

Apprenticeship Pulse Results March 2021

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Apprenticeship Pulse has been surveying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on basic dual vocational education and training (VET) monthly since April 2020. While Switzerland was still in a shutdown in April, the measures in place at that time were gradually relaxed in the following months. After the summer months with relatively low case numbers and limited measures, the second wave arrived in September. This led to a sharp increase in the number of cases in October and a renewed tightening of the measures (including a home office recommendation). Further tightening followed in the following months, with private meetings further restricted and restaurants, bars, cultural, leisure, and sports establishments closed again. In addition, universities again switched to distance learning, while classes at other schools continued with the appropriate hygiene and behavioral rules. However, some cantons also temporarily switched to distance learning at the compulsory school level.

On January 18, 2021, a nationwide partial shutdown was imposed. This closed stores selling non-daily necessities and introduced a home office requirement. However, schools, hotels and service providers (e.g. hairdressers, post offices, banks) could remain open. On March 1, the

first relaxation step allowed stores for non-daily needs to reopen.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on apprenticeship companies and apprentices in **March 2021**, and compares these results with those of previous surveys. The results are clustered into different phases: shutdown (April), relaxations (May-June), restricted measures (July-October), November-December when measures tightened again, and January and February with the partial shutdown. All results are weighted and are therefore representative for training companies and apprentices in Switzerland.

This month, Apprenticeship Pulse again reports on three groups of young people:

- Group 1: Future apprentices 2021
- Group 2: Current apprentices
- Group 3: Apprentices in their final year of training

