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The Outcomes and Objectives of Apprenticeships in France

Vincent Barde, Tristan Gantois, Joceran Gouy-Waz and Blaise Leclair

- In France, apprenticeships in secondary and higher education settings combine on-the-job training with formal learning at an apprentice training centre. At the end of the training period, apprentices obtain an occupational qualification, such as a diploma, degree or other occupational certification. Apprenticeships are meant to foster the employability of young graduates.

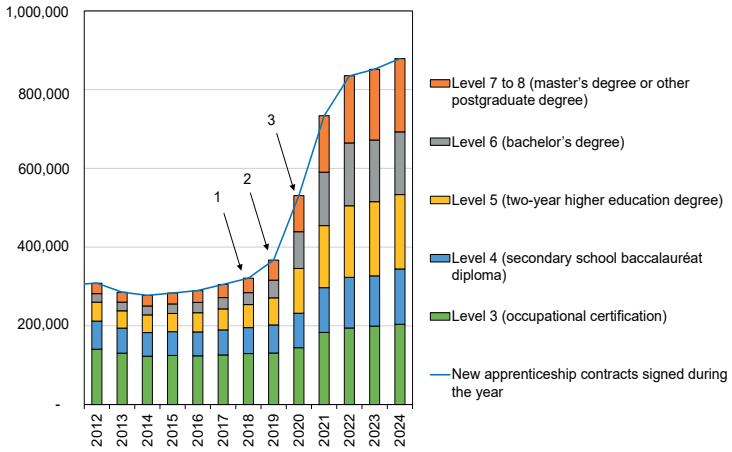
- Since the 2018 reform of the system, apprenticeships have grown sharply in popularity among students pursuing their education. 879,000 new apprenticeship contracts were signed in 2024, compared to 306,000 in 2017, bringing the number of apprentices with an ongoing contract to one million at the end of 2024. This expansion was facilitated by the deregulation of the programmes offered by apprentice training centres. It was also bolstered by more flexible rules for contracts and the introduction of a government single subsidy scheme for employers of apprentices.

- The sharp increase in apprenticeships has come with an almost tripled cost for the public purse. In 2023, the cost to public finances reached around €15bn, or €14,700 per apprentice. This level of government support is considerably higher than that of other European countries where apprenticeships are deeply rooted, such as Germany. Adjustments to apprenticeship support schemes in 2025 will help to curb their cost.

- The rise in apprenticeships has occurred alongside major changes in the profiles of apprentices, who are now more likely to be students in higher education than in secondary school, and of employers, with a shift towards the service sector.

- Apprenticeships are associated with an overall smoother transition from school to work for young people compared to academic-track students not doing an apprenticeship. For young people having obtained an occupational certification (*certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* – CAP) in 2021, 63% of apprentices were employed 18 months after their apprenticeship, compared to just 36% of academic-track students. This impact is less marked, however, as a person's education level rises, and appears to be minimal at the master's level.

Change in composition of apprenticeship placements by education level being pursued



Source: DARES (statistics division for the Ministry for Labour), Système d'Information sur l'Apprentissage (apprenticeship information system).

How to read this Chart: (1) The Career Choice Act 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 was enacted; (2) A single subsidy scheme went into effect for employers of apprentices (*aide unique aux employeurs d'apprentis*); (3) A special subsidy scheme went into effect to promote the retention of apprentices after their contract period (*aide exceptionnelle à l'embauche d'apprentis*).

1. Apprenticeships: an initial education track meant to increase the employability of young graduates

1.1 Apprenticeships are an initial education track involving a period of on-the-job training

In France, students in secondary or higher education can obtain a diploma, degree or other occupational certification after completing one of two separate initial education tracks: academic or apprenticeship. The academic track emphasises theoretical learning which takes place at a secondary school or higher education institution. It may include periods of internships. The apprenticeship track involves alternating periods of learning in apprentice training centres (*centres de formation d'apprentis* – CFAs) and of on-the-job training:[1] the apprentice signs a work contract, earns a salary and is considered to be an employee with the same rights as other employees. Nevertheless, French labour law contains several specific provisions for apprentices (e.g. stricter regulation of working hours for minors). The period of study in an apprentice training centre must represent at least 25% of the term of the contract; the remaining hours are spent with the employer.

The number of apprenticeship placements has risen sharply since 2017, due to two changes to the apprenticeship system operated through the Career Choice Act 2018-771 of 5 September 2018. Firstly, the establishment of apprentice training centres was deregulated and the funding of contracts streamlined (see Box 1). Secondly, a new single subsidy scheme for employers of apprentices (*aide unique*) was introduced as from 2019, the conditions of which changed in 2020 in light of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the number of new apprentices increased from 306,000 in 2017 to almost 879,000 in 2024,[2] a rise of 187% over the period (see Chart on cover page).

