

WHITEPAPER

What's the data telling us?

Report 1. Why effective engagement of learners is critical to apprenticeship success



Introduction

In this first of a series of reports, Beej Kaczmarczyk, expert and long-term sector consultant, and Ben Brownlee, Education Software Group Product Manager, consider how detailed analysis of data on the learner experience of apprenticeships highlights the importance of effective engagement of the apprentice in their learning programme. We studied the data of more than 300k learners and 180 providers based in England, Wales and Scotland to understand what contributes to better completion and pass rates, therefore maximising funding available. What works at every stage of the learner journey? A detailed analysis of back-end data from Smart Assessor software provides evidence of the importance of a range of activities in the learner journey. From onboarding to end point assessment and exit guidance. From implementing a good quality initial assessment and induction process to providing practical strategies to improve attendance and retention.

We recognise the importance of commitment from all partners to an apprenticeship programme; the learner, the employer and the training provider (and EPA organisation). The degree of engagement of these will often determine

- whether the learner completes the apprenticeship and achieves qualifications;
- whether the employer sees the business benefits of employing the apprentice; and
- whether the training provider maximises the funding available for the training and assessment.



A young man with curly brown hair and glasses, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is raising his right hand in a classroom. He is looking towards the front of the room. In the background, other students are visible, including a woman with blonde hair and another woman with dark hair, both looking forward. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a classroom or lecture hall environment.

Poor achievement rates on apprenticeship standards at 52% and new target achievement rates, set at 67% by 2025, highlight the importance of getting engagement and support right.

Our data shows users who engage with the Learner Management System prior to their course start are more likely to pass by 50%.

So, what does the data tell us about learner engagement, and what does it mean for apprenticeship programme practices?

Finding 1: Users who engage with the software prior to their course start are more likely to pass by 50%.

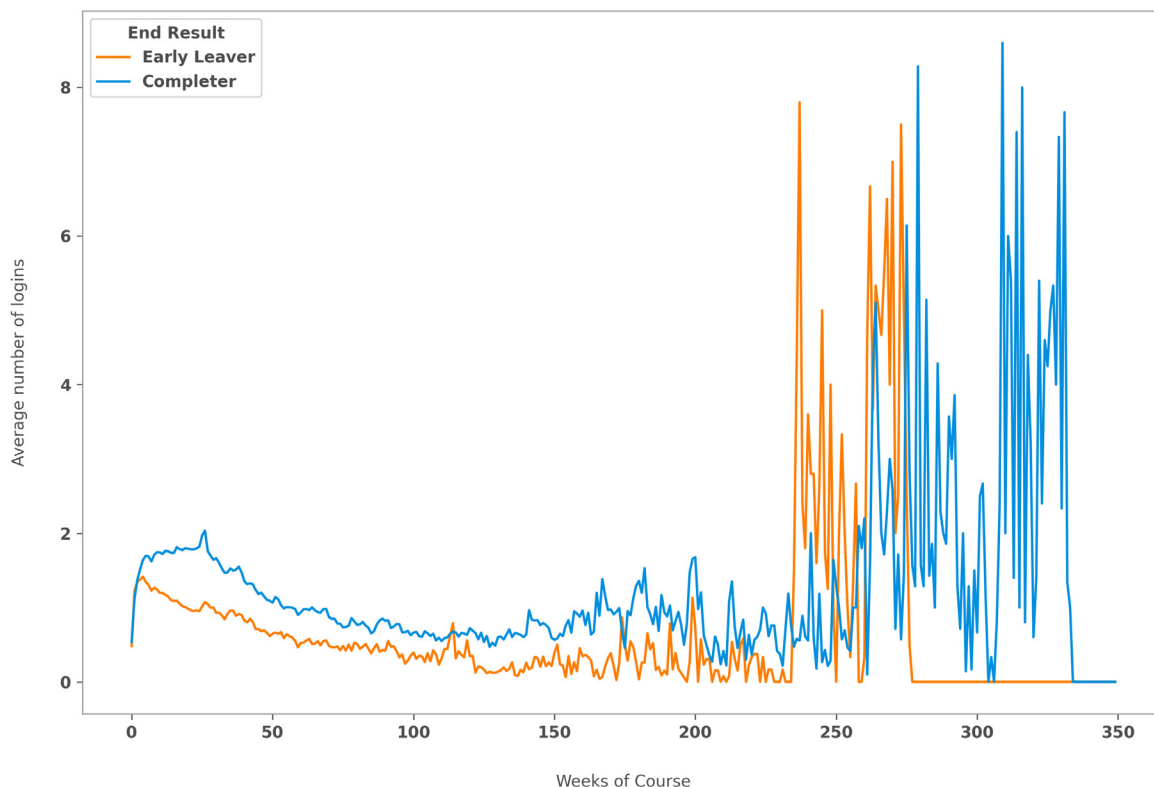
Users who engage with the Learner Management System (LMS) prior to their course start are more likely to pass by 50%. This could indicate:

- Clients who onboard their learners prior to the start date improve the likelihood of completion.
- Learners who have access to the LMS become more familiar with the course programme and its management systems earlier and so are more likely to succeed.
- A comprehensive induction to apprenticeship course management software and related course processes indicates a better equipped and supported learner.
- The mechanism is evidence of good quality initial assessment processes.
- Or that learners who pass are more likely to engage with software early on.



Finding 2: Learners who pass maintain a consistent level of engagement with a sustained increased level of interaction at the end of the course.

Fig 1: The average number of learner logins per week during the length of course.



Learners who log in to the software more frequently during the course are also more likely to complete, see Fig 1: *The average number of learner logins per week during the length of course*. They also maintain a higher level of engagement with the apprenticeship software throughout the course. Completers also show fewer spikes in activity, trending towards more consistent engagement with the LMS.

Early leavers have, on average, a lower level of engagement with the LMS, especially at the start of the course. They also demonstrate high peaks and troughs towards the middle or end of the

program, suggesting sporadic behaviour that marks a pivotal point in their learner journey. Spikes in activity also occur on average earlier in the course.

This may be because of factors relating to the learner's own circumstances, e.g. personal or time management issues, or poor programme design and delivery, not enough initial training about the course programme, or lack of effective one-to-one mentor support. The sustained lower levels of engagement, from day one, indicates a wide window for corrective measures.

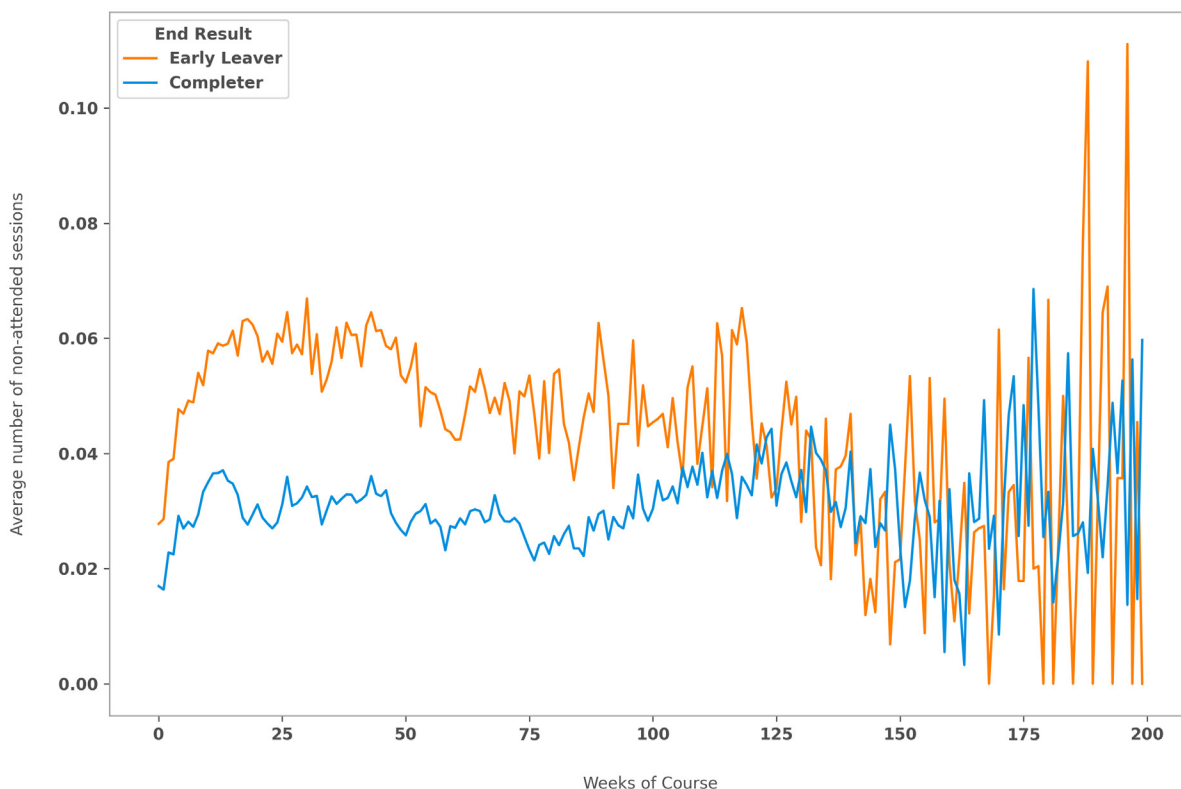
Finding 3: Completers have a steadier attendance rate from day one