The Pulse of Apprentices in March 2021 – Main Points

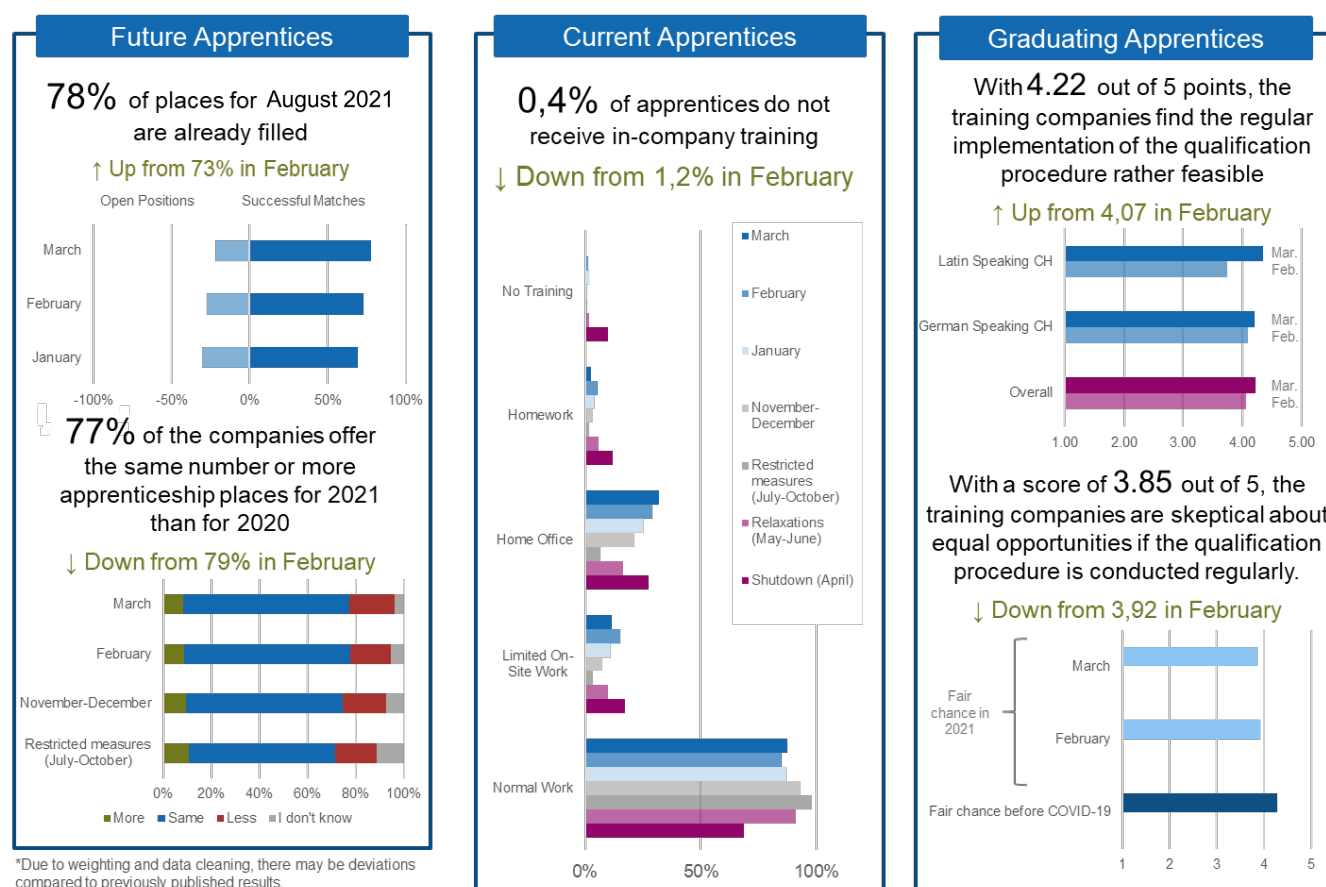


Figure 1: The headlines on Apprenticeship Pulse in March 2021.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to March 2021. The left box shows the main results for future apprentices in 2021, the middle box those for current apprentices (not in the final year) and the right box those for apprentices in the last year of apprenticeship.

In German-speaking Switzerland, future apprentices (Group 1) begin the application process one year before the start of their apprenticeship. In French-speaking Switzerland, this process only starts in the spring. Since August 2020, thus there have been open apprenticeship positions for the cohort starting in summer 2021.

In March, 77% of the companies surveyed (79% in Feb.¹, 75% in Dec., 73% in Nov., 72% in Aug.-Oct.) reported offering the same number of apprenticeships or even more for the start of apprenticeships in 2021 compared to the previous year. Here, the proportion of companies offering more apprenticeships declined somewhat (to 8%; 10% in Feb., 6% in Dec., 12% in Nov., 11% in Aug.-Oct.), while the proportion of companies offering the same number of apprenticeships remained constant (69%; same in Dec., 61% in Nov., 61% in Aug.-Oct.). 19% of companies (16% in Feb., 18% in Dec., 18% in Nov., 17% in Aug.-Oct.) will offer fewer apprenticeships than in 2020, and this proportion is slightly changed since August.

Further, 4% of companies (same in Feb., 6% in Dec., 9% in Nov., 11% in Aug.-Oct.) do not yet know how many apprenticeships they will offer in summer 2021.

Since January, Apprenticeship Pulse has been surveying the percentage of apprenticeship positions that are still open or already filled. In March, the companies surveyed reported that 78% (72% in Feb., 69% in Jan.) of the apprenticeships offered for summer 2021 have already been filled, while 22% (28% in Feb., 31% in Jan.) are still open. The proportion of filled apprenticeships has thus increased since January, as expected. However, a higher proportion of apprenticeships have already been filled in German-speaking Switzerland (79%; 74% in Feb., 71% in Jan.) than in Latin Switzerland² (58%; 60% in Feb. and Jan.), where the recruitment process starts later. It should be noted that these figures only reflect apprenticeships that have already been offered and do not necessarily consider apprenticeships that have not even been advertised yet.

¹ This question was not asked in the January survey.

² Due to the low number of responses in western Switzerland and especially in Ticino, these language regions were combined.

Current apprentices (Group 2) were still strongly affected one year after the start of the pandemic. In March, 87% of apprentices (85% in Feb., 87% in Jan., 93% in Nov.-Dec., 98% in July-Oct., 91% in May-June, 69% in April)³ were working under Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) protective measures (esp. distance and hygiene rules). 12% of apprentices (15% in Feb., 11% in Jan., 7% in Nov.-Dec., 3% in July-Oct., 10% in May-June, 17% in April) were at their workplaces to a limited extent, and 32% (29% in Feb., 25% in Jan., 21% in Nov.-Dec., 6% in July-Oct., 16% in May-June, 27% in April) were at least partly in home office. 3% of apprentices (5% in Feb., 4% in Jan., 3% in Nov.-Dec., 2% in July-Oct., 6% in May-June, 12% in April) received homework for the practical part of their training, and only 0.4% (1.2% in Feb., 1.6% in Jan., 0.7% in Nov.-Dec., 1% in July-Oct., 2% in May-June, 10% in April) did not receive any in-company training.⁴

Thus, the March survey shows a slight improvement in the situation of apprentices, with a slight decrease in the proportions of apprentices with limited on-site work, homework, and without in-company training. Normal work with FOPH protection measures and home office, on the other hand, have regained some prevalence. The occupational fields "Restaurants/Hotels" and "Sales/Purchasing" continue to be strongly affected, but these occupational fields

were able to significantly reduce the proportion of apprentices with homework and without in-company training compared to February, offering more normal work and—in some cases—limited on-site work. This result is in line with the first relaxation of the partial shutdown in early March.

