

**entitledtolearn**

opening doors to funded training

## **Project Evaluation**

**June 2023**

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# I. Executive Summary

The 2020 Social Market Foundation (SMF) report 'Adult education, education, education' stated that:

*Those participating in Adult Education... tend to be better educated to begin with, suggesting those who may benefit most... receive less of it.*

The nature of the UK adult skills sector means that providers often struggle to deliver education to those who need it most, such as lower earning and unemployed adults. Upskilling is a route which would provide many of these households with an opportunity to find a job and/or progress their earnings, increasing their living standards

There also remain significant pockets of underspend in the Adult Education Budget (AEB), with colleges struggling to recruit sufficient volumes of learners on some courses.

Entitledtolearn was conceived as a "matchmaker" or "learner finder" service, helping potential learners, mostly Universal Credit claimants, find places on AEB funded courses. This would help training providers fill their courses, making the most of their available budget. Entitledtolearn's pilot project was funded by the Ufi VocTech Trust, with the goal of establishing a business model which would eventually be funded by partnerships with training providers.

The project engaged with hundreds of learners and dozens of training providers. We received very positive feedback from users, and identified that there is a demand from individuals for help in finding courses and funding sources. Despite this, several challenges have meant that entitledtolearn will not be continuing operations in its current form beyond the end of Ufi VocTech Trust's funding in May 2023.

One of the key findings of the project is that, despite the wide range of AEB funded courses, finding funded places outside of a narrow range of courses is often challenging. Whilst schemes such as the Government's Skills Bootcamps are useful, finding accredited, vocational courses which both suited the learners' needs and received funding was in many cases impossible.

Our users all expressed an interest in further education and training, however due to various barriers to learning studying was an impossibility for many. Time pressures such as employment or caring responsibilities prevent many from studying. Flexible online courses were generally the preferred method of learning, however this stipulation made finding relevant courses even more challenging. As will be explored in Section VII, the lack of correlation between the courses people want to study and those with available funded places was an impediment to the projected business model for entitledtolearn.

While a small number of learners were eventually helped onto courses, translating this into a financially robust business model was not possible at the current level of operation. Further research into learner finder services currently in operation has confirmed this.

This model may be more sustainable on a local scale, operating in partnership with the careers services of local training providers, as this could ensure that learners could be effectively distributed onto courses which both suit their needs and have available funded places.

# II. Introduction



## Who are we?

Entitledtolearn was a collaboration between entitledto, who offer an online benefits calculator, and The Digital College, a provider of online professional training.

In development entitledtolearn received funding through Ufi VocTech Trust's 2021 Ignite grants, before subsequently being funded through their 2022 round of Seed grants.

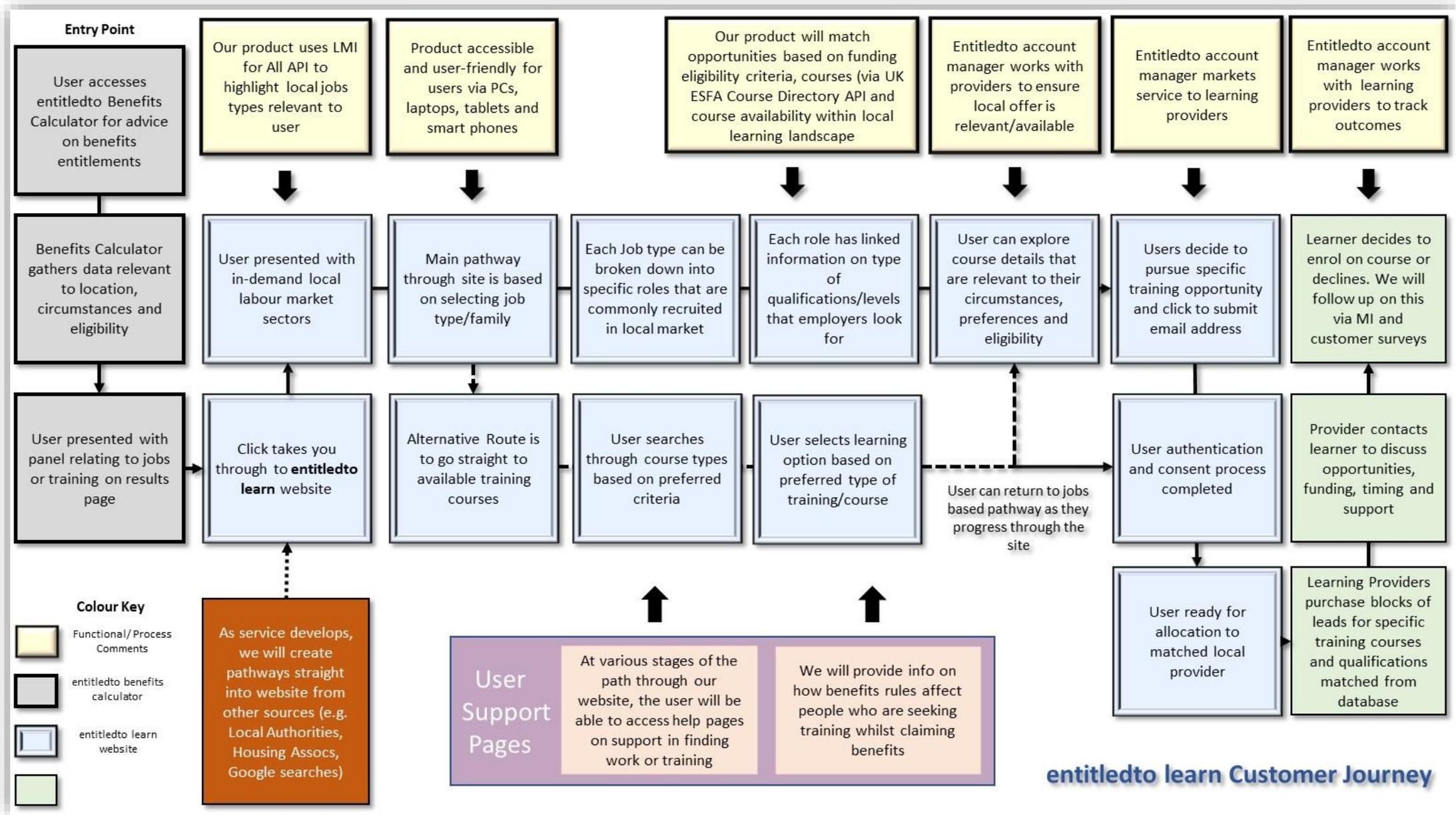
Ufi VocTech Trust is a grant-funding charitable body which seeks to champion the power of vocational technology to improve skills for work. They support technology projects in skills development and learning through grants, direct investments, strategic partnerships, and advocacy.

