



# LEARNING AND SKILLS AT WORK 2020

Mind the gap: time for learning  
in the UK



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## Report

# Learning and skills at work 2020

## Mind the gap: time for learning in the UK

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## 1 CIPD foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has wide-reaching implications for organisations, individuals and society. Organisations have had to take difficult decisions about workforce resourcing as well as how and where they operate. Many individuals have lost their jobs or been furloughed, while others have seen a dramatic shift in how, and where, they work. Disruption is likely to continue for a significant period of time, with experts suggesting that it could be up to six months to a year before we return to a 'normal' way of life and work.

And, the pandemic is likely to have far-reaching consequences even beyond this point, for organisations, individuals, the economy and society.

We know from previous experience that in a time of crisis, learning and development is often the earliest, and hardest, hit organisational activity. Yet, the ability to be resilient, to learn, adapt and continuously improve in the face of such a challenge will be vital, and we need to ensure that we don't press pause on development but continue to invest in the skills of the workforce.

These are certainly challenging times, but they also potentially offer us the opportunity to do things differently. Already we are seeing many organisations leveraging the technologies needed to work and learn any time, any place, to support learning in the flow of work. Now is the time to harness this trend further and ensure that we do as much as we can now to support individuals and organisations to prepare for the future.

Digital solutions will of course not replace other forms of development, but the increasing quality of online learning coupled with scalability, accessibility, and the ability to personalise this type of learning highlights its potential to play a far stronger future role in supporting workplace and adult skills development.

Elizabeth Crowley  
**Senior Policy Adviser, CIPD**





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## 2 Accenture foreword

The timing of this report couldn't be better.

You might think that any research collected before the advent of COVID-19 would be irrelevant in our new world. But you'd be wrong. Things that were true six months ago have become even more true now. Businesses need new skills and more highly skilled people, as the world of work is disrupted. Mindsets and behaviours are changing rapidly, possibly more rapidly about work than in any period before. People want growth and need development within their careers and working lives. So learning is an essential part of any organisation's future – and learning and development teams are the custodians of that precious resource, but they're struggling.

The CIPD's report captures a UK-wide picture of professionals challenged by limited resources, a lack of robust evaluation and measurement, and a sluggish adoption of the emergent technologies that make learning both more efficient and more engaging. Yet organisations are quick to assert how vital learning is for performance, productivity and agility. There's a gap here that needs to be reconciled, and a global pandemic that exacerbates the urgency.

In 2020 we've been forced to prioritise and digitise our lives at speed. Now we're re-inventing ourselves and our organisations to move forward in an uncertain world. This unprecedented disruption demands the expansion of two very different skillsets: the human magic of empathy, creativity, problem-solving and resilience, with digital skills like cybersecurity, data, cloud and artificial intelligence. The growing need for that mixed expertise is something Accenture identified several years ago and has been tracking, but economies in lockdown have accelerated the trend exponentially. We've progressed years in months. Don't expect to go back.

Success for British organisations means minding, and closing, the gaps that the data in this report lays bare: between organisational intent and investment, the human and the digital, old-school learning styles and new-age experiences. Some high-performing organisations are closing these gaps and proving the power of learning in their organisation.

The CIPD's research, amplified by global crisis, is a clarion call to Britain's public and private sectors to get our priorities right. Some things high-performing organisations in this study are doing to close the gap include:

- using learning as a driver of business value and revenue – moving away from learning as a cost
- investing in strategic learning to drive the skills needed in future work and using learning as an enabler of agility
- nurturing a learning culture where learning is valued and supported by leaders – and people help each other to learn constantly
- personalising learning for individuals, providing learning that's just enough and just for me
- weaving learning into the flow of work and performance, where people learn as they work and work as they learn
- tapping into the value of powerful digital learning from apps, to advanced simulations, to VR and XR
- investing in learning platforms – to both enable a better learning experience and enable organisational insight through data and analytics



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- being more creative and innovative in learning experiences, in a way that keeps learners coming back
- embedding immersive learning experiences into key moments in life, work and career.

We all know that with challenge comes opportunity. The UK will have an abundance of both in the year ahead. By getting our priorities right, investing in the right things and learning together, I'm confident we can close the gaps identified in this report. Doing so will be essential for the success of all organisations, the UK and our individual working lives.

The time to move forward learning as we move forward into a new reality of work is now.

Andy Young

**Managing Director, Talent and Organization, Accenture**



### 3 Executive summary

#### Key findings

- Attitudes are in the right place. Organisations are increasingly recognising the needs to improve capabilities and address skills gaps, and getting closer to the business as they do so.
- But there are big gaps between intent and the reality of investment, resources and educational deployment.
- Though the use of technology has increased since our last survey, organisations are failing to leverage emerging technologies that would make their learning more potent and are increasingly expected in other parts of learners' lives.
- Most organisations are having to do more with less, and there's a long way to go to create truly supportive learning environments.
- We believe the need for flexible, rapid and continuous skills development is being exacerbated by the pressures put onto the global economy by pandemic-related lockdowns.
- Our nine recommendations lay out the actions and attitudes that will help learning professionals close the gap between the admirable ambitions and lofty challenges revealed in this report.