Box 1: How the apprenticeship system works in France

The Career Choice Act of 5 September 2018 overhauled France's apprenticeship system.

This Act established *France Compétences*, a government-funded institution responsible for providing funds to the apprenticeship and job training system, which distributes this public funding to the various financial backers of apprenticeship and job training programmes.

In addition, the permitting procedure for opening an apprentice training centre has been eliminated, along with the apprenticeship training catalogue, which fell under the purview of the regions. Establishing an apprentice training centre now merely requires filing a declaration with the Regional Directorates for the Economy, Employment, Labour and Solidarity. 11 new skills development agencies (*opérateurs de compétences* – OPCOs) have been set up based on groups of related sectors or similar occupations. They replaced the former 20 accredited fund collection bodies (*organismes paritaires collecteurs agréés* – OPCAs). Although these bodies were formerly responsible for funding various job training programmes for workers on behalf of occupational sectors, the 2018 reform revoked the responsibility of skills development agencies for funding the individual training account scheme (with the *Caisse des dépôts et consignations* now having this role), instead tasking them with funding the cost of education programmes for apprentices – covering the private sector and the public industrial and commercial sector – at apprentice training centres. They are also responsible for assisting sectors with developing occupational certifications and helping firms identify their training and education needs. The amount of government funding granted is set out for each programme of study based on a certain coverage level (*niveau de prise en charge* – NPEC) for apprenticeship contracts, which is a fixed amount allocated each year of the apprentice's contract. These coverage levels are determined by the occupational sectors and take into account the recommendations of *France Compétences* established based on cost accounting data from apprentice training centres and the financial sustainability of the system.

(1) An occupational qualification contract (*contrat de professionnalisation*) is the other type of contract available under sandwich-course programmes (*alternance*) in France. Based on the continuing education system, it is intended for young people aged 16 to 25 who want to supplement their initial education, for jobseekers aged 26 and over, as well as for recipients of the social inclusion benefit (*revenu de solidarité active* – RSA), the specific solidarity allowance (*allocation de solidarité spécifique* – ASS) and the adult disability allowance (*allocation adultes handicapés* – AAH).

(2) DARES (2024), "Le contrat d'apprentissage" (in French only).

Moreover, the Act provided for the introduction of a government single subsidy scheme for employers of apprentices pursuing a diploma at or below the secondary school level (*baccalauréat*) in firms with less than 250 employees. This single subsidy scheme replaced four types of assistance that employers of apprentices could receive if they met certain conditions: the VSE young apprentice subsidy, the tax credit for apprenticeship, the apprenticeship subsidy and the subsidy for taking on a first apprentice or an additional apprentice.

Lastly, the Act relaxed the legal framework governing apprenticeships: the maximum number of working hours for apprentices was expanded in certain sectors, the minimum contract term was reduced from twelve to six months and the contract termination procedure was streamlined for employers and apprentices. The age limit was also raised from 26 to 29.

1.2 In France, the government is a prime financial backer of apprenticeships

Several government support measures exist for apprenticeships, with three main objectives: reduce the cost to employers of taking on an apprentice (employment subsidy for apprenticeship contracts), fund the training and education offering (government coverage of educational costs) and support the purchasing power of apprentices (advantageous tax and benefit status).

The cost incurred by employers when hiring an apprentice varies depending on the latter's age, the year of the contract and the size of the firm. French law sets out a minimum compensation level corresponding to a percentage of the statutory minimum wage, with this percentage increasing based on the apprentice's age and year of apprenticeship. This base level of compensation can, however, be raised through a collective bargaining agreement or a firm-level agreement. In addition, apprentices have a more advantageous tax and benefit status than other employees, while receiving the same social security rights, particularly regarding pension entitlement. This is because a portion of their compensation is exempt from employee social security contributions and the general social security contribution.[3] Also, their income is exempt from income tax up to the statutory minimum wage.

To incentivise firms to take on and train apprentices, employers receive reductions and exemptions from ordinary law applicable to all employees, as well as an apprentice employment subsidy. Following changes to the amount and scope of this subsidy,[4] it is now paid to all employers of apprentices, but its amount varies depending on firm size. The subsidy is €5,000 for an apprentice employed in firms with less than 250 employees and €2,000 in all other firms, for the

(3) Article 9 of the 2026 Social Security Budget Bill provides for the elimination of this measure.