Entitledtolearn was conceived in response to two distinct needs in the world of adult education and training. The first was the challenge faced by training providers of recruiting sufficient numbers of eligible learners for all their courses. The second was the lack of advice and resources on available opportunities for funded training for low income adults.

Thus entitledtolearn was designed to help potential adult learners find places on courses, particularly those which would be free to them through provisions such as the National Skills Fund's "Free Courses for Jobs" offer. Our aim was to open pathways into education and training for individuals, and to create paid partnerships with training providers to fund this extra service. Like other "learner finder" services, we would help training providers find learners from our pool of "leads," who were people we recruited from the entitledtolearn website via entitledto.

As conceived at the start of the project, entitledtolearn would function as follows:

- Potential learners would be recruited from the entitledto website, via a panel on the results page advertising entitledtolearn's services.
- The entitledtolearn website would provide users with local labour market information and available courses. Users could ask for information on a specific course via the website, but in practice most used the "Get help" feature to contact us.
- Users getting in contact would communicate their goals and wishes to the account manager, who would find appropriate courses for them.
- Upon choosing a course, the user's details would be passed on to a training provider, who would purchase set numbers of leads from entitledtolearn.
- The training provider would take over the lead, giving them further advice and helping them enroll onto the course.
- Should that course or training provider not fit the learner, the learner and entitledtolearn account manager would search for further opportunities.



The entitledtolearn user journey, as conceived at the point of applying to Ufi.

# Funding for Learning: The Adult Education Budget

The adult education budget (AEB) is a government fund established to support the training and education of adults over the age of 19. While there are some further eligibility requirements, the basic provisions are as follows:

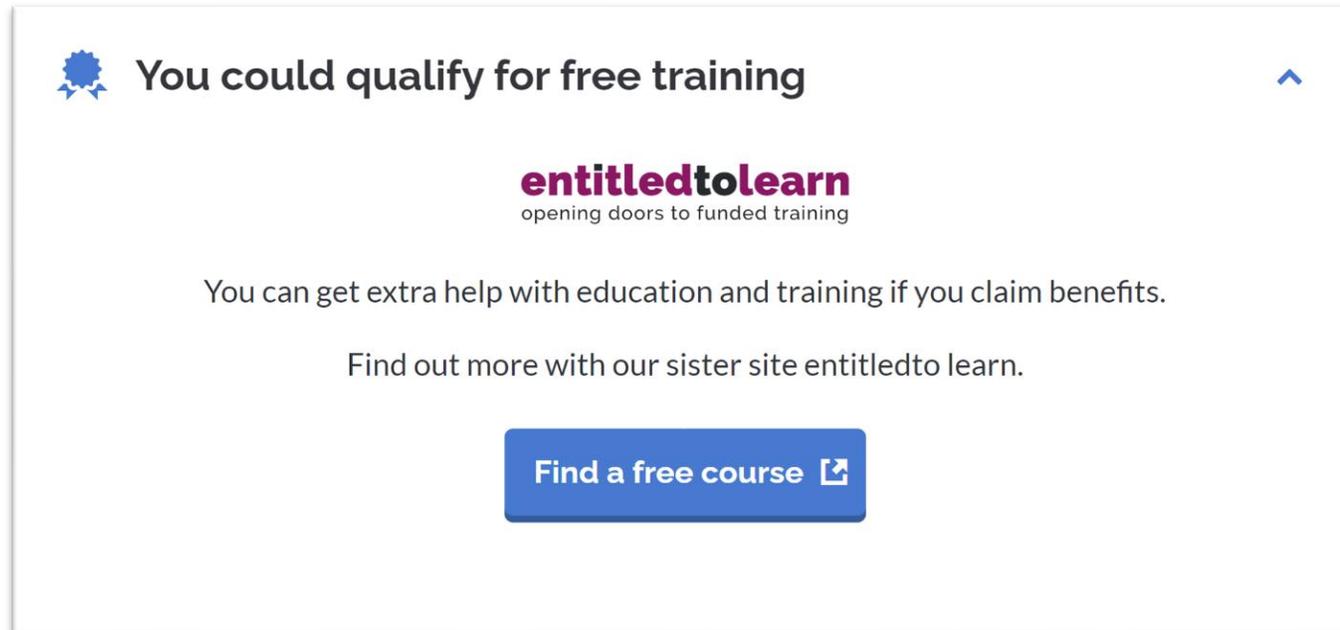
- AEB funding can be used by adults aged 19-23 to fund any Level 2 qualification, or their first Level 3 qualification.
- It can fund a first Level 2 or Level 3 qualification for adults earning under a certain level (March 2023, the threshold was £20,319 annual gross salary.)
- AEB funding entitles all adults to fully funded English and Maths qualifications up to and including Level 2 and essential digital skills up to and including Level 1.
- AEB will fund English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses up to and including Level 2 for low-wage earners.