Apprentices in the final year of their apprenticeship (Group 3) will complete their apprenticeships in summer 2021 and will soon begin their qualification procedures (QV). This year's qualification procedures should be carried as usual if possible. The companies surveyed in March believe that this is quite feasible (value of 4.22 on a scale from 1 "definitely not" to 5 "definitely yes"; 4.07 in February). However, the companies in German-speaking Switzerland (4.21; 4.10 in Feb.) were somewhat less optimistic than those in Latin Switzerland (4.34; 3.74 in Feb.), where companies have become more optimistic than they were in the past month. In addition, the training companies surveyed believe that equality of opportunity under normal QV procedures this year (value of 3.85 on a scale from 1 "definitely not" to 5 "definitely yes"; 3.92 in February) is lower than before COVID-19 (4.29).

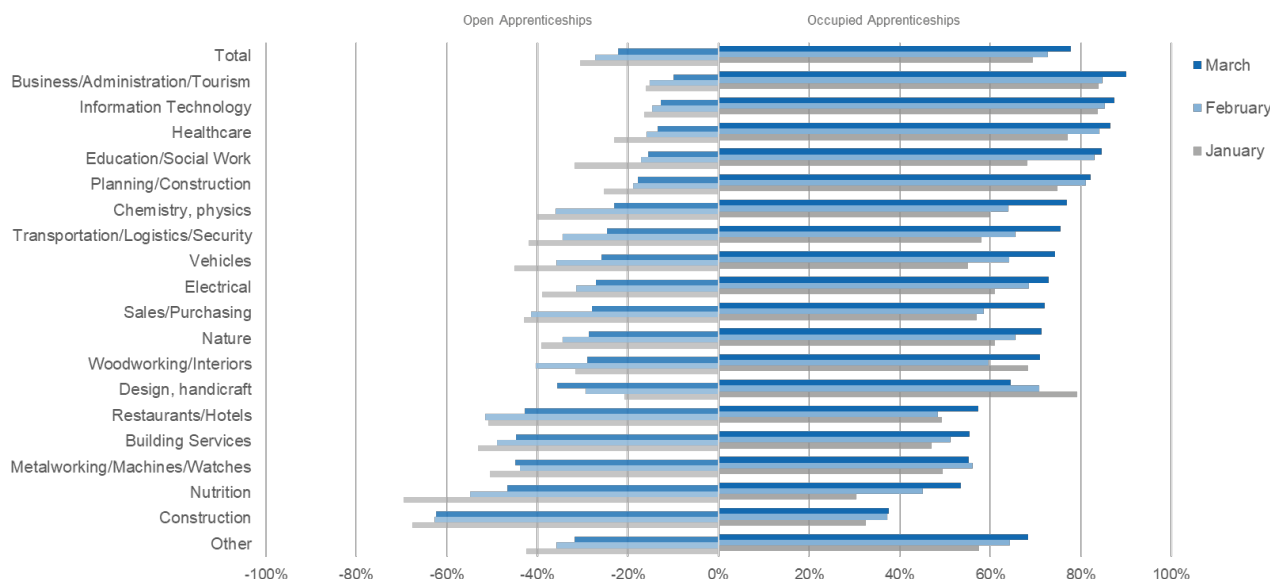


Figure 2: Open and filled apprenticeships by occupational field.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse Survey in March 2021. The left-hand side of the graph shows overall and for each occupational field the proportion of apprenticeships are still open; the right side shows what proportion is already filled. Occupational fields with fewer than 50 apprenticeship companies are grouped under "Others".

³ Due to the weighting and further data cleaning, there may be slight deviations from the results published in the previous fact sheets.

⁴ These proportions do not add up to 100% because of various measures may apply at the same time and not always all apprentices complete practical training in a company straight away, i.e. the companies could choose several answers.

Detailed Results

Apprentices starting in 2021 (Group 1)

In March, 77% of companies (79% in Feb.⁵, 75% in Dec., 73% in Nov., 72% in Aug.-Oct.) reported offering the same number of apprenticeships or even more apprenticeships for the start in 2021 compared to 2020. The proportion of companies offering more apprenticeships remains roughly constant since last August (8%; 10% in Feb, 6% in Dec., 12% in Nov., 11% in Aug.-Oct.), while the proportion of companies offering the same number of apprenticeships has increased (69%; same in Feb., 65% Dec., 61% in Nov., 61% in Aug.-Oct.). In addition, a relatively constant 19% of companies (16% in Feb., 18% in Dec., 18% in Nov., 17% in Aug.-Oct.) will offer fewer apprenticeships than in 2020, and 4% (same in Feb., 6% in Dec., 9% in Nov., 11% in Aug.-Oct.) do not yet know. 4.9% of companies reported in March that they are offering additional apprenticeships for those who would otherwise not find places because of COVID-19 (e.g., due to company closings; 5.2% in Feb.). On average, these companies can offer 1.60 additional apprenticeships (1.46 in Feb.).