(4) Apprentice employer subsidies have changed several times since they were first introduced in 2019.
– From 2019 to July 2020, the government single subsidy scheme for employers of apprentices, established by the Act of 5 September 2018, allowed firms with less than 250 employees to receive an employment subsidy for apprentices pursuing a diploma or occupational certification at or below the secondary school level (*baccalauréat*). The subsidy was €4,125 for the first year of the contract, €2,000 for the second year and €1,200 for the third year.
– From July 2020 to December 2022, the special subsidy scheme for employers of apprentices (*aide exceptionnelle*), implemented under the "1 Young Person, 1 Solution" scheme (plan 1 Jeune, 1 Solution), allowed employers to receive a subsidy of €5,000 to take on an apprentice younger than 18 and €8,000 to take on an adult apprentice for the first year of the contract, regardless of firm size and the education level of the qualification being pursued. For the second and third years, eligible firms were subsequently covered under the single subsidy scheme.
– From January 2023 to December 2024, the single subsidy and the special subsidy were combined into one scheme. The subsidy amount was set at €6,000 per apprentice, regardless of firm size and the education level of the qualification being pursued. The subsidy was granted for the first year of the contract only.
– Between 1 January and 24 February 2025, the subsidy was briefly available in the original form it had taken from 2019 to July 2020, but the amount was capped at €6,000 and only provided for the first year of the contract.
– As from 24 February 2025, the subsidy has been set at €5,000 per apprentice for firms with less than 250 employees, €2,000 for firms with more than 250 employees and €6,000 for disabled apprentices.

first year of the contract. To receive the subsidy, firms with at least 250 employees must commit to signing a minimum proportion of contracts that promote labour market integration (e.g. apprenticeship contracts, occupational qualification contracts, sector-level research training contracts[5] and international business volunteer programme contracts).[6] Ultimately, the cost of an apprentice to an employer is minimal in the first year of the contract, particularly for the youngest apprentices working in firms with less than 250 employees (see Table 1).

Training and education institutions are also supported financially by skills development agencies (OPCOs),[7] which cover their educational fees using funding from the single occupational training and education and apprenticeship contribution (*contribution unique à la formation professionnelle et à l'apprentissage* – CUFPA). Since the passage of the Act of 5 September 2018, the coverage levels (*niveaux de prise de charge* – NPECs) for educational fees depend on the apprentice's sandwich course and the occupational sector of their employer. The latest coverage levels, applicable as from 15 July 2024, range from an annual amount per contract of €3,000 for a vocational qualification (*baccalauréat professionnel)* as a pharmacy technician in the trading and service sector in medical and technical fields to €30,000 for an apprentice studying to be a physical theatre artist in the performing arts sector.[8] The average coverage level weighted for headcount was roughly €7,600 for the 2024 cohort.[9]

Apprenticeships involve higher total public expenditure (coverage of educational costs and employer subsidies) on average than for academic-track students. Although costs appear to be relatively comparable at the secondary education level, they rise in higher education, particularly starting with the bachelor's (*licence*) level. Accordingly, the cost of an apprentice pursuing a general bachelor's degree is roughly four times higher than that of a regular student. At the master's level, it is almost twice as high. These differences at the higher education level are due to the subsidy schemes granted to employers of apprentices and a lower apprentice-to-instructor ratio. Cost differences are also partly explained by a composition effect, as apprentices are more likely to enrol in costlier fields of study with higher training costs than are regular students.[10]

(5) In French, *conventions industrielles de formation par la recherche.*
(6) In French, *volontariat international en entreprise*.
(7) Skills development agencies (OPCOs) are government-accredited organisations tasked with funding apprenticeships, assisting occupational sectors with developing related certifications and helping small-to-medium-sized firms identify their training and education needs.
(8) *France Compétences,* "Référentiel unique avec l'ensemble des niveaux de prise en charge des contrats d'apprentissage" – July 2024 (in French only).
(9) *France Compétences* (2025), "Rapport annuel sur la mise en œuvre de la COP en 2024" (in French only).
(10) MESR (2024), "L'apprentissage dans l'enseignement supérieur : évolution par formation et profil des apprentis", *Etat de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche*, no. 17 (in French only).

Table 1: Portion of wages paid per month* by employer for an apprentice earning the statutory minimum wage