## Devolution

Since August 2019, certain local authorities and mayoral combined authorities have delivered the AEB and other adult education directly. This means that the funding rules can be different in these areas. For example, someone living in Liverpool, a devolved area, would not be eligible for a funded place on an online Level 3 course if it was delivered by a training provider based in a non-devolved authority. This added another layer of complexity to finding and placing learners on courses.

# III. User Journey

The entitledtolearn user journey began when an individual decides to check their benefits entitlement via [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk). The entitledtolearn panel was shown to entitledto users at the completion of their benefits calculation. Note that while <https://www.entitledtolearn.co.uk/> can be accessed directly, in practice all visitors arrived at the site via the panel on the results page of entitledto's website. We introduced this panel incrementally, displaying it to users depending on their local authority. The final design of the panel is shown below:



Once users clicked through to the entitledtolearn site, they were greeted with a landing page which was tailored to their local area, using the postcode they had provided to entitledto. The landing page displayed 8 job sectors, which were labelled with an indicator of local labour market demand. The data used throughout the site was taken from LMI for All, a DfE-funded project that provides labour market information from a range of sources.

The screenshot shows the 'entitledtolearn' website landing page. The header features the logo 'entitledtolearn' with the tagline 'opening doors to funded training' on the left, and navigation links 'Not sure what course you are interested in?' and 'Get help finding a course' on the right. The main heading is 'Free training in the North West' with the subtext 'We help to take your next step in the world of work'. Below this is a search bar labeled 'Search by job title'. The 'Select a job sector:' section displays eight job sectors in a grid, each with a 'High Growth' indicator and a 'Read more' link. A location filter 'M16 35 miles radius' is visible in the top right of the grid area.

Select a job sector:		M16 35 miles radius ▾	
<b>CARING PERSONAL SERVICE OCCUPATIONS</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE OCCUPATIONS</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>TEACHING AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE ASSOCIATE PROFESSIONALS</b> High Growth Read more →
<b>HEALTH PROFESSIONALS</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>CORPORATE MANAGERS AND DIRECTORS</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>SKILLED AGRICULTURAL AND RELATED TRADES</b> High Growth Read more →	<b>BUSINESS AND PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATE</b> High Growth Read more →

Once the user chose one of the 8 sectors displayed on the landing page, they were shown a number of roles in this sector.

The screenshot shows the 'entitledtolearn' website interface. At the top, there is a purple header with the logo 'entitledtolearn' and the tagline 'opening doors to funded training'. To the right of the logo, there is a navigation bar with the text 'Not sure what course you are interested in?' and a button 'Get help finding a course'. Below the header, there is a breadcrumb trail: '← North West / CARING PERSONAL SERVICE OCCUPATIONS'. The main heading is 'CARING PERSONAL SERVICE OCCUPATIONS'. Underneath, there is a section titled 'Job titles' with a sub-heading 'The world of work is changing. Find out which jobs and careers are in demand in your area. Click on the sector you're interested in to see a list of careers and courses.' Below this, there are three job listings, each in a white box with a light blue border. Each listing includes a job title, a description, an annual pay figure, a predicted demand percentage, and a 'View details' button with a dropdown arrow.

Job Title	Description	Annual pay	Predicted demand	Action
<b>Nursery nurses and assistants</b>	Nursery nurses and assistants care for children from birth up to seven years of age in day or residential nurseries, children's homes, maternity units and similar establishments.	£15,840	+10.33%	<a href="#">View details</a>
<b>Childminders and related occupations</b>	Childminders and related occupations provide day-to-day care of children within a domestic setting, and supervise and participate in their play, educational and other activities.	£22,080	+9.79%	<a href="#">View details</a>
<b>Playworkers</b>	Playworkers deliver and facilitate play opportunities for children in a range of formal and informal settings including play groups, play schemes, free play locations, and in pre- and after-school activities.	£14,400	+8.99%	<a href="#">View details</a>

The jobs were accompanied by descriptions, annual pay figures and predicted demand statistics, again taken from LMI for All.

## Teaching assistants

Teaching assistants assist teachers with their day-to-day classroom work and with routine administrative tasks.

Annual pay  
£16,320

Predicted demand  
+9.55%

[View details ^](#)

### Qualifications

Academic qualifications may be required by some employers, although entry is possible with relevant experience (possibly on a voluntary basis) alone. An NVQ Level 2 qualification is available. CRB clearance is mandatory.