According to the training companies surveyed in March, 78% of the apprenticeships offered for summer 2021 (72% in Feb., 69% in Jan.) have already been filled, which means that 22% of apprenticeships (28%, 31% in Jan.) are still open. As expected, the proportion of apprenticeships filled is higher in German-speaking Switzerland (79%; 74% in Feb., 71% in Jan.) than in Latin Switzerland⁶ (58%; 60% in Feb.; same in Jan.). However, this figure should be used with caution, as the recruitment

process for the start of apprenticeships in 2021 does not start at the same time everywhere and unadvertised apprenticeship positions are not covered.

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of vacant and filled apprenticeships varies according to occupational field. The highest proportion of filled apprenticeship positions is found in "Business, Administration, Tourism" (90%). However, an above-average number of apprenticeships has already been filled in the professional fields of "Information Technology" (87%), "Healthcare" (87%), "Education/Social Work" (85%) and "Planning/Construction" (82%). On the other hand, the fewest apprenticeships have been filled in "Construction" (37%), followed by "Food" (53%), "Metal/Machines/Watches" (55%), "Building Services" (55%) and "Restaurants/Hotels" (57%).

Half of the companies used online advertising in March to fill the apprenticeship positions that were still open (49%). In addition, 58% of the companies conducted trial apprenticeships with protective measures and or normal job interviews. This means that the proportion of training companies that conduct online trial apprenticeships (5%) or job interviews (16%) is relatively low. In addition, companies found that recruiting suitable apprentices was only slightly more difficult this year than in the years before COVID-19 (value of -0.27 on a scale from -2 "much more difficult" to +2 "much easier").

	Apprentices at work		Apprentices at home		
	Normal Work	Limited On-Site Work	Home Office	Homework	No workplace training
Total	87%	12%	32%	3%	0.4%
Building	100%	1%	2%	4%	0%
Education/Social Work	99%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Electrical	98%	5%	8%	3%	0%
Vehicles	100%	4%	2%	2%	1%
Restaurants/Hotels	75%	21%	4%	8%	6%
Building Services	98%	2%	4%	1%	0%
Healthcare	100%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Woodworking/Interiors	99%	2%	1%	1%	3%
Information Technology	62%	17%	72%	2%	0%
Metalworking/Machines/Watches	100%	5%	1%	1%	0%
Nature	99%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Planning/Construction	85%	10%	31%	2%	0%
Sales/Purchasing	95%	3%	7%	1%	1%
Transportation/Logistics/Security	99%	3%	2%	1%	0%
Business/Administration/Tourism	84%	13%	41%	2%	0%
Other	88%	20%	17%	5%	0%

Figure 3: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on apprentices training by occupational field.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse Survey in March 2021. For each measure and occupational field, the table shows the proportions (%) of apprentices among all apprentices covered by the apprenticeship companies surveyed in the respective occupational field (multiple answers possible); Occupational fields with fewer than 50 apprenticeship companies are grouped under "Others".

⁵ This question was not asked in the January survey.

⁶ Due to the low number of responses in western Switzerland and especially in Ticino, these language regions were combined.

