


# Apprenticeship Pulse Results May 2021

## Other Publication

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### Publication date:

2021-06-03

### Permanent link:

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000489011>

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### Originally published in:

Apprenticeship Pulse – Factsheet



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# Apprenticeship Pulse Results May 2021

3. June 2021

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The Apprenticeship Pulse has been surveying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on basic dual vocational education and training (VET) in Switzerland on a monthly basis since April 2020. The first survey covered the situation during the shutdown, which was 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 restaurants, bars and cultural, leisure and sports facilities closed again. Teaching at vocational schools continued with the hygiene and behavioral rules, and only a few cantons temporarily switched to distance learning.

In January 2021, a nationwide partial shutdown was imposed. This closed stores selling non-daily goods and introduced a home office requirement. However, schools, hotels and service providers could remain open. On March 1, the first relaxation step allowed stores to reopen.

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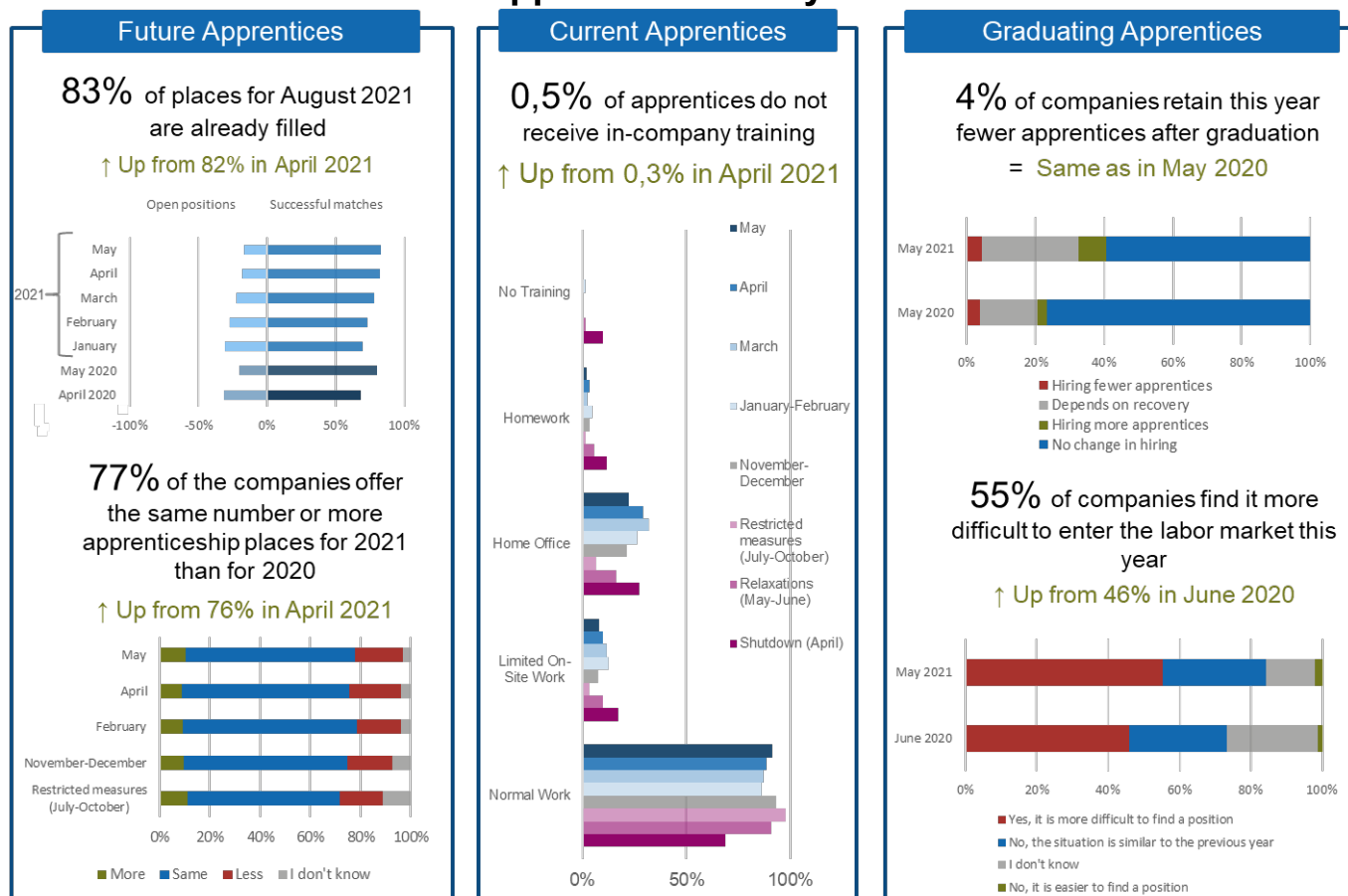
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More relaxation steps were introduced on April 19, allowing outside areas of restaurants and bars, leisure and cultural facilities as well as sports facilities to reopen, and certain events and face-to-face teaching at universities to become possible again.