In terms of meeting sessions prior to start of the course, early leavers miss 50% more sessions, and similarly, more sessions are missed on average during the course by early leavers.

This is especially the case at the start of the course, and could indicate that expectations of apprentices, in terms of attendance, have not been clearly communicated.

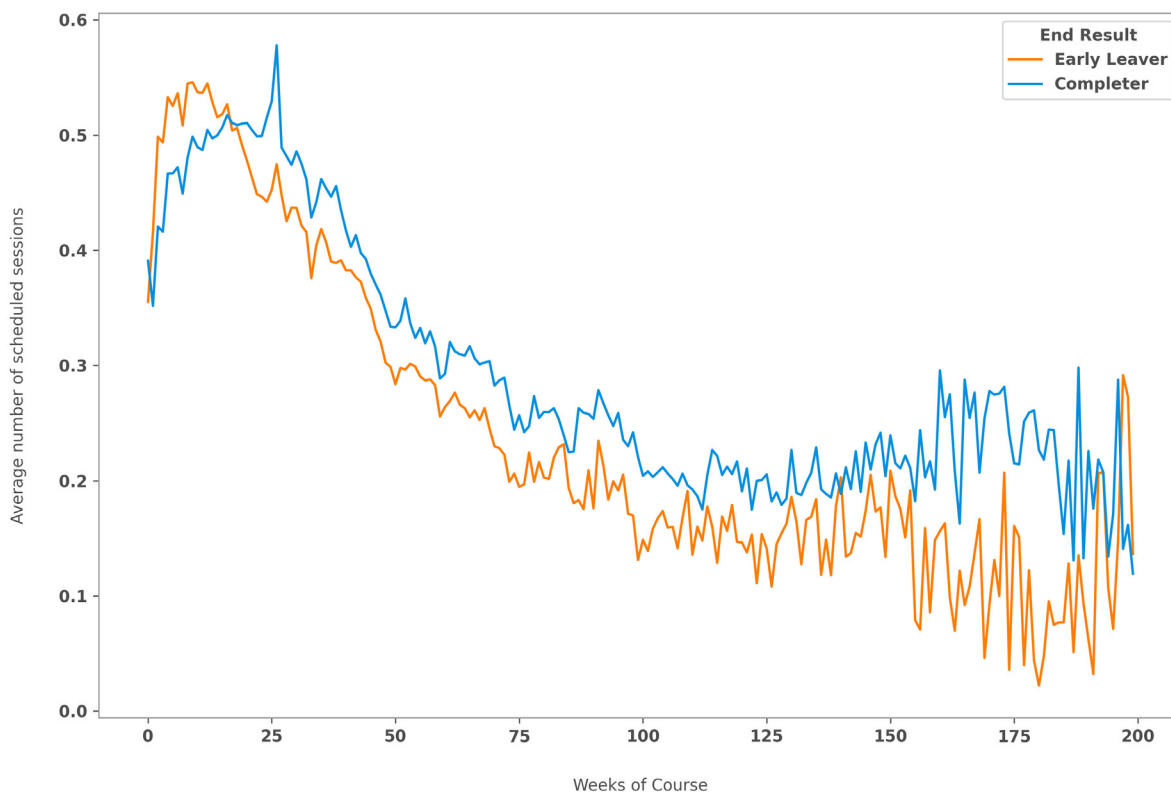
Successful completers also have a more even pattern of session attendance. See Fig 2: *The average number of learner feedback sessions that were missed by the learner per week during length of study.* These results would vary widely depending on how well the provider has articulated their expectations of apprentices in terms of their education, training and assessment. Long gaps between meeting sessions, e.g. with workplace tutors, do not help in establishing the supportive environment needed by individual apprentices.

Fig 2: The average number of learner feedback sessions that were missed by the learner per week during length of study.



Finding 4: Completers have more frequent scheduled sessions

Fig 3: The average number of learner sessions that were scheduled per week during length of study.