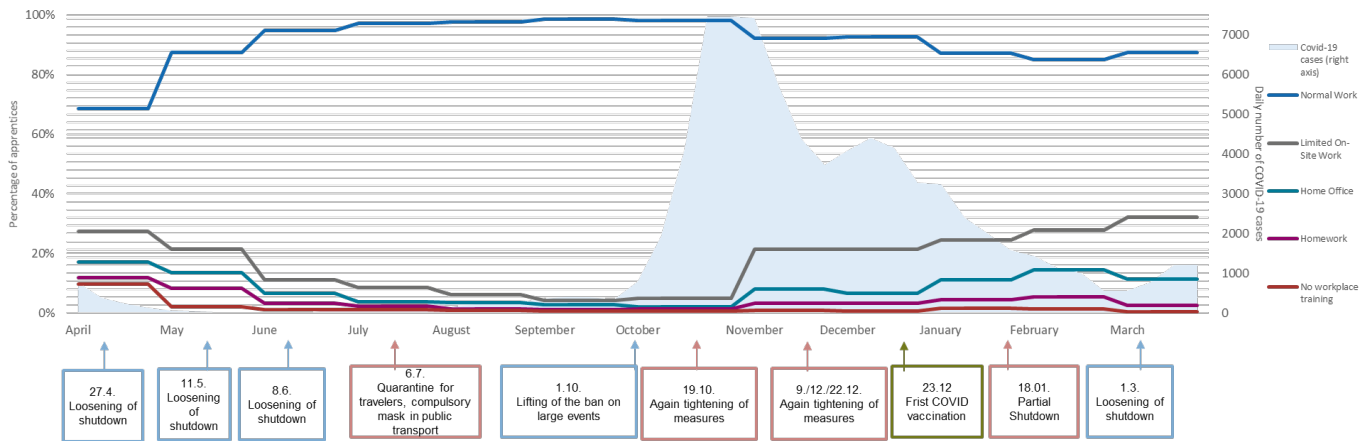


Figure 4: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on training of apprentices over time.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to March 2021. On the left vertical axis, the figure shows the proportion (%) of apprentices per measure for in-company training among all apprentices covered by the apprenticeship companies surveyed (multiple answers possible). The right vertical axis shows the number of COVID-19 cases per day (weekly average) from April 2020 to March 2021.

Current Apprentices (Group 2)

Figure 3 shows the effects of the pandemic on the training of apprentices overall and by occupational field. With an average of 87% (85% in Feb., 87% in Jan., 93% in Nov.-Dec., 98% in July-Oct., 91% in May-June, 69% in April), the apprentices in most occupational fields were also working normally at least some of the time in March (with FOPH protective measures). 32% of apprentices (29% in February, 25% in January, 21% in November-December, 6% in July-October, 16% in May-June, 27% in April) were at least partially working from home, and this proportion was, like April, above average in the professional fields of "Information Technology" (72%), "Business, Administration, Tourism" (41%) and "Planning/Construction" (31%).

The proportion of apprentices with limited on-site work was 12% in March (15% in February, 11% in January, 7% in November-December, 3% in July-October, 10% in May-June, 17% in April), those with homework for the practical part was 3% (5% in Feb., 4% in Jan., 3% in Nov.-Dec., 2% in July-Oct., 6% in May-June, 12% in April) and those without in-company training 0.4% (1.2% in February, 1.6% in January, 0.7% in November-December, 1% in July-October, 2% in May-June, 10% in April). The proportion of apprentices without in-company training and with homework was again comparatively high in the "Restaurants/Hotels" industry (6% and 8%, respectively), even if there was a shift in favor of more limited work and normal work. In addition, the "Information Technology" occupational field is notable because relatively few apprentices continued to work normally (62%) and a very high proportion were at least partially in home office (72%).

The main difference between the language regions is the proportion of apprentices working from home: while this

was 34% in German-speaking Switzerland in March, it was only 20% in Latin Switzerland. However, the proportion of apprentices with normal work was slightly higher in Latin Switzerland (91%) than in German-speaking Switzerland (87%). There are no differences in limited on-site work, homework, and no in-company training.

Figure 4 shows the development of these shares over time with daily COVID-19 cases and FOPH measures. Apprentices' situation improved slightly in March compared to the previous month. The proportions of apprentices with normal work under FOPH protective measures and in home office have increased slightly, while the proportion of those with limited on-site work, homework for the on-site part, and without in-company training have decreased slightly. These results are consistent with the first easing of the partial shutdown at the beginning of March, when mainly stores were allowed to reopen.

Quarantine measures

The quarantine regulations to protect against further COVID-19 infections mean that apprentices are temporarily confronted with interruptions in their basic vocational training. 15% of the companies surveyed (18% in Feb., 28% in Jan., 38% in Nov.-Dec.) stated in March that they had quarantined apprentices in the four weeks prior to the survey—from mid/late February to mid/late March. 5% of training companies (7% in Feb., 11% in Jan., 14% in Nov.-Dec.) had apprentices in quarantine during this time, and other employees quarantined in 29% (34% in Feb., 47% in Jan., 55% in Nov.-Dec.). In these training companies, 3% of apprentices (4% in Feb., 7% in Jan., 11% in Nov.-

Dec.), 1% of the vocational trainers (2% in Feb., 3% in Jan., 4% in Nov.-Dec.), and 3% of other employees (4% in Feb., 6% in Jan., 8% in Nov.-Dec.) were in quarantine. The occupational fields of "Healthcare," "Restaurants/Hotels" and "Information Technology" have so far been affected by above-average apprentice quarantine rates (9% in each case; aggregated data for Nov.-March).

According to this date, the number of quarantine-affected companies has decreased again, which could be related to the ongoing protection measures and increased testing. This decline is confirmed by the fact that the companies surveyed stated that the apprenticeship was slightly less affected by the quarantine measures in March than in the previous months (value of 1.66 on a scale from 1 "weak" to 5 "strong"; 1.85 in Feb., 1.86 in Jan., 1.81 in Nov.-Dec.).