This fact sheet shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on apprenticeship companies and apprentices in **May 2021**. It reports on three groups of young people: future apprentices, current apprentices and apprentices in the last year of their apprenticeship.

The results are compared with those of previous surveys, focusing on the survey in the previous month (April 2021) and the situation one year ago (May 2020). All results are weighted and are representative for training companies and apprentices in Switzerland.

## The Pulse of Apprentices in May 2021 – Main Points



**Figure 1: The headlines on Apprenticeship Pulse in May 2021.**

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to May 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.

**Future apprentices (Group 1)** begin the application process one year before the start of their apprenticeship in German-speaking Switzerland. In French-speaking Switzerland, this process does not start until spring. In May, 77% of companies surveyed reported that they were offering the same number or more apprenticeship positions for the cohort starting in 2021 compared to the previous year (76% in April). Both proportions – those offering more apprenticeships (10%; 9% in April) and those offering the same number (67%; same in April) – remained roughly constant. The proportion of companies that will offer fewer apprenticeships has fallen slightly (to 19; 21% in April) and 3% of companies do not know yet (4% in April).

Since January, the Apprenticeship Pulse has been surveying the percentage of apprenticeship positions that are still open or already filled for the cohort starting in 2021. According to the companies surveyed, 83% of the apprenticeships positions offered for summer 2021 were already filled in May (82% in April), while 17% were still open (18% in April). The proportion of filled apprenticeship positions has increased steadily since January and this

proportion is comparable to the situation a year ago. At that time, the majority of the apprenticeships that had not yet been filled in spring could be allocated later – for example due to the surprising lockdown. Thus, in May 2020, 80% of the apprenticeship positions were filled, while in April 2020 it was only 68%. It should be noted that these figures do not include the total number of apprenticeship positions offered at the time of the survey.

**Current apprentices (Group 2)** were still strongly affected in May 2021. In May, 91% of the apprentices (88% in April) were working under Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) protective measures (esp. distance and hygiene regulations). 8% of apprentices were at their workplaces to a limited extent (10% April), and 22% were at least partly in home office (29% in April). 2% of apprentices received homework for the practical part of their training (4% in April) and only 0.5% (0.3% in April) did not receive any in-

company training.<sup>1</sup>

This means that the work situation of apprentices has again slightly improved in the last month. However, the proportion of apprentices without in-company training has slightly increased, while this proportion is still relatively small. In the occupational field of "Restaurants/Hotels" in particular, the proportion of apprentices without in-company training has been significantly reduced thanks to the relaxation steps that took place in April. The proportion of apprentices in home office has sharply decreased in the last month, which possibly due to the increase of widespread testing at the workplace. The occupational field "Information Technology" still has a relatively large number of apprentices in home office (62%), followed by "Business/Administration/Tourism" (32%) and "Planning/Construction" (25%).