Age of apprentice	Firm size	Portion paid per month by employer (total employer cost of wages)		
		1st year of contract	2nd year of contract	3rd year of contract
Aged 16-17	Less than 11 employees	€79	€716	€1,230
	11-49 employees	€103	€750	€1,289
	50-249 employees	€105	€753	€1,294
	More than 250 employees	€355	€753	€1,294
Aged 18-20	Less than 11 employees	€373	€936	€1,432
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€435*	*€936*	*€1,432*
	11-49 employees	€411	€981	€1,501
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€473*	*€981*	*€1,501*
	50-249 employees	€414	€985	€1,507
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€477*	*€985*	*€1,507*
	More than 250 employees	€664	€985	€1,507
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€727*	*€985*	*€1,507*
Aged 21-25	Less than 11 employees	€556	€1,120	€1,432
	If at or above bachelor's level	*€619*	*€1,120*	*€1,432*
	11-49 employees	€603	€1,174	€1,501
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€665*	*€1,174*	*€1,501*
	50-249 employees	€607	€1,178	€1,507
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€670*	*€1,178*	*€1,507*
	More than 250 employees	€857	€1,178	€1,507
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€920*	*€1,178*	*€1,507*
Aged 26 and over	Less than 11 employees	€1,419	€1,836	€1,836
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€1,482*	*€1,836*	*€1,836*
	11-49 employees	€1,507	€1,924	€1,924
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€1,570*	*€1,924*	*€1,924*
	50-249 employees	€1,515	€1,932	€1,932
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€1,578*	*€1,932*	*€1,932*
	More than 250 employees	€1,765	€1,932	€1,932
	If degree at or above bachelor's level	*€1,828*	*€1,932*	*€1,932*

Source: Employer subsidy calculator, Portail de l'alternance (sandwich-course portal), Ministry for Labour, Health, Solidarity and Families, November 2025.

* As from 1 July 2025, employers taking on an apprentice working towards a degree at or above the bachelor's level must pay €750 of the coverage level for the apprenticeship contract, or €62.50 per month.

How to read this Table: For an apprentice aged 18 to 20 pursuing a diploma or degree below the bachelor's level, taken on by a firm with less than 11 employees and earning the statutory minimum wage, the portion paid per month (total employer cost of wages) by the employer is €373 for the first year of the contract, €936 for the second year and €1,432 for the third year. The statutory minimum wage corresponds to a percentage of the total employer cost per month of the statutory minimum wage, which is €1,881 for a full-time employee.

While government subsidy schemes have considerably increased the number of apprenticeship placements, this has also come with a sharp rise in government expenditure associated with such subsidies. Consequently, apprenticeships represented a cost to public finances of €14.9bn in 2023, compared to €6.1bn in 2018.[11] This total of €14.9bn breaks down as around €8.5bn in funding for apprentice training centres, €4.3bn in government subsidies for employers of apprentices and €2.1bn in other expenses, including exemptions from employee social security contributions and income tax for apprentices, as well as regional investment grants for apprentice training centres. The cost to public finances per apprentice appears high in comparison with other European countries: annual government expenditure per apprentice is around €14,700 in France, compared to €4,700 in Germany (see Box 2).

Box 2: Comparison of French and German government expenditure for apprenticeships

Government expenditure for apprenticeships in France is threefold higher per apprentice than in Germany. While such expenditure amounted to €14.9bn in France in 2023, i.e. €14,700 per apprentice, it was €7.1bn in Germany, i.e. €4,700 per apprentice and per student benefitting from the "transition system"[a] (see Table 2). The primary reason for this gap lies in the level of government subsidies paid to employers of apprentices. In 2023, such employers in France received a total of €4.3bn in government subsidies, i.e. €4,200 per apprentice, whereas their German counterparts received €0.1bn, i.e. €76 per apprentice and per student benefitting from the apprenticeship transition system.[b]

In addition, the French government covers a larger portion of educational costs (excluding employer subsidies) than does Germany's government. Per apprentice, this amount was €8,381 in France compared to €4,350 in Germany. This difference may be attributable to several factors, such as Germany having a larger share of apprenticeship contracts at the secondary education level, which cost less than such contracts in higher education, lower costs related to a more longstanding apprenticeship culture, at least in Germany's secondary school tracks, economies of scale related to a more reduced offering of disciplines in Germany and the fact that German apprentices spend more time completing on-the-job training, thus reducing the cost of theoretical learning.

Any comparison with Germany should be interpreted with caution given that the two apprenticeship systems are organised differently. In particular, each system is governed differently, with France having a more centralised system than that of Germany. Funding mechanisms also vary: costs are shared in France, whereas in Germany a larger share of funding comes from individual levies paid by firms. Finally, the two countries adopt different educational approaches. In Germany, apprenticeships are specific educational programmes, while in France the apprenticeship and academic tracks are two different ways of completing the same educational programme).[c]

Table 2: Comparison of French and German government expenditure for apprenticeships in 2023

		Germany		France	
		Per apprentice*	Total	Per apprentice*	Total
Government expenditure	Educational costs	€4,350	€6.6bn	€8,381	€8.5bn
	Employer subsidy schemes**	€76	€0.1bn	€4,197	€4.3bn
	Other	€243	€0.4bn	€2,107	€2.1bn
	Total	**€4,669**	**€7.1bn**	**€14,685**	**€14.9bn**

Source: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB), Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2023, Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung, Bonn 2023 (in German only). "Formation professionnelle" Annex appended to the 2025 Budget Bill. French Government Audit Office, "Analyse de l'exécution budgétaire 2022 de la mission Travail et emploi", April 2023 (in French only). DG Trésor calculations.