61% of quarantined apprentices were able to complete their practical training (55% in Feb., 48% in Jan., 51% in Nov.-Dec.) in home office, 24% received homework (30% in Feb., 32% in Jan., 28% in Nov.-Dec.), and 36% received no practical training (43% in Feb. and Jan., 39% in Nov.-Dec.). This means that the proportion of homework and no training has decreased in favor of home office.

Effects on practical and theoretical knowledge

The companies find that the practical knowledge of the apprentices has tended to decrease due to changes since the shutdown caused by COVID-19 (value of -0.26 on a scale from -2 "much poorer knowledge" to 2 "much better knowledge"; same in Jan. and Dec.⁷, -0.18 in Nov., -0.02 in Oct.). Companies' assessments have been stable since December. The left bar chart in Figure 5 shows that the companies surveyed in March attributed 53% (51% in January, 39% in December) of this change to the fact that learning content in the home office was more difficult to

convey, 21% to quarantine measures that led to absences and missed content (27% in January, 38% in December), and 26% to other reasons (23% in January and December).

According to the companies, apprentices' theoretical knowledge has decreased somewhat more (-0.36 on a scale from -2 "much poorer knowledge" to 2 "much better knowledge"; -0.35 in January, -0.28 in Dec., -0.26 in Nov., -0.16 in Oct.), although here, too, no deterioration is visible compared to the previous month. The companies attributed this decrease to home schooling (67%; 64% in January, 52% in December), which makes it difficult to convey learning content. Quarantine measures and the resulting missed content also play a role (20%; 23% in January, 30% in December). 14% of the changes come from other reasons (13% in Jan., 17% in Dec.). As a result, quarantine has lost its importance for affecting practical and theoretical knowledge in recent months, which is in line with the lower level of quarantine impact.

Catching up on missed material

Figure 6 shows whether companies think that their apprentices will be able to catch up on the material they have missed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the remaining apprenticeship period, comparing these results with the development of the COVID-19 case numbers and FOPH measures. In March, the companies still believe that apprentices cannot fully catch up on the *in-company training* material they have missed (4.02 points on a 5-point scale, with 5 standing for "can certainly be made up"; 3.94 in Feb., 3.92 in Jan., 4.16 in Nov.-Dec., 4.26 in July-Oct., 4.15 in May-June, 4.10 in April).

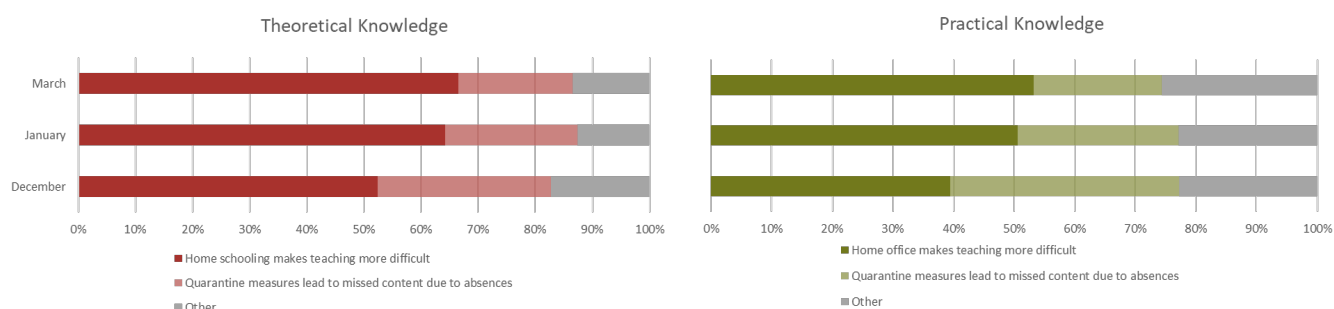


Figure 5: Reasons for the poor theoretical and practical knowledge of the apprentices.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from December 2020 to March 2021. The graphics show the proportions of the various reasons for each month (this question was not asked in the February survey) and separately for practical and theoretical knowledge the COVID-related changes in an average teaching company.

⁷ This question was not asked in the February survey.