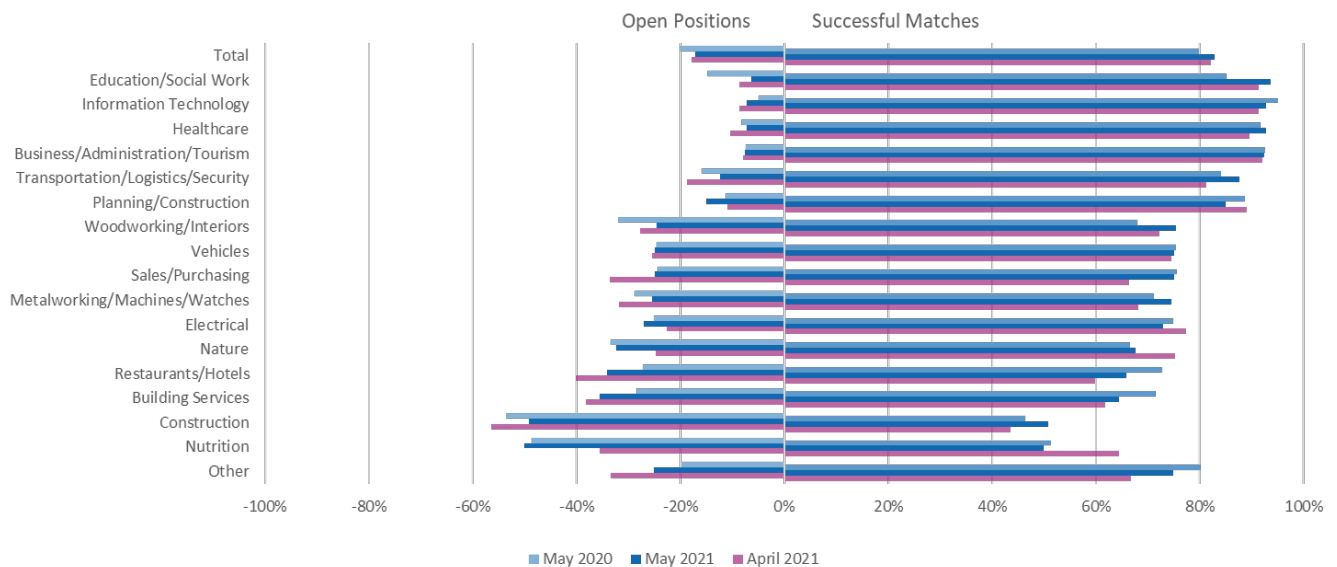
### Apprentices in the final year of their apprenticeship (Group 3)<sup>2</sup>

Usually, some apprentices are employed by their training companies after completing their apprenticeship - but not all. 59% of companies indicated in May that they will not change their employment practices this year compared to prior to COVID-19 pandemic. Training companies that will employ more apprenticeship graduates than usual are rare (8%). In addition, 4% of the companies will continue

to employ fewer apprenticeship graduates this year, while 28% of companies do not know yet.

In May 2020, a larger proportion of companies kept the same number of apprentices compared to May 2021 (77%), while a smaller proportion of companies changed their employment practices (4% kept fewer apprentices; 3% kept more apprentices). However, the proportion of companies that did not know yet was also lower a year ago (17%).

Another question deals with the challenges for apprentices entering the job market after completing their apprenticeship. For them, the question is whether it will be more difficult to find a job after graduation compared to cohorts before COVID-19. In May, 55% of apprenticeship companies believe that finding a job this year will be more difficult, while 29% find the situation comparable. 2% of companies predict an easier entry into the labor market and 14% do not know. In June 2020<sup>3</sup>, the companies' assessments of the challenges of entering the labor market were similar, although a larger proportion could not make a statement (25%).



**Figure 2: Open and filled apprenticeship positions by occupational field and in comparison with the previous year**

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse surveys in May 2020, April 2021 and May 2021. The left-hand side of the graphic shows overall and for each occupational field the proportion of apprenticeships positions are still open; the right side shows the proportion of positions are already filled. Occupational fields with fewer than 50 apprenticeship companies are grouped under "Others".

<sup>1</sup> These proportions do not add up to 100%, as various measures can apply at the same time and not all apprentices in a company always complete the practical training in the same way, i.e. the companies could select several answers.

<sup>2</sup> These questions were asked for the first time in May 2021, which is why comparative values are not available from the previous month.

<sup>3</sup> This question has not yet been asked as of May 2020.

## Detailed Results

### Apprentices starting in 2021 (Group 1)

In May, 77% of companies reported that they are offering the same number or more apprenticeship positions for the cohort starting in 2021 compared to 2020 (76% in April). There was a slight decrease in the proportion of companies offering fewer apprenticeships (to 19%; 21% in April). Furthermore, 3% of companies do not yet know how many apprenticeships they will offer for the summer (4% in April). The proportion of companies offering fewer apprenticeship positions in May is considerably higher in Latin-speaking Switzerland<sup>4</sup> (27%) than in German-speaking Switzerland (19%), while fewer companies in Latin-speaking Switzerland offer the same number of apprenticeships as they did the previous year (55% vs. 69%).

5.2% of companies reported in May (5.5% in April) that they can offer additional apprenticeships for those who would not find an apprenticeship otherwise due to COVID-19 (e.g. because of company closures). On average, these companies offer 1.47 such additional apprenticeship positions (1.39 in April). Thus, the implemented solidarity in real terms is lower than the potential a year ago, as 17% of companies were willing to offer additional apprenticeship positions (22% in April 2020). This is possibly due to the fact that the apprenticeship market functioned well in 2020 and this is also expected for 2021.