### Tasks

- assists teacher with preparation or clearing up of classroom;
- looks after lesson materials such as paper, pencils and crayons;
- listens to children read, reads to them or tells stories;
- assists children with washing or dressing for outdoor and similar activities;
- makes simple teaching aids and constructs thematic displays of educational material or children's work;
- helps with outings and other out-of-classroom activities.

### How to become a Teaching assistants in North West

#### Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning Level 3

Level 3 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning Level 3

COST  
£0

LOCATION  
North West

[View →](#)

#### Level 2 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and learning Level 2

Level 2 Certificate in Supporting Teaching and learning Level 2

COST  
£0

LOCATION  
North West

[View →](#)

#### Access to HE Diploma (Teaching)

The course provides students the opportunity to achieve the essential subject knowledge required for progression to university in order to study a degree for primary/secondary teaching or other

COST  
£0

LOCATION  
North West

[View →](#)

After clicking 'View Details' for a chosen job, the user was shown 3 relevant courses in their area. They could then drill down for further information on each course.

## "Want to find out More?"

Users interested in a course were encouraged to input their personal details into a "find out more" panel. Once the user had inputted their details into this form, they became a 'lead', and would be contacted via email to continue their user journey. In practice this was the primary way in which we accrued leads.

### Want to find out more?

Courses can run out of space quickly. Get more information and check availability by entering your email address below. We will send you one email and you can opt-out for future correspondence

  
   
  
 I consent to my details being passed on to training providers.

The initial email sent to leads from [help@entitledtolearn.co.uk](mailto:help@entitledtolearn.co.uk) established contact, before asking for a few further details of what they were looking for. Around two thirds of leads did not respond to this initial email. Whilst we considered eliminating this email in favour of one simply sending the user some options for courses based on the data which they have already provided, this initial contact proved essential. This was due to the fact that many of the leads with which we had contact expressed requests which differed markedly from the information they provided on the site. Furthermore, this initial email saved time by eliminating the process of searching for courses for users who would not follow up on contact.

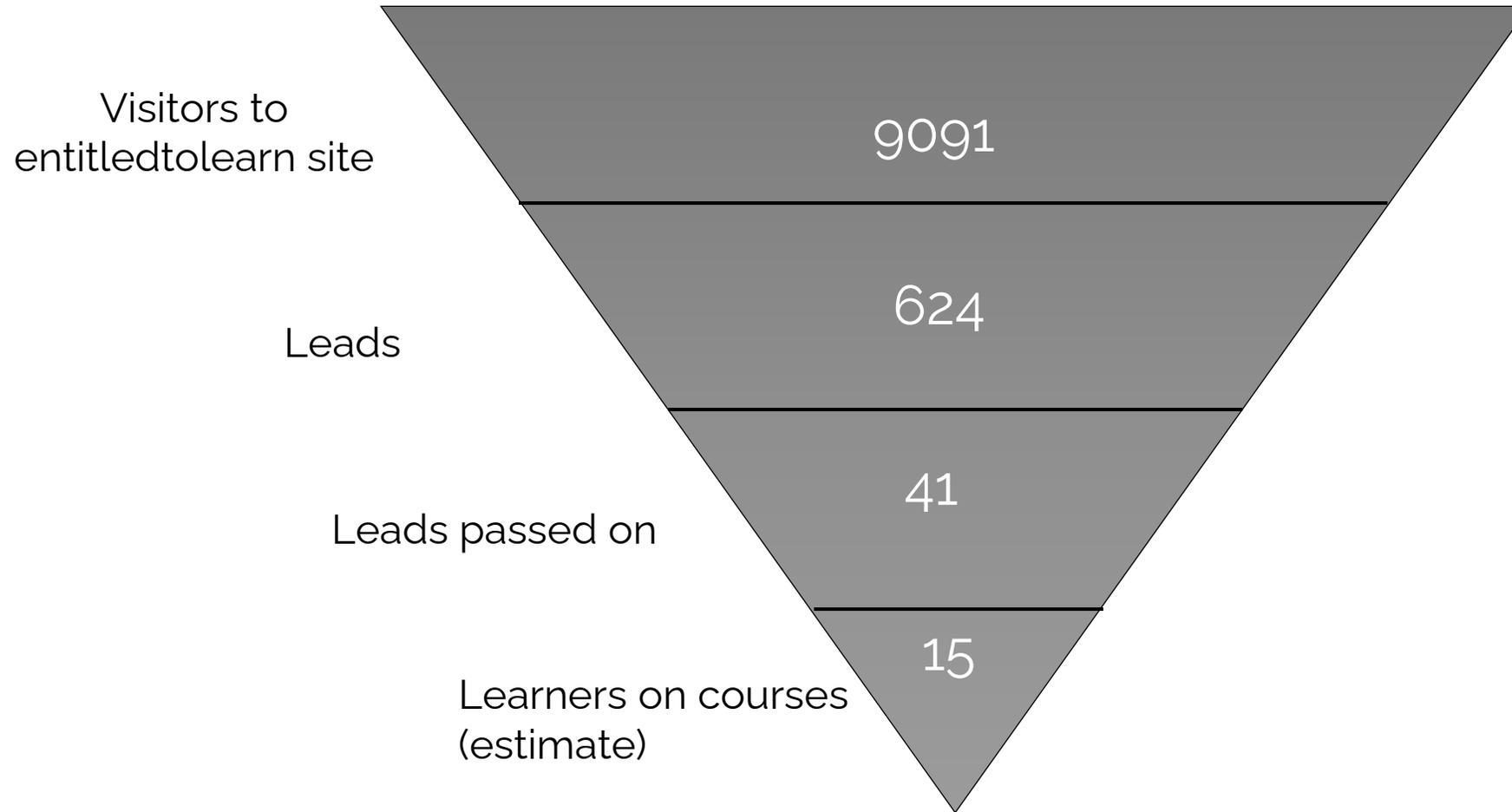
- For the users who responded to this “welcome” email, they would then be asked for further information where necessary, but the majority would be sent 1 to 3 links to courses which seemed to suit their needs, or linked to a relevant training provider. This “follow-up” email would also offer to establish contact between the user and any training providers in which they were interested.
- The user journey may then involve further email contact, but ideally this would be the point at which the user’s details are handed over to a training provider. 6.6% percent of leads were passed on to training providers.
- Ideally, upon being passed on to a training provider, learners would be helped on to a course which suits their needs. Our prospective business model hoped to establish professional partnerships with a number of training providers, who would pay a fee to entitledtolearn for each lead passed to them. Ultimately no official partnerships were formed, the reasons for which are expanded on in Section VII.
- Of the 41 leads passed on to training providers by entitledtolearn, only 15\* ended up on courses. The reasons for this will be expanded upon in Section VII and Appendix 2.