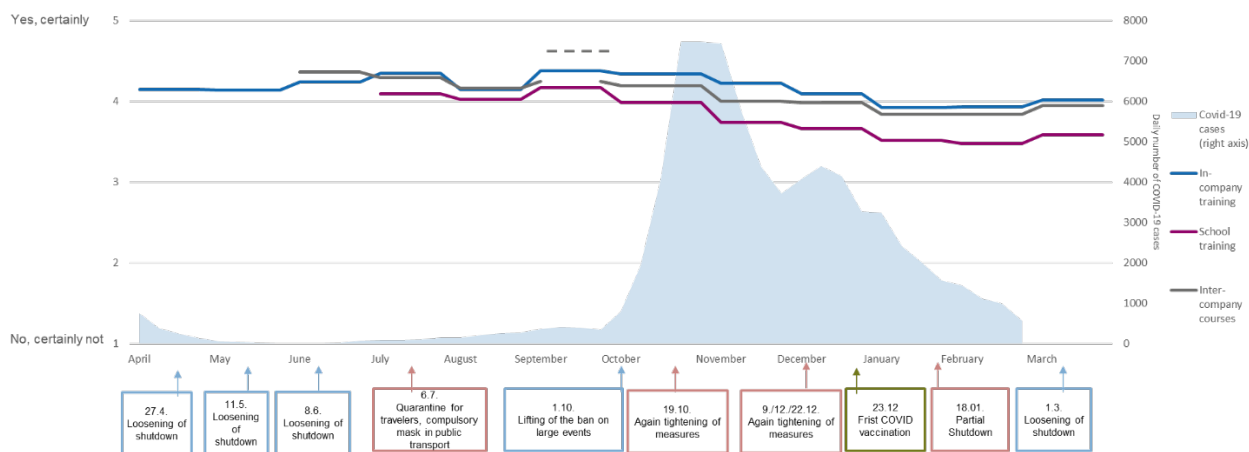


Figure 6: Catching-up on the missed material due to COVID-19 pandemic over time.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to March 2021. On the left vertical axis, the figure shows whether the companies think that the apprentices will definitely not (1) or definitely (5) still can catch up with the material. The right vertical axis shows the number of COVID-19 cases per day (weekly average) from April 2020 to March 2021.

The value for *school-based training* is somewhat more pessimistic (3.58; 3.48 in Feb., 3.52 in Jan., 3.52 in Nov.-Dec., 3.95 in July-Oct.). For *inter-company courses*, the value is 3.94 (3.84 in February and January, 3.99 in November-December, 4.13 July-October, 4.24 in May-June, 4.12 in April). As a result, companies have become more pessimistic that their apprentices can catch up on the school-based training that they missed, while the values for the inter-company courses and in-company training have remained roughly stable. 37% of the companies surveyed have already started measures to help apprentices catch up during the remaining apprenticeship period on the material they missed. These measures included, above all, more intensive supervision by trainers (70%) and more time in the company for training (63%).

The companies were also asked which apprentices were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of apprentices in companies that state all apprentices are equally affected has steadily decreased (to 38%; 41% in February, 43% in January, 47% in December). Weaker apprentices are most frequently identified as the most affected group (36%; 37% in Feb., 32% in Jan., 28% in Dec.). Compared to April, the percentages of apprentices in companies who believe that apprentices in their final year (24%; 26% in Feb., 19% in Jan., 17% in Dec.), apprentices in the middle of their apprenticeship (8%; 7% in Feb., Jan. and Dec.) or apprentices in their first year of apprenticeship (19%; the same in Feb., 20% in Jan., 18% in Dec.) are most affected have remained stable.

Apprentices in the last year of apprenticeship

The apprentices in the last year of their apprenticeship are about to begin the qualification procedures (QV), which should be carried out normally this year (if possible). Companies believe that this is feasible (4.22 on a scale from 1

“definitely not” to 5 “definitely yes”; 4.07 in February). The companies in Latin Switzerland were more optimistic in March (4.34) than in April (3.74), and optimism also increased slightly in German-speaking Switzerland (to 4.21; 4.10 in February). However, companies were rather skeptical that all apprentices would have a fair chance in a normal QV (value of 3.85 on a scale from 1 “definitely not” to 5 “definitely yes”; 3.92 in February). Before COVID-19, companies found the QV essentially equitable (4.92).

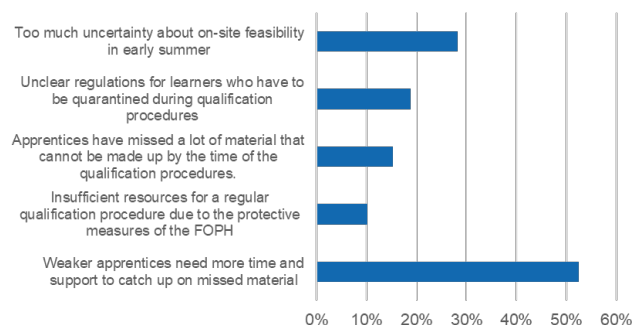


Figure 7: Reasons for the assessments of the feasibility and equal opportunities of QV 2021.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse Survey in March 2021. The graphic shows the proportion of training companies (in%) of all companies surveyed for each reason.