According to the companies surveyed in May, 83% of the offered apprenticeship positions for summer 2021 have already been filled (82% in April), leaving 17% still open

(18% in April). Latin-speaking Switzerland - where the recruitment process traditionally starts later - caught up last month: while only 59% of apprenticeships were filled in April, this figure rose to 68% in May. In German-speaking Switzerland, the proportion of filled apprenticeships remained constant (84% in April and May). However, we must recall that apprenticeships not yet offered are not covered in each case.

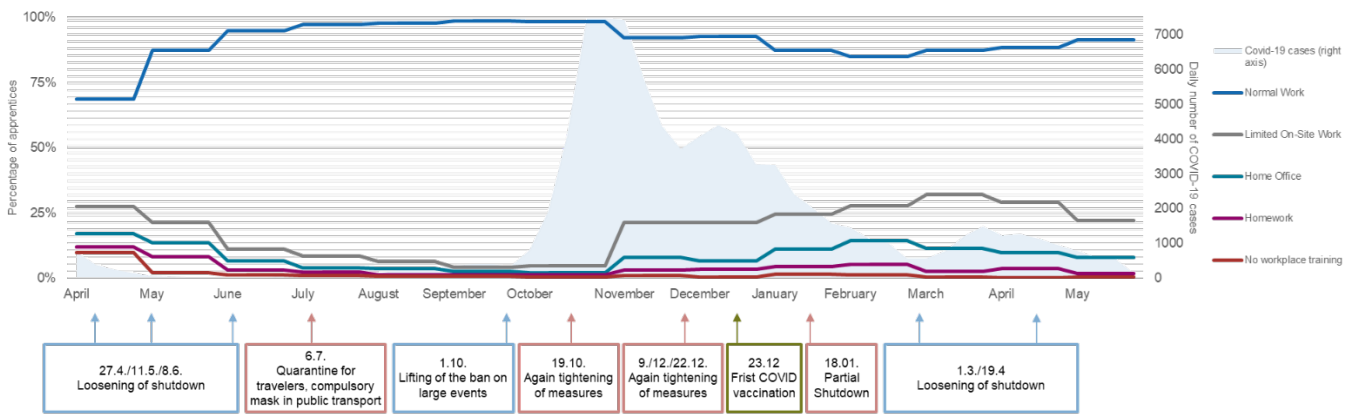
Figure 2 shows that the proportion of vacant and filled apprenticeship positions varies by occupational field. The highest proportion of filled apprenticeship positions is in the occupational fields of "Education/Social Work" (94%), "Information Technology" (93%), "Healthcare" (93%) and "Business, Administration, Tourism" (92%). On the other hand, "Food" (50%) has been able to offer the fewest apprenticeships so far, followed by "Construction" (51%), which, however, has been able to slightly catch up compared to the previous month (44%) and it also has a lower proportion of vacant apprenticeship positions than in May 2020 (46%). There is also still a relatively large number of vacant apprenticeships in the occupational field "Restaurants/Hotels" (34%), which was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, although a positive trend can be observed this month. In particular, the occupational fields "Restaurants/Hotels" (27%) and "Building Services" (28%) had a smaller proportion of open apprenticeship positions a year ago than in May 2021.

	Apprentices at work		Apprentices at home		
	Normal Work	Limited On-Site Work	Home Office	Homework	No workplace training
<b>Total</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>
Building	100%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Education/Social Work	100%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Electrical	98%	3%	4%	2%	0%
Vehicles	99%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Restaurants/Hotels	86%	16%	1%	4%	1%
Building Services	99%	1%	3%	1%	0%
Healthcare	99%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Woodworking/Interiors	99%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Information Technology	66%	16%	62%	4%	1%
Metalworking/Machines/Watches	99%	2%	0%	1%	0%
Nature	99%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Planning/Construction	91%	6%	25%	2%	0%
Sales/Purchasing	92%	8%	8%	1%	1%
Transportation/Logistics/Security	98%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Business/Administration/Tourism	88%	11%	32%	2%	0%
Other	89%	8%	12%	5%	3%

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

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse survey in May 2021. The table shows the proportions (%) of apprentices per measure and occupational field of 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".

<sup>4</sup> Due to the low number of responses in Latin-speaking Switzerland, 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 May 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 May 2021.