Some key figures gleaned from Google Analytics:

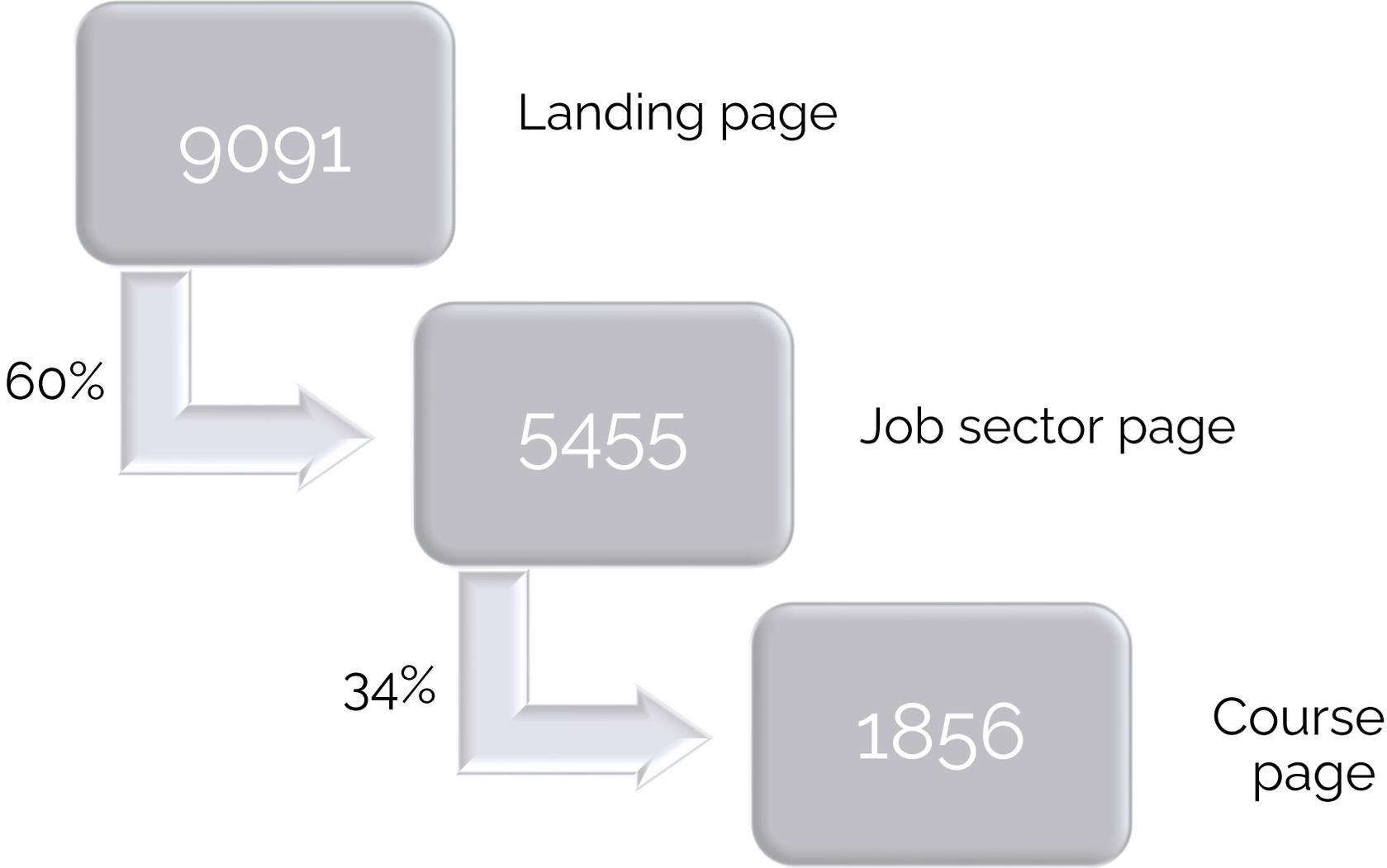
- The total number of site visitors as of the entitledtolearn panel being removed from entitledto in February 2023, was 9091.
- The average engagement time was 2 minutes and 19 seconds.
- 62% of users viewed the site on mobile devices.