In terms of the average number of one-to-one assessor / teacher and learner sessions per week, completers have more frequent one to one scheduled sessions, as shown in Fig 3: *The average number of learner sessions that were scheduled per week during length of study*. Although early leavers start off well, with a larger number of scheduled sessions, these soon drop off.

Completers also tend to have more time allocated to their sessions, although this does not take into account the types and levels of the course. Sessions also tend to be longer near the end of the course, a trend which early leavers do not benefit from. Longer sessions may also allow more time for additional learning support where an individual need has been identified.

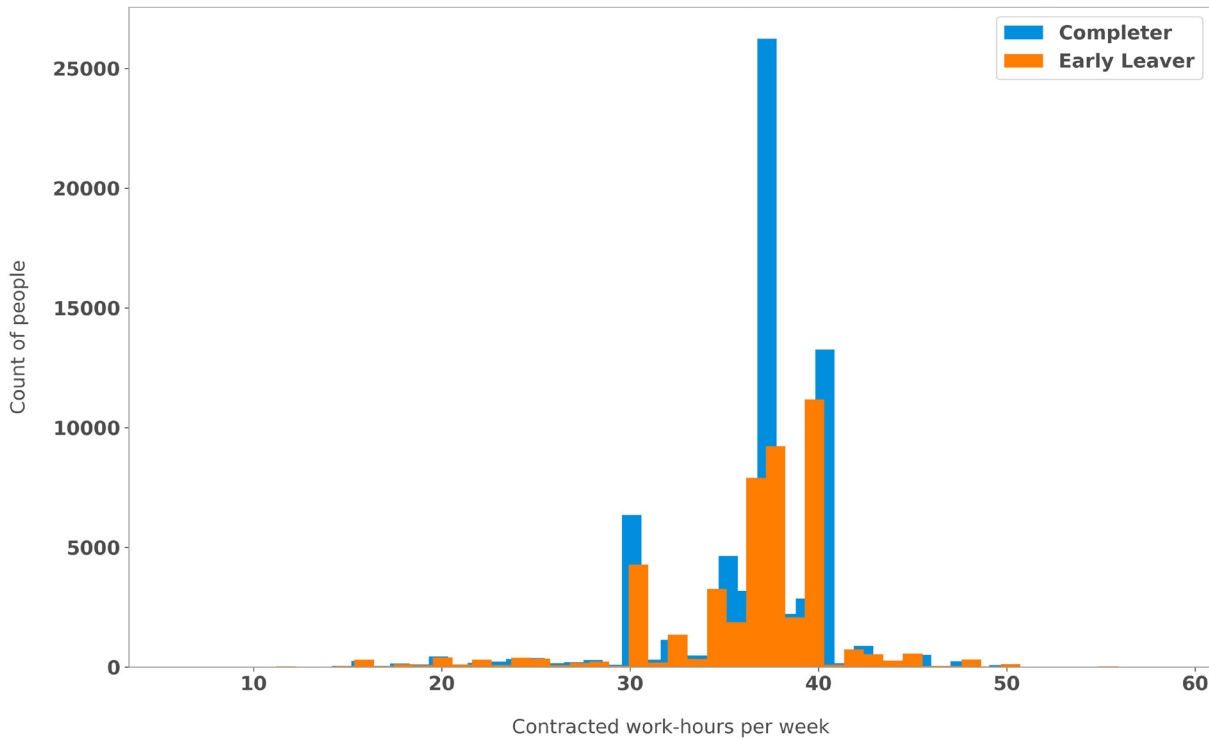
The data on formative and summative evidence mirrors much of these findings. More frequent feedback increases the likelihood of completion, especially at the beginning of the course. Where provider's staff have liaised effectively with employers during the recruitment of apprentices and offered effective support to employers in the assessment of learning development, then we see more rapid progress of learners towards successful completion. Of course, the quality of feedback is just as important as the frequency, and providers must ensure that this aspect of workforce development is not ignored. It is also important that apprentices are set stretching targets for learning skills and behaviours.



Early leavers miss **50% more** sessions prior to the course and during the course. The sustained lower levels of engagement **indicating a wide window for corrective measures.**

Finding 5: The distribution of contracted work hours per week doesn't impact learner engagement levels between early leavers and completers.

Fig 4: The distribution of contracted work hours per week.



In terms of the distribution of contracted work hours per week (averaging at 35–38 hours per week), there is no marked difference on the impact on learner engagement between early leavers and completers. As shown in Fig 4: *The distribution of contracted work hours per week*. What would be more significant is any differences in the time allowed each week out of the contracted hours for off-the-job training.