### Current Apprentices (Group 2)

Figure 3 shows the impact of the pandemic on the training of apprentices overall and by occupational field. With an average of 91% (88% in April), the apprentices in most occupational fields continued to work normally in the company in May (with FOPH protective measures). In addition, 8% of apprentices had a limited on-site work (10% in April). 22% of the apprentices were at least partially working from home (29% in April), and this proportion was relatively high – as it was already in the previous month – in occupational fields "Information Technology" (62%), "Business/Administration/Tourism" (32%) and "Planning/Construction" (25%).

The proportion of apprentices with homework is 2% in May (4% in April) and the proportion of apprentices without in-company training is 0.5% (0.3% in April). The occupational field "Restaurants/Hotels" in particular is able to reduce the proportion of apprentices without in-company training and with homework in favor of more normal work in the company (86% compared to 78% in April).

The main difference between the language regions is the proportion of apprentices working from home. Although this proportion is higher in German-speaking Switzerland (23%) than in Latin-speaking Switzerland (15%), this proportion has decreased in both language regions compared to the previous month. In contrast, Latin-speaking Switzerland has caught up in terms of the proportion of apprentices with limited on-site work (8%). In addition, there is a slightly higher proportion of apprentices with normal work (94%) in Latin-speaking Switzerland than in German-speaking Switzerland (91%).

Figure 4 shows the development of these shares over time with daily COVID-19 cases and FOPH measures. Apprentices' situations have slightly improved in the last month, as more apprentices are working normally at the workplace and less have a limited on-site work, working from home and/or receive homework for the practical part. Thus, the relaxations on April 19 could lead more apprentices back to their workplaces, especially in the occupational field of "Restaurants/Hotels".

### Quarantine measures

Due to the quarantine regulations to protect against COVID-19 infections, apprentices are occasionally confronted with interruptions in their training. There was slight change in the extent of companies and apprentices that were affected compared to previous months. 15% of the companies stated that they had quarantined apprentices in the four weeks prior to the survey (the same in April) from mid/end April to mid/end May. 5% of companies had vocational trainers in quarantine (4% in April), and 28% had other employees in the same situation (30% in April). In these companies, 3% of the apprentices (the same in April), 2% of the trainers (1% in April) and 3% of the other employees (4% in April) were in quarantine.

53% of quarantined apprentices were able to complete their training through home office (63% in April), 23% received homework (24% in April), and 39% did not received any practical training (36% in April).

## 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 the COVID-19 (to -0.23 on a scale from -2 “much poorer knowledge” to 2 “much better knowledge”; - 0.27<sup>5</sup> in March<sup>6</sup>). This means that the companies have become slightly more optimistic compared to March. The left bar chart in Figure 5 shows that the surveyed companies attributed 54% of this change to the fact that learning content was more difficult to convey in the home office in May (53% in March), and 21% to the fact that quarantine measures resulted in missed content due to absences (same in March) and 25% to other reasons (26% in March).

According to the companies, apprentices’ theoretical knowledge has decreased somewhat more (-0.33 on a scale from -2 “much poorer knowledge” to 2 “much better knowledge”; -0.36 in March), although a slight improvement is also visible compared to the previous month. The companies attributed this decrease to home schooling (67%; the same in March), which made it difficult to convey learning content. However, quarantine measures resulting missed content also play a role (20%; same in March). 13% of the changes were due to other reasons (14% in March). There were hardly any changes in the relevance of the reasons for these changes in apprentices’ practical and theoretical knowledge.