\* The exact number of leads who started or finished courses cannot be ascertained, as many have not followed up on further contact from entitledtolearn attempting to establish this. We are using 15 as an estimate.

## Total engagement with entitledtolearn, August 2022 – March 2023



# entitledtolearn website page visits



With 9091 site visitors and 624 leads, the conversion rate was 6.9%. This improved after the website redesign in December 2022.

41 leads, or 6.6% were passed on to training providers. We felt that this percentage could only be improved should we have decided to cut back engagement with the leads, learning less about their needs, and instead passing them on to training providers in the hopes that they could then help them find the relevant course. Ultimately, while this technique may work for larger-scale operations, as explored in Sections VI and VII, one of the aspects of entitledtolearn's service which was most valued by users was the level of personal attention and advice. Without this, while the rate of leads passed on may have been higher, it is doubtful whether this would have had a meaningful impact on the number of people starting courses. This would have been dependent on the efficacy of the admissions and careers departments of the training providers.

# IV. User Feedback

We used three main channels to collect user feedback on entitledtolearn, as well as opinions on the state of adult training and education. These were:

- A focus group
- A user questionnaire
- Website feedback collected on our 'Contact Us' page.

In practice, the website feedback was used as an alternative to the 'Get Help' feature, with the exception of contact from a training provider who contacted us about a potential partnership, mistakenly thinking that entitledtolearn could fund learners through their private center.

# Focus Group

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, we held an online focus group with 6 attendees. The participants were selected from among the 624 leads. In the one-hour session we addressed:

- The reasons for the participants' initial interest in training courses
- Whether they had found and started a course, with the help of entitledtolearn or independently
- Their feedback on the website and service
- Any self-identified barriers to learning
- Their level of interest in a “matchmaking” service for potential learners and training providers, and any thoughts they had on the form this would take.

The main findings from the focus group aligned with topics which had already arisen in prior email communications with users. The main take-aways were:

- Participants were generally interested in training to improve their employability or change career; they understood that better skills could help them progress in the labour market
- There is a general level of interest in the “matchmaker” service we provide, but certain barriers to learning prevent many from beginning courses
- One of the most prevalent barriers to learning were time-pressures, such as caring responsibilities or employment.

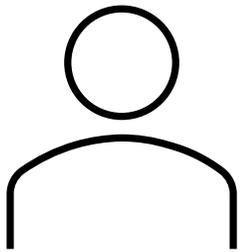
## More details from the focus group

**Degree-level qualifications** – 4 out of 6 participants in the group had degree-level and above qualifications. In these cases, the participants were seeking additional skills to improve their employability. This is typical of another difficulty in finding funded training, as many courses covered by AEB funding will only be fully-funded for students who do not yet have a qualification at that level. Thus a learner with an unrelated undergraduate degree, who was seeking to study a vocational Level 3 qualification, would only be eligible to receive funding through repayable Advanced Learner Loans.

**Overseas qualifications** – 2 of the participants in the focus group had qualifications gained overseas and were struggling to find help and information on converting these qualifications.

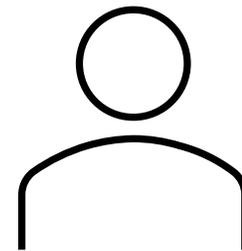
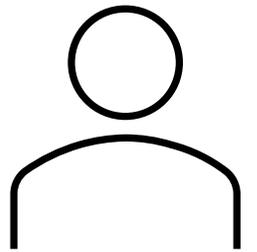
# User Questionnaire Feedback

Our user questionnaire asked for further feedback and additional comments. We received 20 comments, of which the vast majority praised the entitledtolearn service. Here are a few examples of the feedback we received:



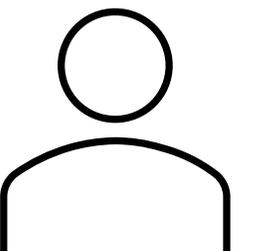
"Great emails and communication thank you"

"Online is great as I'm a single mum with two kids"



"Simple and easy to use"

"Always get good advice"



\* The full list of feedback recorded in the questionnaire is recorded in Appendix 4.

## Findings from Questionnaire Feedback

A few comments recurred in the feedback gathered in the questionnaire. These highlighted some of the things which were valued by entitledtolearn users. These included:

- Swift and effective communication
- Ease of use
- Personalised, helpful service.

There were also a handful of negative comments, however these all seemed to be regarding service from training providers after being passed on by entitledtolearn. This was indicative of wider issues which will be discussed in Section VII.

# V. Feedback from Training Providers

Over the course of the project, we received some informal feedback and held some structured interviews with colleges and other training providers.

These interviews were held with 3 further education providers, all based in England, all of which were in top 50% of AEB recipients by total endowment.

Training Provider 1 is a further education and higher education institution in West Yorkshire.

Training Provider 2 is a further education and higher education in the East of England.

Training Provider 3 is a further education institution in the West Midlands.

The interviews were structured around 5 main questions:

1. How do the training providers mainly find learners?
2. Do they ever struggle to find learners for adult education courses?
3. Has devolution effected their institutions?
4. Have they ever engaged with a learner finder service?
5. If so, did they have any feedback on these experiences?

## 1. How do training providers find their learners?

The primary recruitment tools outlined by the interviewees were delivered by the marketing divisions of their institutions.