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The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on organisations, individuals, the economy and society. Organisations have had to respond to a rapidly evolving landscape, changing how and where they operate, as well as reconsidering the services they offer. Many organisations had to redeploy, upskill or reskill staff quickly, while individuals have seen a dramatic shift in how, and where, they work. Disruption is likely to continue for some time, and the ability to be resilient, to learn and adapt, in the face of such challenges is vital for organisations and individuals alike.

Yet, even before the pandemic, organisations were facing an increasingly complex and unpredictable future, driven by wider technological, societal, and economic trends.

Globalisation and technological change are forcing organisations to embrace new competition and complex challenges. Technology continues to disrupt previously successful business models. Working lives have been extended and individuals are increasingly seeking more workforce flexibility. In such a rapidly evolving employment landscape, the ability to anticipate and prepare for future skills needs is increasingly critical for organisations.

All of this impacts how organisations facilitate learning at work. In this fast-changing world, learning needs to evolve and it must be accessible, agile and flexible. To respond, organisations need to change where, when and how learning is delivered: increasingly in the flow of work, not in venues; via digital technologies which enable learning to be available anytime and anywhere; and through curation, not just creation, harnessing the growth of rich, readily available online content. Moreover, emerging technologies such as augmented and virtual reality, artificial intelligence and mobile solutions enable personalised and targeted learning that impacts performance. While organisations and business leaders focus more and more on productivity and adaptability, they need to provide learning solutions that support these outcomes directly.

The *Learning and Skills at Work* survey results reveal that while some progress has been made, many organisations are struggling to change and significant gaps remain in the understanding and practice needed to facilitate the necessary change.



**Organisations are increasingly recognising the need to improve line management capabilities, but more needs to be done to address skills gaps and prepare for the future.**

Our research shows that improving people management capabilities is the top people priority for organisations, and it's encouraging to see that employers are increasingly recognising the fundamental role people managers play in addressing workplace skills and improving productivity. However, survey evidence also suggests that, in practice, too few organisations are prioritising line management development, training and support.

Many of the issues that need to be tackled to create future-fit organisations are relatively low down in terms of both organisational and people priorities. For example, while succession planning, developing future leaders, and increased workforce flexibility/agility are identified as a top-three priority by under a fifth of organisations, only 4% of organisations identify the need to reskill employees affected by automation and just 8% identified developing 'soft skills', skills which are increasingly critical in the age of automation.

A third of organisations state that they are unable to address skills gaps in their organisations; this is likely to have a knock-on impact on productivity and performance, hampering organisations' ability to introduce new products, processes, or services. In fact, organisations who reported that they had higher-than-average productivity were three times more likely to report that they were able to tackle skills gaps compared with those with below-average productivity.



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**Learning and development functions are getting closer to the business, but to support this shift, more attention needs to be paid to the mix of roles and skillsets in the learning function.**

If learning is to positively impact business performance, it has to get much closer to the business and there needs to be greater clarity in the learning team about business drivers. Encouragingly, the research shows that, increasingly, learning is structurally positioned outside of HR and closer to operations, and in over half of organisations the principle responsibility for identifying learning need sits with either line managers or senior directors. This has benefits in diagnosing performance needs, engaging managers in the design and delivery process, and facilitating learning solutions in the flow of work.

However, the evidence suggests that many organisations are struggling to achieve the mix of skills and capabilities needed to evolve their learning functions and support this shift.

With an increasing move to provide learning opportunities in the flow of work, traditional learning solutions will be inadequate; however, roles such as face-to-face trainer/facilitator still dominate L&D teams. While it is encouraging to see the emergence of L&D business partnering, the use of performance consultants, who link business needs with learning solutions, are only reported by a small minority of organisations. New roles that support learning in the moment of need, such as digital asset creator, community manager, and curator researcher, are also rare. While there is some welcome evidence of the use of data analysts, very few organisations have roles that are dedicated to evaluation and impact tracking. The lack of data analytical capacity hampers the ability of organisations to take informed decisions and identify current and future skills.

**While use of technology to support learning has increased in importance since the last survey in 2015, organisations are still failing to leverage emergent technologies that enable learning any time, any place, any way.**

It's never been more important to ensure that organisations have technology in place to support employees to learn any time, any place, any way. Implementing effective digital learning and collaboration tools will continue to be vital as some organisations work remotely, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 'in-person' group learning activities are limited. Yet, despite the prevalence of technology in all aspects of work and working lives, face-to-face remains the most popular delivery method at the time this survey was conducted.