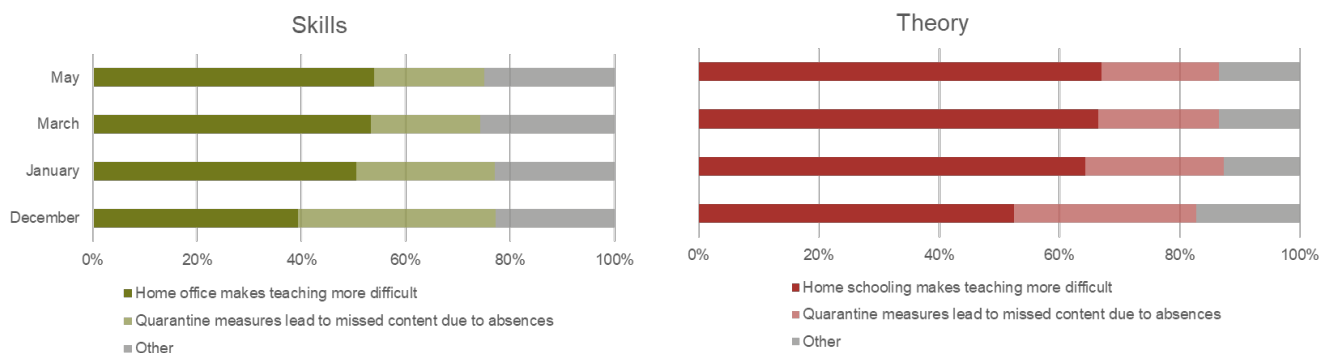
## Catching up on missed material

Figure 6 shows whether companies think that their apprentices can catch up on the material they missed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the remaining apprentice-

ship period, comparing these results with the development of the COVID-19 case numbers and FOPH measures. In the last month, the companies have become more confident that the apprentices can catch up on missed material, in line with the improvements in case numbers and the regulatory relaxation. However, even in May, the companies believe that the apprentices cannot fully catch up on the in-company training material they have missed (4.08 on a 5-point scale, where 5 means “can certainly be made up”; 4.00 in April).

In the case of *inter-company courses*, the companies assess the situation roughly the same (4.08; 3.99 in April), while they continue to be more pessimistic about *school-based training* (3.78; 3.68 in April.). Thus, 10% of companies want support for their current apprentices (12% in April).

The companies were also asked which apprentices were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of companies that state all apprentices are equally affected has remained stable compared to the previous month (46%; same in April). The weaker apprentices are most frequently identified as the most affected group (31%; 30% in April). There has been a slight decrease in the proportion of companies that believe apprentices in their final year are most affected (19%; 23% in April), as well as in the proportion that believe those in their first year of apprenticeship are most affected (16%; 18% in April). However, slightly more companies believe that the pandemic hit apprentices who are in the middle of their apprenticeship the most severely (7%; 6% in April).

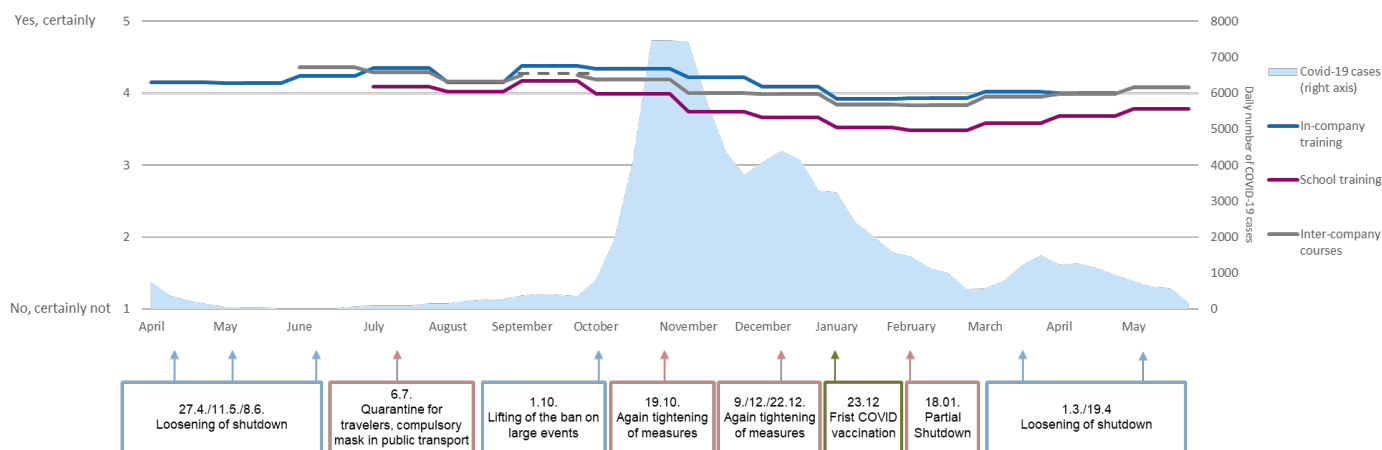


**Figure 5: Reasons for the poor practical and theoretical knowledge of the apprentices.**

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from December 2020 as well as January, March and May 2021. The graphs show the proportions of different reasons for COVID-related changes in an average apprenticeship for each month and separately for practical and theoretical knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the weighting and further data cleaning, there may be slight deviations from the results published in the previous fact sheets.