The marketing techniques mentioned included online and social media campaigns, links with local business, and publications and other physical media. Community outreach through schools and partnerships with the DWP were also used.

While learner finder services were used in some cases, as will be expanded upon in Question 4, the majority of student recruitment was conducted internally.

## 2. Do the interviewed institutions struggle to find learners?

Training Provider 1 responded that generally, their biggest challenge is not finding learners, but having the staff to meet demand. While on rare occasions courses or classes will be undersubscribed, this is not on the whole a concern.

Training Provider 2 stated that the COVID19 pandemic had left them struggling financially, with their marketing efforts not yielding as many enrollments as they would like.

Training Provider 3 does not generally struggle to find learners, however some courses such as ESOL and functional skills are more subscribed than others. They stated that finding learners for funded courses is generally easier.

### 3. Has devolution effected operations?

Training provider 1 thought that generally devolution had not negatively impacted them, though they did not have sufficient data to say definitively.

Training Provider 2 stated that devolution had complicated operations, particularly in their distance learning department.

Training Provider 3 is in a non-devolved area, so had not been effected.

### 4. Have the institutions engaged with learner finder service?

Training Provider 1 had recently begun engaging with a learner finder service, but they could not give us further information.

Training Provider 2 had a recent negative experience with a learner finder service.

Training Provider 3 has never engaged with a learner finder service, and can't conceive of a need for one in the near future.

## 5. Do they have feedback on their experience with learner finder services?

Training provider 2 gave an account of their negative experience with a learner finder service. Their partnership lasted 6 weeks, during which staff at the college were bombarded with communications from the learner finder, and were sent learners who were generally not well fitted to the courses for which they were referred. The learner finder service would refer large volumes of learners to one or two courses at a time, putting immense pressure on those departments. Many of these learners would be uninterested or unsuitable for the courses for which they were referred. Some learners were referred for online courses despite only wanting in-person learning, and vice-versa. Some had been promised the wrong course, and others had special educational needs which had not been accounted for by the learner finder service. Ultimately the college lost money on some learners after having to withdraw them from courses which weren't right for them. Despite this negative experience, the college did state that they would be interested in using a learner finder service in the future, should they operate in a more scrupulous way, unlike the "unfriendly" and "pushy" service described.

# VI. Mystery Shopping Exercise

To understand the existing 'learner finder' services currently operating in the market, we undertook a mystery shopping exercise.

We found learner finder sites via a Google search. It is worth noting that, from the learner's perspective, the websites of learner finder services are often indistinguishable from training providers. Whether or not the courses are delivered by the company in question is obscured many websites. In some cases, the learner finder services do deliver some courses, or a learner finder service is integrated into the business model of a training provider. Through ambiguous language and unclear branding, many of these websites do not explicitly state whether they are a training provider, a learner finder, or both.

Once we had identified learner finder services, we created a fake persona, that of an adult learner living in a non-devolved postcode. We then signed up for a number services, expressing an interest in Level 2 and 3 funded courses.

Despite our fictional learner having expressed an interest in Business Administration courses, we were sent a number of emails advertising Autism Awareness and Mental Health courses by one of the learner finders. We were emailed around every 3-6 days, reminding us to complete our enrolment, however every email focused on the autism and mental health courses. These emails advertised the importance of these courses with statistics about growing autism diagnoses, and the current mental health crisis. Here is a quotation from one of the emails:

*Soaring numbers of under-18s have sought NHS care for mental health problems in 2022 but, only a quarter who need help, get it.*

***You can help...***

*Get trained and qualified in Children and Young People's Mental Health for free.*

From our research we know that these two subjects are among the most readily available funded courses. Thus the barrage of emails expounding the value and importance of these courses seems an effort to move learners onto courses with abundant funding attached, including payment of a lead generation fee to the learner finder service.

# Typical Fee per Lead

We found that the amount charged by learner finder services to deliver each learner to training providers ranged from around £50 at the lower end, to more typical prices of £100-120.

While collecting data on the amount given to training providers for each AEB funded learner was difficult, Training Provider 2 gave a typical figure of £400. Accounting for overheads, Training Provider 2 felt that the more expensive services were not a viable option.

While there is a market for less expensive learner finder services, the resources needed to streamline the process of finding and passing on learners was incompatible with the fairly 'hands-on' business model we had tested. Furthermore, we believe that some of the practices of these large-scale operations have led to mistrust in the market, as described by Training Provider 2.

Above all, we concluded that there is a conflict of interest between the commercial needs of the business and offering independent advice to learners.

# VII. Findings and Conclusions

For the reasons set out in this report, the 'match-making' service provided by entitledtolearn was not commercially viable. We have come to a number of conclusions as to why the business model anticipated at the project's inception did not function. These can be summarised in a few points:

1. Disparity between courses requested by users and available funding through the AEB. Almost all users wanted free training, but for the majority this was not available.
2. Barriers to learning preventing potential learners from starting courses.
3. Difficulties establishing commercially viable partnerships with training providers.

# 1. Courses requested vs courses available

The imbalance between courses requested and courses with available funded places was entitledtolearn's primary difficulty.

While AEB funding rules mean that, in theory, the vast majority of accredited Level 2 and 3 courses are able to receive funding and thus be taken for free, in reality finding funded places on these courses is difficult. In March 2023, there were over 400 Level 3 courses for adults approved for government funding, however in practice the majority of courses requested by entitledtolearn's user base were unfunded or had no available funded places. See Appendix 3 for several case studies which examine these discrepancies.