How to read this Table: * Costs per apprentice in 2023 were obtained by dividing the total cost by the number of apprentices (and, for Germany, the number of transition system students), with 1,510,140 apprentices in Germany and 1,016,229 in France. ** In France, the apprentice employment subsidy was €6,000 in 2023.

a. In Germany, young people unable to find an apprenticeship placement can take part in the transition system, which involves a year of additional study with the purpose of facilitating their apprenticeship placement in the following year.
b. This system allows German students who are unable to find an employer to take them on as an apprentice to receive a year of preparatory study ahead of an apprenticeship placement in the following academic year.
c. G. Delautre (2014), "Le modèle dual allemand", DARES, *Document d'études*, no. 185 (in French only).

(11) "Formation professionnelle" Annex appended to the 2025 Budget Bill. Annex 9 to the 2025 Social Security Budget Bill 2025 (in French only).

2. Apprentice profiles, having changed significantly since 2018 with rising numbers of new apprentices, differ from those of academic-track students

2.1 The sharp rise in the number of apprentices since 2018 has been primarily driven by higher education and the service sector, leading to a more diversified group of apprentice employer firms

The sharp increase in the number of apprentices since 2018 has involved all education levels and sectors, but it has primarily been driven by apprentices pursuing higher-level degrees (bachelor's and master's) and by the service sector.

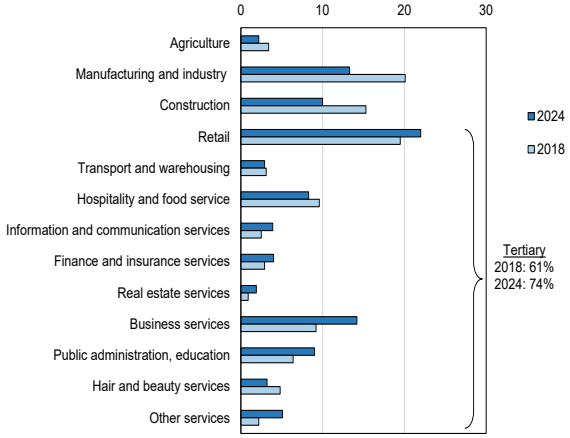
The number of new apprentices pursuing education levels at or below a secondary school diploma (*baccalauréat*) increased from 195,500 to 344,500 (up 76%) between 2018 and 2024, while apprentices in bachelor's or master's programmes surged from 67,100 to 345,400 (up 415%).

Furthermore, apprentices are now more often taken on in certain service sectors, such as business services, public administration and information and communication services (see Chart 1). Placements in the agriculture, manufacturing and industry, and construction sectors have experienced the reverse, even though the number of apprentices in absolute terms in these sectors has also increased (e.g. up 81% in the manufacturing and industry sector).

Accordingly, the composition of the apprentice cohort has changed considerably: a majority of apprentices are now pursuing higher education degrees (with 61% pursuing qualifications ranging from short-cycle tertiary degrees to postgraduate degrees, compared to 39% in 2018). Apprentices are also more concentrated in the service sector, which accounted for 74% of apprenticeship contracts in 2024, compared to 61% in 2018.

The sharp increase in the number of apprentices has also come alongside a shift in the profiles of employer firms. In particular, firms with more than 250 employees are taking on a growing share of the total of apprentices: 23.5% in 2024, compared to 20.7% in 2018.[12] This rise is associated with the increase in the share of apprentices pursuing degrees at or above the bachelor's level, as such apprentices are more likely to be employed by large firms (38% in 2024, compared to 12% of apprentices pursuing a lower education qualification.[13]

Chart 1: Apprentices by sector (as a %)



Source: DARES (2025), "Le contrat d'apprentissage" (in French only).

How to read this Chart: 3.4% of apprentices were working in the agriculture sector in 2018, compared to 2.2% in 2024. The share of apprentices in the tertiary sector rose from 61.1% in 2018 to 74.4% in 2024. The total may not add up to 100% due to rounded figures.

(12) DARES (2024), op. cit.
(13) Source: DECA (*Dépôt des contrats en alternance*) database.