<sup>6</sup> These questions are only asked every two months.



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

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from monthly Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from April 2020 to May 2021. The figure shows on the left vertical axis whether companies think apprentices are certainly not (1) or certainly (5) still able to catch up with the material. The right vertical axis shows COVID-19 cases per day (weekly average) from April 2020 to May 2021.

### Apprentices in the last year of apprenticeship (Group 3)

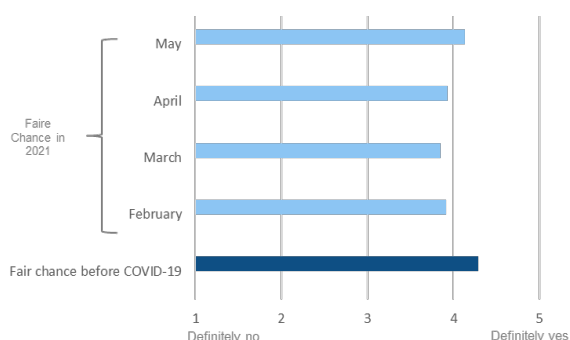
The apprentices in the final year of their apprenticeship will complete their apprenticeship in summer 2021 and are already in the middle of their qualification procedures (QV, final exams). This year's QV will be carried out normally, if possible. According to the May survey, the practical QV was or will be adjusted for only 7% of apprentices. In particular, apprentices from the occupational field of "Education/Social Work" are unable to complete the QV normally. In 2020, a significantly higher proportion of apprentices had their company-based QV somehow adjusted (41%).

The surveyed companies think that COVID-19 will have a weak influence on the final grades of the school-based and company-based QV in 2021 (2.6 for school-based and 2.2 for company-based; 1 means "no influence at all", 5 means "very strong influence"). Thus, they estimate the influence of the pandemic on final grades to be lower than a year ago (3.1 for school-based and 2.6 for company-based in May 2020).

Figure 7 shows, however, that apprenticeship companies in May believe that, in a normally carried out QV, not all apprentices will have a fair chance in 2021 (4.13 on a scale from 1 "definitely not" to 5 "definitely yes"; 3.94 in April) compared to prior to COVID-19 (4.29). However, they have become slightly more optimistic than in the previous months.

After completing their apprenticeship, some apprentices will be employed by their apprenticeship companies, but not all. 59%<sup>7</sup> of the companies stated in May that they would keep the same number of apprentices after graduation this year as in the period prior to COVID-19. 8% of training companies will employ more apprenticeship graduates, while 4% will employ fewer. For comparison: In May 2020, a significantly larger proportion of companies stated that they would not change their employment practices (77%).

In addition, 55%<sup>8</sup> of apprenticeship companies think that the job search is more difficult this year, while 29% find the situation comparable. 14% of the companies do not know, and 2% predict an easier entry into the labor market. These assessments of the challenges of entering the labor market are similar to those in June 2020.



**Figure 7: Equal opportunities at this year's QV.**

Remarks: Results based on weighted data from the Apprenticeship Pulse surveys from February to May 2021. The graph shows the values for an average company.

<sup>7</sup> These questions were asked for the first time in May 2021, which is why no comparative values from the previous month are available.

<sup>8</sup> These questions were asked for the first time in May 2021, which is why no comparative values from the previous month are available.