This has been commented on in recent Ofsted inspections, where hours have not been sufficient for learners to achieve within planned timescales, or those hours have been in personal time additional to contracted hours.

Finding 6: Learners who complete courses are more likely to interact with feedback mechanisms surrounding resources held within your Learner Management System.

The data on resources marked as complete by learners shows that learners who complete their course typically mark resources as complete more frequently than those who leave early. Completers mark resources as complete 31% more frequently than early leavers. This might imply that learners who complete are more organised and likely to check off pieces of work, and those who drop out are less organised, but other factors may be at play here.

Learners who complete also, on average, give more feedback on resources than those who drop out. Completers are shown to give 25% more feedback on resources. These results may also depend on how engaged employers are in the development of resources, including innovative resources to contextualise subjects like English and maths, which may skew results.



Conclusion - What might this mean?

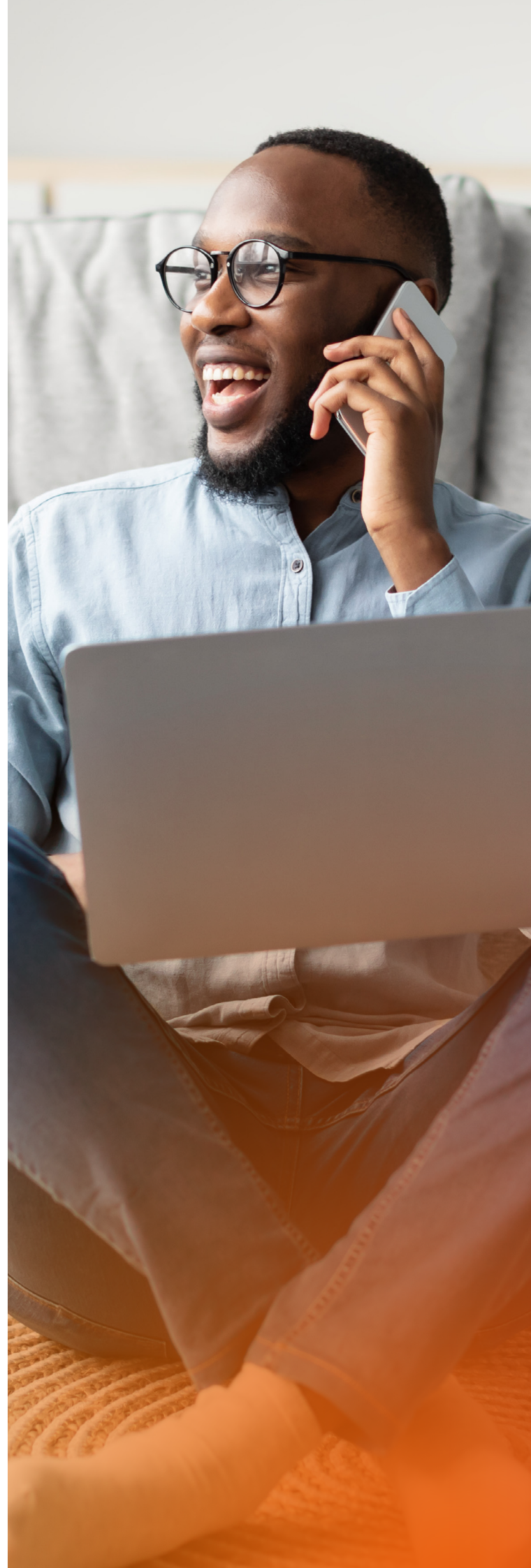
The evidence from the data analysis does raise some interesting questions about how best to motivate learners to engage with their programme to ensure successful completion, and what this might mean for training providers:

- What are your expectations of apprentices in terms of their education and development of skills?
- How extensive and consistent are your initial assessment processes?
- How can you demonstrate that apprentices have developed confidence and positive attitudes about themselves and others?
- What practical strategies have you employed to improve attendance and retention?
- What practical systems do you have in place to support apprentices that have fallen behind?

These questions are also relevant in the Education Inspection Framework and Ofsted inspections.

The data would suggest that apprentices, carefully informed of the requirements and challenges of the programme, and the personal benefits in terms of qualifications, employment and earnings, will engage fully with the learning and assessment processes.

The next report in this series will look at the implications for providers; for the teaching, learning, assessment and support they provide in the work-based learning environment.





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