Among the leads who engaged in more sustained communication with entitledtolearn, Level 3 courses were the most popular, and there was a strong preference for online courses, but courses like this are few and far between.

Examining a random sample of 30 Further Education institutions, as defined by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, all of which cater to several thousand students, the range of online level 3 courses available proves to be very limited. Fig. 1. shows the full range of available courses in this category across this random sample of training providers as of April 2023. It demonstrates that the number of funded, online Level 3 courses is very limited.

Appendix 1 shows in detail which courses were requested by users of entitledtolearn between August 2022 and April 2023.

Comparing the data in Appendix 1 and Figure 1 below, there is little overlap in the areas covered by courses with funding available, and the areas frequently requested by entitledtolearn users. Even in the areas of overlap, for example the proliferation of available health and social care courses, there is still a lack of correspondence between these courses and the actual wishes and needs of learners. **Simply put: the funded courses available to people are not the ones they want.**

While the list of Level 2 courses available online and for free is far longer, it does not have a significantly wider footprint in terms of subject areas covered.

<b>Courses (Online &amp; Level 3)</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Notes</b>
NCFE/CACHE Counselling Skills	Health & Social Care	
Understanding the Care and Management of Diabetes	Health & Social Care	
Principles of End of Life Care	Health & Social Care	
Understanding Autism	Health & Social Care	
Understanding Mental Health	Health & Social Care	
Understanding the Principles of Dementia Care	Health & Social Care	
Understanding the Care and Management of Diabetes	Health & Social Care	
Adult Care	Health & Social Care	
Health & Social Care	Health & Social Care	Work based qualification
Leadership and Management	Business & Management	
AAT Accounting	Accounting & Bookkeeping	
Supporting Teaching & Learning in School	Teaching and teaching assistant courses	Work based qualification
Specialist Support for Teaching & Learning in Schools	Teaching and teaching assistant courses	Work based qualification
TQUK Level 3 Award in Education and Training	Teaching and teaching assistant courses	
Certificate in the Principles of Special Educational Needs	Teaching and teaching assistant courses	
Level 3 Diploma for the Children's Workforce (Early Years Educator)	Childcare	Work based qualification
Certificate in Coding Practices	IT, programming, & other digital skills courses	
Cyber Security	IT, programming, & other digital skills courses	
A Mentoring Mindset	Mentoring	Only available in Wales

**Fig. 1.** Available funded online Level 3 courses from a sample of 30 random Further Education providers, March 2023.

## Reasons for the imbalance between demand and supply

The difficulty of finding appropriate course placements for entitledtolearn users reflects a number of factors:

- Most fundamentally, the government provides free training for courses that provide the highest social and economic rate of return for society overall. However these courses, such as the free Level 3 courses for people wanting to work in social care, as seen in Figure 1, are not the ones that most people are interested in. Promoting free training for careers in care is in effect a way of compensating for the lack of earnings progression in this sector. Our users generally looked instead to enter sectors where there were higher private returns to upskilling, but these sectors lack government funding, as there is a reluctance to subsidize training which could be financed privately.
- The complexity of support and funding made it harder for users (sometimes aided by our account manager) to understand and navigate the system. As discussed in Section I, the devolution of local areas and combined authorities impeded the ease with which funded places could be found for certain users.
- The system is still too reliant on in-person courses. Based on responses gathered in the user questionnaire, and from communication with entitledtolearn users, the majority are not interested in solely in-person courses, which are the courses which appear to have the most readily available funding

## 2. Barriers to Learning

As is expanded upon in Appendix 2, a number of barriers to learning can prevent even the most committed potential learners from starting courses of training.

Entitledtolearn was primarily designed to assist low-wage earners and people who claim benefits, therefore the prevalence of financial barriers to learning was unsurprising. Despite attempting to find fully-funded courses for leads where possible, this did not account for other financial pressures, such as difficulties juggling study with employment, and the cost of childcare and transport.

Even in the cases where a funded course was found for a learner, other factors may interfere with them starting the course. This included time-pressures such as caring responsibilities, which could exclude all study save self-paced. Many users did not own a car, so the distance to local in-person training providers was another impediment. These and other barriers are further explained in Appendix 2.

### 3. Difficulties establishing partnerships with training providers

Ultimately, entitledtolearn did not establish any paid partnerships with training providers. As explored in Section V, there is a market for learner finder services, but it is small at the moment and is marked by a level of mistrust. In combination with entitledtolearn's recent launch and lack of established track-record, we found establishing partnerships difficult.

Without these partnerships with training providers, the handing-off process became more challenging. With a lack of open, streamlined processes whereby we could pass learner details on to the admissions departments of training providers, often potential learners were not followed up after being passed on. Having these partnerships would have expedited the process of passing on leads, and led to a higher rate of leads starting courses. However without these very large numbers of users, forming partnerships was a challenge. We were unable to find a pathway that would allow us to start small and develop partnerships gradually and that would also be consistent with the learners' best interests.

# Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced, entitledtolearn successfully provided a helpful service and received positive feedback from users. There remains a need for clearer advice on the financial provisions available to low earners who are seeking training and education to upskill. There are also serious gaps in funding in the sphere of adult education. Without addressing these issues, great numbers of adults who are seeking training to improve their careers and earnings will simply not be able to make the changes which are vital to both their quality of living, and the UK economy.