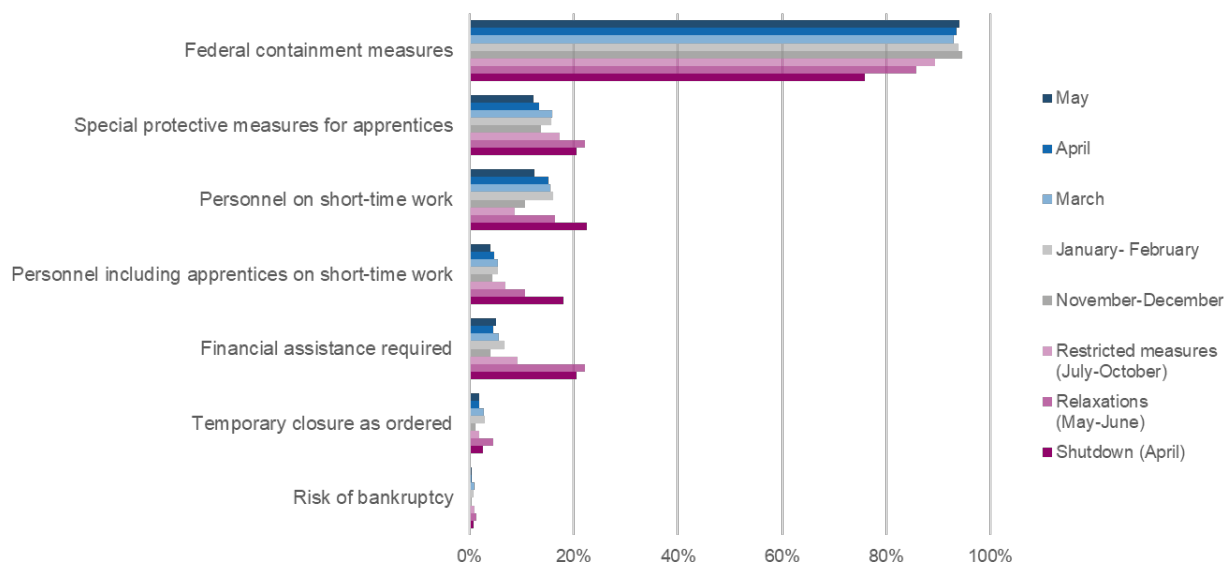


## Effects on training companies and apprentices

The surveyed companies and their apprentices were affected to varying degrees by the COVID-19 pandemic in May as well, but there were only minor changes compared to the previous months. Figure 8 shows that 94% of the companies were working with FOPH protective measures (same as in April).

The proportion of companies with staff including apprentices on short-time work has remained roughly the same

(5%; 4% in April), while those working with protective measures that particularly affect apprentices, decreased slightly (12%; 15% in April). The proportion of companies with temporary closure order or risk of bankruptcy remains at a low level. Even if there have been no noticeable changes in how the companies were affected in the last few months, their situation has improved considerably compared to a year ago.



**Figure 8: 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 May 2021. The graphic shows the proportion of training companies affected (in%) of all training companies surveyed per impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Data and Representativeness

The Apprenticeship Pulse survey in May 2021 includes 2,615 training companies (2,525 in April) of various sizes from all cantons and professional 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 5.86% in February (5.65% in April). However, the calculation of the response rate is not exact because the survey was not only sent directly to these companies, but was also distributed using other channels.

The training companies surveyed offer 23,701 apprenticeship positions (27,793<sup>9</sup> in April) in a wide variety of regions and occupational fields. They also cover a total of 2.77% (2.65% in April) of all training companies in Switzerland.

The coverage for German-speaking Switzerland (3.56%; 3.44% in April) is better than for Latin-speaking Switzerland (1.40%; 1.30% in April). There are also big differences in the occupational fields. The occupational fields "Information Technology" (7.54%), "Building Services" (6.30%) and "Metal/Machines/Clocks" (6.15%) are covered best, while "Vehicles" (2.16%), "Sales/Purchasing" (2.39%) and "Nature" (2.47%) tend to be underrepresented.

In addition, large companies tend to be overrepresented compared to SMEs. However, micro and small companies have slightly caught up compared to the previous month, which explains why the survey covers fewer apprentices in May than in the previous month. The weighting procedure<sup>10</sup> used corrects for differences in representativeness by company size, language region and occupational field.

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

<sup>10</sup> 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>

Further information at  
[www.lehrstellenpuls.ch](http://www.lehrstellenpuls.ch).

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all training companies that participated in this survey. We would also like to thank the following organizations that support this research project:

- Allpura
- Auto Gewerbe Verband Schweiz (AGVS)
- GastroSuisse / HotellerieSuisse
- Gebäudehülle Schweiz
- Hotel & Gastro formation
- Kunststoff Schweiz
- login Berufsbildung AG
- OdA Hauswirtschaft
- OdA Santé
- Schweizer Fleisch-Fachverband (SFF)
- Schweizerische Berufsbildungsämter-Konferenz (SBBK)
- Schweizerische Konferenz der Leiterinnen und Leiter der Berufs- und Studienberatung (KBSB)
- Schweizerischer Arbeitgeberverband
- Schweizerischer Baumeisterverband
- Schweizerisch-Liechtensteinischen Gebäudetechnikverband
- Schweizerische Vereinigung für die Berufsbildung in der Logistik (ASFL SVBL)
- SPEDLOGSWISS
- Swiss Textiles
- swissmem Berufsbildung
- swissceramics - Verband Schweizer Keramik
- Verein Polybau

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