2.2 Apprentices come from more privileged social backgrounds than students in secondary vocational education, while apprentices in higher education come from more disadvantaged social backgrounds

While the share of students from disadvantaged social backgrounds decreases with the number of years of education completed, the social composition of apprentices and academic-track students differs depending on education level. In secondary vocational education, children of blue-collar and white-collar workers and non-working individuals are significantly overrepresented in the academic track, accounting for 66% of students (compared to 56% of apprentices).[14] However, differences in socio-economic status are less pronounced in higher education, where 38% of apprentices come from disadvantaged social backgrounds (compared to 33% of academic-track students).[15]

At the secondary education level, the larger share of young people from middle-income socio-economic groups[16] choosing to do an apprenticeship (among young people from such middle-income groups enrolled in an occupational certification programme, 46% are apprentices compared to a share of 40% for all students enrolled in such programmes) is thought to be due primarily to differences in social and cultural capital. Accordingly, children of craftspeople and merchants are overrepresented among middle-class students (they account for 50% of apprentices compared to 24% among all occupational certification students). They likely have advantages relative to other students when it comes to access to information and to certain occupational networks that facilitate their apprenticeship placement.[17] In the same vein, according to DARES,[18] the rate of apprenticeship placement after graduation from lower secondary school, i.e. the share of apprenticeship placement seekers who actually sign a contract, is higher among children from households predominantly composed of corporate executives or self-employed individuals (68%) than among children from blue-collar households (59%). This difference is stable across business sectors. Using family connections to contact firms is less common among apprentices from white-collar households (25% of such apprentices make use of family connections) and among apprentices from blue-collar households (27%) than it is among apprentices from households predominantly composed of self-employed individuals (35%).

Conversely, the slightly larger share of apprentices in higher education from lower-income backgrounds is thought to be due in part to students from disadvantaged social backgrounds being less underrepresented as apprentices in business schools and engineering programmes. Given the high cost of these areas of study, especially in business schools, apprenticeships allow students to have their tuition fees, the cost of which is typically shouldered by the student's family or the student alone, covered by a firm (and indirectly by the government). Children of white-collar and blue-collar workers and non-working individuals accounted for 30% of engineering apprentices (compared to 21% of academic-track students) and 33% of business school apprentices (compared to 15% of academic-track students). Socio-economic background differences between apprentices and academic-track students are smaller in university education programmes: the share of apprentices who are children of white-collar and blue-collar workers and non-working individuals reached 45% at the bachelor's level (compared to 51% among academic-track students) and 40% at the master's level (compared to 36% among academic-track students). The distribution of apprentices in higher education based on socio-economic status has been steady overall since the 2018 reform.[19]

(14) Children of blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and non-working individuals account for 37% of students in secondary education, all occupational sectors combined. M. Barhoumi (2024), "L'orientation en CAP par apprentissage ou par voie scolaire est fortement liée au niveau scolaire et à l'origine sociale des élèves", *Note d'Information,* no. 24.05, DEPP (in French only).
(15) SIES (Information Systems and Statistical Studies Department) (2024), "L'apprentissage dans l'enseignement supérieur en 2023", *Note flash*, no. 2024-22 (in French only).
(16) Children of tradespeople, merchants, white-collar workers or independent farmers.
(17) DARES (2021), "Accéder à l'apprentissage après la 3e : quels profils, quelles démarches ?", *DARES analyses*, no. 30 (in French only).
(18) Ibid.
(19) SIES (2022), "Les étudiants en apprentissage dans l'enseignement supérieur : effectif, profil et réussite" (in French only).

3. Apprentices experience a better transition from school to work relative to academic-track students, but this positive impact is less marked among high-degree holders

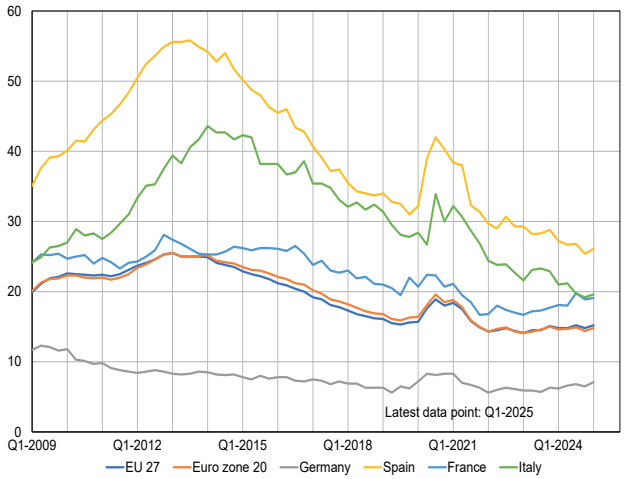
3.1 Apprenticeships are meant to improve the school-to-work transition, but could in theory reduce the transferability of skills acquired

The main objective of an apprenticeship is to acquire occupational skills that facilitate the transition from school to work,[20] contributing to a lower youth unemployment rate, which is high in France (see Chart 2). The expansion of apprenticeship programmes also aims to improve the matching between students' initial education and employers' needs, thereby enhancing the allocative efficiency of the labour market.