Figure 7 shows how surveyed companies justified their assessments of the QV’s feasibility and equal opportunity. 52% of companies found that weaker apprentices were subject to regulations for apprentices who had to be quarantined during the QV (19%) and that it was not possible to catch up on all missed material by then (15%). 10% of companies also did not have enough resource to execute the QV normally under FOPH protective measures.

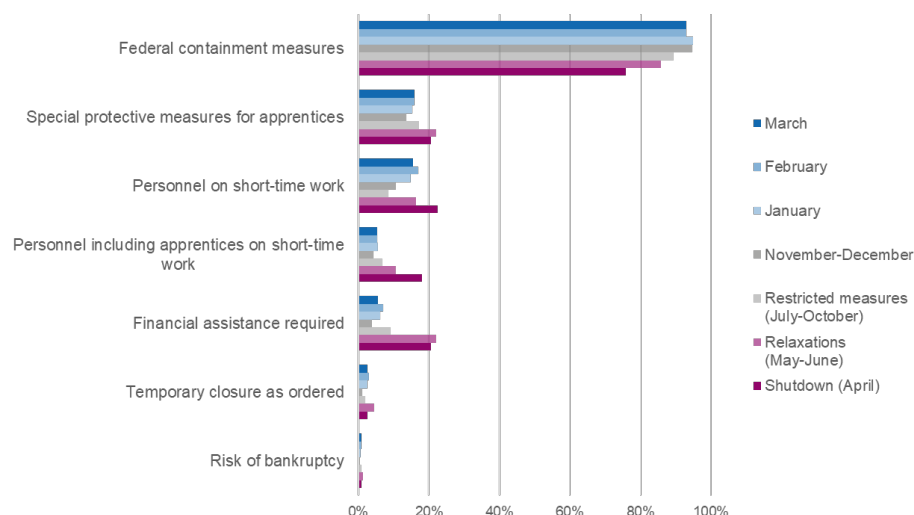


Figure 8: The training companies and their apprentices affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to February 2021. The graphic shows the proportion of apprenticeships affected (in%) of all apprenticeships surveyed for each impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on training companies and apprentices

The surveyed companies and their apprentices were also affected to varying degrees by the COVID-19 pandemic in March, but there are only minor changes compared to the previous months. Figure 8 shows that in 93% of companies (same in February, 95% in January and November-December, 89% in July-October, 86% in May-June, 76% in April) were working with FOPH protective measures in March. The proportion of training

companies with staff including apprentices on short-time work has remained more or less stable (6%; 7% in Feb., 6% in Jan., 4% in Nov.-Dec., 9% in July-Oct., 22% in May-June, 21% in April), as has the proportion of companies with protective measures that particularly affect apprentices (15%; 17% in February, 15% in January, 11% in November-December, 9% in July-October, 16% in May-June, 23% in April).

Data and Representativeness

The Apprenticeship Pulse survey in March 2021 includes 2,603 training companies (2,568 in February, 2,466 in January, 2,500 in December, 2,292 in November) of different sizes, from all cantons and occupational fields. The questions were answered by people with different functions in their respective training companies, with vocational trainers, HR specialists, and managers all represented. Since a total of 44,660 training companies were contacted for the survey, the apprenticeship pulse achieved a response rate of 5.83% in February (5.75% in Feb., 5.52% in Jan., 5.60% in Dec., 5.13% in Nov.). However, the calculation of the response rate is not exact because the survey was not only sent directly to this list of training companies but was also distributed using other channels.

The coverage for German-speaking Switzerland is better than for the other two language regions. For exam-

ple, German-speaking Switzerland is more strongly represented in the March survey with 3.53% of its training companies (3.60% in Feb., 3.50% in Jan., 3.54% in Dec., 3.21% in Nov.), compared to Latin-speaking Switzerland with 1.30% (1.64% in Feb., 1.41% in Jan., 1.58% in Dec., 1.56% in Nov.). In addition, large companies tend to be overrepresented compared to SMEs. However, the weighting procedure⁸ corrects for differences in representativeness by company size, language region and occupational field.

The apprenticeship companies surveyed offer a total of 26,170⁹ apprenticeships (21,668 apprenticeships in Feb., 21,699 in Jan, 23,158 in Dec., 24,046 in Nov.) in a wide variety of regions and occupational fields.

⁸ The fact sheet "Weighting and Representativeness of the Results" provides more detailed information on the weighting method used: <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000454763>.

⁹ The number of apprentices in a training company is only asked for the first time they take part in the survey (not every month). However, this information was again collected from all participating companies in the March survey in order to compensate for fluctuations in the number of apprentices.

Further information at
www.lehrstellenpuls.ch.

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