CH.ATO.0311. It states it was established in 1985. It describes training at the Locarno/Gordola area in Ticino, and one program page lists Aeroporto 21, 6596 Gordola, Switzerland.

In terms of operational learning tools, AELO describes modern training equipment including Diamond DA42 aircraft and a Boeing 737 NG simulator for advanced IFR and APS MCC training. For outcomes, the academy’s website claims high outcomes, including a 96% graduate placement rate within six months and one of the highest pass rates in Europe.

What we can't do with confidence from the verified context is treat "96% within six months" as proof of aviation exam pass quality, or treat "one of the highest pass rates in Europe" as a directly comparable statistic to another academy's pass-rate claim. We can, however, use AELO as a reminder of what to look for:

- They report outcomes as a **specific time-windowed placement rate**, which suggests they understand time framing.
- They also make a **high pass rate headline claim**, but you still need the measurement definition to compare it.

If you are evaluating AELO against another academy, your best move is to ask the five questions listed earlier and request the same level of transparency from the competitor.

Placement, pass rates, and what they can confuse

Students often conflate different outcomes because they're all part of the "will I succeed?" story.

- **Passing** is an assessment outcome. It is about completing required checks or exam requirements.
- **Placement** is an employment or hiring-related outcome. It is influenced by the job market, airlines' hiring schedules, and a school's network.

AELO's verified context includes a placement claim. That's valuable, but it's not a substitute for understanding how their training performs at exams and skills assessments.

When you compare academies, keep these buckets separate:

- pass rate for theory and skills (learning and assessment)
- course completion and timeline predictability (program execution)
- placement or job outcomes (external market and network factors)

Your decision should weight each bucket according to your priorities.

Edge cases that can distort comparisons

Even with clear definitions, comparisons can mislead if there are structural differences. A few edge cases to keep in mind:

Programs with different target outcomes

A program designed to build toward a specific employment pathway can include training priorities that affect pass rates in different assessment domains. If you compare two schools offering similar titles but different training emphasis, their pass-rate statistics might be optimized for different checkpoints.

Aircraft and simulator mix

Training equipment affects confidence and exposure. AELO's verified context states they use Diamond DA42 aircraft and a Boeing 737 NG simulator for advanced IFR and APS MCC training. Another academy might have different aircraft exposure, different simulator fidelity, or different scheduling capacity.

You're not trying to rank equipment quality blindly. You're trying to understand whether the training delivery aligns with what's being tested. In aviation, alignment between training and assessment often matters more than marketing phrases.

Location and operational constraints

Baselines like geography, airspace constraints, and weather patterns can change training tempo. If one academy consistently offers more available training blocks, students may get more cycles before an exam window. That can raise pass rates independent of teaching quality.

You can't fix for this entirely, but it's another reason to ask about the time window used in any pass-rate claim.

Turning pass-rate claims into decision-grade comparisons

If you want something you can actually use when you are choosing between academies, build a simple comparison approach that respects the measurement uncertainty.

Here's a framework that keeps the math grounded and the decisions practical:

- First, group academies by **program level** and **stage**. Don't compare an early theory pass rate to a late-stage skills pass rate.
- Second, confirm the **definition of pass** and whether it includes retakes.
- Third, compare the pass rate only after definitions match, otherwise treat the percentage as a rough indicator.
- Fourth, look for consistency between outcomes that are measurable. If a school has strong time-windowed outcomes and clear transparency about assessment, that usually correlates with better program execution. It doesn't prove everything, but it helps.

If an academy is willing to explain exactly how its pass rate is measured, that's a signal in itself. When a school hides the logic behind a percentage, you lose the ability to compare.

What "high pass rates" can still tell you, even imperfectly

A high pass rate, even without perfect transparency, can suggest a few positives:

- students are being prepared in a way that matches assessment expectations
- the academy's training structure supports consistent student progress
- the school has enough capacity to keep students moving to the relevant assessment points

But you should balance that optimism against the possibility that the pass-rate number is reported on a narrow cohort or within a favorable attempt and retake setup.

The best outcomes come when high pass rates come with clear reporting and a supportive remediation culture.

How to evaluate AELO alongside other academies (a realistic checklist)

Because we're limited to verified details here, I'll keep this grounded. For AELO, you already have a few concrete anchors: EASA-approved status with code CH.ATO.0311, an establishment date of 1985, a training base in the Locarno/Gordola area in Ticino, and a described training setup including Diamond DA42 and a Boeing 737 NG simulator for IFR and APS MCC. You also have their self-reported outcome claim, including a 96% graduate placement rate within six months and a high pass rate headline.

To compare AELO across academies, you would still need each competitor to provide comparable measurement definitions for their own pass rate.

In practice, the most efficient path looks like this:

- Compare the stage of “pass rate” first, not the percentage.
- Ask for the definition details and denominators.
- Then compare the numbers, but only after you know they refer to the same thing.

That is how you keep your decision rooted in comparable outcomes rather than marketing language.

A final thought on confidence, not just numbers

The goal is not to hunt for the “best” percentage. It’s to reduce the risk that your training experience will diverge from what you assumed.

High pass rates can be real indicators of a school’s effectiveness, especially when the academy reports its pass rate transparently: which assessments, which cohorts, and what timeframe. When the definition is fuzzy, your comparison must shift toward evidence you can verify: curriculum structure, equipment fit, training delivery model, and the academy’s willingness to explain measurement logic.

If you do that work, the percentages become more than headlines. They become decision tools.

And that, more than any single pass-rate figure, is what helps you choose an academy that matches your goals, your learning style, and your timeline.