Apprenticeships have several unique characteristics allowing them to meet those objectives. Firstly, apprentices enjoy direct ties with their firm and the development of a one-to-one relationship with their apprenticeship mentor, aspects that foster their employability after completion of their studies, particularly in the firm in which they worked as an apprentice. Secondly, through their on-the-job experience young apprentices develop skills specific to their firm or to the sector in which it operates, as well as, more broadly, develop job skills fostering their employability.

Nevertheless, apprentices' acquisition of general job skills that are transferable across firms or sectors may be more limited than that of academic-track students, who spend more time in formal education settings. Apprenticeships may therefore support employment at labour market entry, but the limited body of scientific research on this topic prevents us from drawing any conclusions about their longer-term impact.[21]

Chart 2: Change in the youth (aged 15-24) employment rate in France and in major partner EU countries (as a %)



Source: Eurostat.

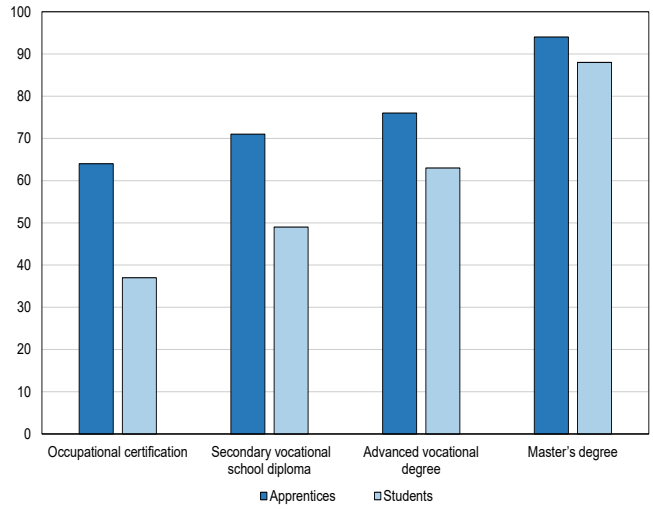
3.2 The impact of apprenticeships on job prospects varies widely, particularly depending on apprentices' profiles

Without accounting for differences in socio-economic status among individuals, apprentices tend to enter the job market with more ease after graduation than their academic-track peers. When assessing the school-to-work transition based on labour market entry 18 months after graduation, apprentices consistently have a higher employment rate than their academic-track peers, regardless of the level of education pursued (see Chart 3). The employment gap at labour market entry between apprentices and academic-track students is lower, however, for the highest-degree holders: it falls from 27 percentage points at the occupational certification level to 6 percentage points at the master's level.[22] That being said, these are still descriptive statistics that do not allow us to draw any conclusion about apprenticeships providing a distinct advantage.

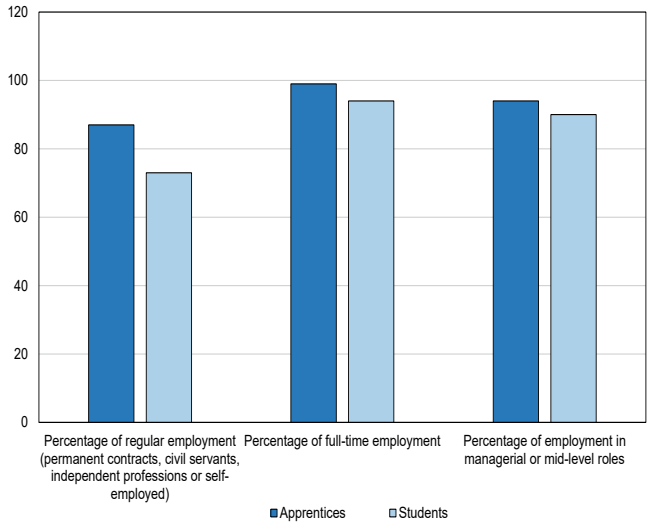
(20) French Government Audit Office (2022), "La formation en alternance. Une voie en plein essor, un financement à définir" (in French only).
(21) E. A. Hanushek, G. Schwerdt, L. Woessmann and L. Zhang (2015), "General Education, Vocational Education, and Labor-Market Outcomes over the Lifecycle", *The Journal of Human Resources*.
(22) Limited by the data available to us, we cannot separate out French elite higher education institutions (*grandes écoles*) from other master's-level degree programmes.

Chart 3: Comparison of the transitions into employment of apprentices and academic-track students

Labour market entry at 18 months for holders of an occupational certification, a secondary vocational school diploma, an advanced vocational degree (obtained in 2021) or a master's degree (obtained in 2020) (%)



Working conditions of master's degree graduates (excluding teaching) (%)



Source: E. Lemaire, C. Loiseau, E. Jounin (2024), "Insertion professionnelle des apprentis de niveau CAP à BTS deux ans après leur sortie d'études en 2021: 71 % sont en emploi salarié dans le secteur privé en juillet 2023", Note d'Information, no. 24.31, DEPP-DARES (in French only). E. Lemaire, C. Loiseau, E. Jounin (2024), "Insertion professionnelle des lycéens professionnels de niveau CAP à BTS deux ans après leur sortie d'études en 2021 : 55 % sont en emploi salarié dans le secteur privé en juillet 2023", Note d'Information, no. 24.30, DEPP-DARES (in French only). A. Aubry, S. Bah, K. Herzberg (2023), "Le taux d'emploi salarié en France des diplômés en 2021 de master à 6, 12 et 18 mois", Note Flash du SIES, no. 32, MESR-SIES (in French only). H. Yildiz (2023), "L'insertion professionnelle à 18 et 30 mois des diplômés 2020 de master", Note flash du SIES, no. 22, MESR-SIES (in French only).

Ceteris paribus, the economic literature corroborates this advantage irrespective of the personal and academic characteristics of apprentices who have graduated and their academic-track peers (gender, possession of a driving licence, area of study, etc.).[23] Apprentices are effectively found to have a higher rate of employment after graduation and more favourable working conditions than academic-track graduates. This early advantage in labour market entry is mainly driven by the retention of apprentices, as their employers more frequently hire them directly once they have graduated.[24]

However, the employment advantage provided by apprenticeships decreases as the level of education qualification pursued rises. Accordingly, the economic literature suggests that apprenticeships cease having a significant positive impact on the school-to-work transition at higher levels of education, *ceteris paribus*.[25] This could be due in part to the fact that in higher education, apprentices are not any less likely

(23) M. Sollogoub, V. Ulrich (1999), "Les jeunes en apprentissage ou en lycée professionnel, une mesure quantitative et qualitative de leur insertion sur le marché du travail", *Économie et Statistique*, no. 323, p 31-52 (in French only). V. Simonnet, V. Ulrich (2000), "La formation professionnelle et l'insertion sur le marché du travail : l'efficacité du contrat d'apprentissage", *Économie et Statistique*, no. 337-338, p. 81-95 (in French only). D. Abriac, R. Rathelot, R. Sanchez (2009), "L'apprentissage permet-il une meilleure insertion sur le marché du travail ?", Formations et emploi, *Insee Références* (in French only). B. Le Rhun, N. Marchal (2017), "Insertion professionnelle des apprentis et des lycéens", *Éducation & formations*, no. 94, p. 117-148 (in French only).

(24) T. Couppié and C. Gasquet (2018), "Comment l'apprentissage favorise-t-il l'insertion professionnelle des CAP-BEP ?", *Formation emploi* (in French only). P. Cahuc and J. Hervelin (2020), "Apprenticeship and Youth Unemployment", *Sciences Po Economics Discussion Paper*. However, these papers do not consider differences in study completion rates between apprentices and academic-track students. Such rates vary depending on academic status and the education qualification pursued: for example, in 2023, apprentices working towards an occupational certification had a higher study completion rate than for academic-track students (86.9% compared to 84.6%), whereas apprentices pursuing an advanced vocational degree had a lower rate of study completion versus their academic-track peers (73.1% compared to 80.4%). Depp (2024). *Repères et références statistiques* 2024 (in French only).

(25) J.-J. Arrighi, O. Joseph (2005), "L'apprentissage : une idée simple, des réalités diverses", *Céreq Bref*, no. 223, Céreq (in French only). S. Issehnane (2011), "Le développement de l'apprentissage dans le supérieur : une évaluation empirique à partir de l'enquête Génération 2001", DARES, *Travail et Emploi,* no. 125 (in French only). B. Cart, A. Lene, M. H. Toutin (2018), "L'apprentissage favorise-t-il toujours l'insertion professionnelle ?", *Céreq Essentiels*, no. 1, p. 109-116 (in French only). X. Collet (2024), "L'alternance en master : une représentation idéalisée non conforme aux réalités de l'insertion", Formation emploi, *Revue française de sciences sociales*, no. 168, p. 187-208 (in French only). P. Cahuc, L. Ferracci (2014), "L'apprentissage au service de l'emploi", *Notes du Conseil d'analyse économique*, no. 19 (in French only).

to be hired by their employer after their apprenticeship than academic-track students who completed a long-term internship at the end of their studies.

Furthermore, while apprentices from higher education are more frequently offered better jobs than their academic-track peers (e.g. higher percentage of permanent contracts or managerial roles, higher starting salary), this may be attributable to factors unrelated to their participation in an apprenticeship programme, such as other differences with students (e.g. the sectors of their studies).

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Dorothée Rouzet
tresor-eco@dgtresor.gouv.fr

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