Technology-enabled delivery, however, has increased in importance, with the vast majority of organisations now using some form of technology to support learning. The most commonly used methods are webinars, learning management systems and open education resources. Yet, the adoption of more emergent technologies to support the delivery any time, any place, any way is sluggish: augmented reality, virtual reality, and mobile applications are used by only a very small proportion of organisations.

Learning technology infrastructure and innovation is much more prevalent in larger companies, which raises the challenge to smaller organisations to leverage the use of readily available technologies such as personal smart devices.

Significantly, the vast majority of organisations report barriers to the delivery of learning and skills initiatives, with time, money and management support topping the list, calling into question the value placed on learning in many organisations.



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**There is a long way to go to create supportive organisational learning environments.**

To support organisational, individual and team learning, organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things. Encouragingly, most organisations report that learning is aligned to organisational goals and that easily accessible resources are in place to support organisational learning. However, just two-thirds report that they have a clear vision for learning, suggesting there is still room for improvement in aligning and resourcing learning to meet key priorities.

And while organisations think that organisations have the vision, strategy and resources in place, the results on the prevalence of wider people management practices, the role of line management, and individual-level need suggest there is a long way to go to create a supportive learning environment in many organisations.

Wider people management practices play a key role in how skills are developed and deployed at work. Well-designed work which offers opportunities for growth and the ability and autonomy to problem-solve alongside a supportive workplace culture that fosters trust, commitment and engagement, all enable employees to develop their skills further and more effectively deploy the skills they already have. However, despite this, only a minority of organisations report that these types of practices are prevalent characteristics of their organisations.

Line managers have a critical role to play in defining learning need, supporting employees to transfer what they learn back into the workplace, and facilitating continuous learning, yet only fulfil this role in a minority of organisations. Employees, on the other hand, should understand why they are engaging in learning, have clear learning and development plans in place, be allowed time away from their day-to-day jobs for learning and be enabled to take responsibility for their learning. However, again, these practices are only prevalent in a minority of organisations.

**Organisations still face challenges in demonstrating the impact of learning and development; without being able to measure learning impact, valuable time and resources are wasted.**

The majority of organisations assess the impact of their L&D initiatives in some way, although evaluations are often sadly limited to participant satisfaction. Only 16% assess the behaviour change of participants by assessing the transfer of learning into the workplace. The vast majority still encounter barriers to evaluation, with lack of learner or management time and the pressure of other business priorities the most commonly reported obstacles.

The lack of robust evaluation and measurement of impact creates a catch-22 situation: organisations don't invest in evaluating learning and development because it isn't seen as important (they lack the time, resources or support), or too hard, and learning and development activity isn't valued because organisations can't demonstrate its impact. Without being able to measure learning impact, valuable time and resources are wasted.

Measuring the impact, transfer and engagement of learning and development activities can't just be done by a questionnaire. Effective learning and development evaluation needs to be linked to learning needs and focused on evaluating learning outcomes, not inputs. Where L&D has a clear vision and strategy and is aligned with business need, evaluations tend to be more prevalent, in-depth, and the data collected more widely used.



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### Organisations are having to do more with less. Learning and development functions have experienced increased workloads, but a squeeze on budgets, headcounts and use of external suppliers.

The vast majority of large organisations have a learning and development budget, compared with just a third of SMEs. Encouragingly, resources are spread relatively evenly across different levels of employees, by seniority.

Learning functions are often having to do more with less. While most report overall increases in workload, only a minority report increases in headcount, budget and use of external providers/suppliers.

While limited resources are not necessarily a barrier and can actually help to drive innovation and greater business alignment, the survey results suggest that organisations who see increased resources experience a virtuous circle of internal and external investment. For instance, those organisations who reported that learning and development budgets had increased were also much more likely to report growth in headcount, increased investment in learning technologies, and increased use of internal subject-matter experts.

Gain insight into the steps other organisations are taking to transform their learning practices in the accompanying case studies collection,

[Transforming learning: examples of organisational approaches](#)

### Recommendations

The research shows that while some progress has been made, a number of areas still need to be addressed if learning is to be seen as a strategic enabler for the business, driving productivity, performance, unlocking potential and meeting the needs of a rapidly changing work and employment context.

In light of the findings, and challenges identified, we set out a number of calls to action for practitioners:



**1 Align your learning and development strategy with organisational need:** If learning is to positively impact business performance, it has to get much closer to the business and there needs to be greater clarity in the learning team about business drivers.



**2 Increase the knowledge and capability of your learning function:** For learning and development to become more relevant, agile and effective in organisations, L&D professionals must increase their knowledge and capability.



**3 Demonstrate value through evaluating learning impact:** Effective learning and development evaluation needs to be linked to learning needs and focused on evaluating learning outcomes, not inputs.



**4 Consider the wider learning environment in your organisation:** To support learning at an individual and organisational level, organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things.



**5 Embrace technologies that support learning and collaboration:** It's never been more important to ensure that organisations have technology in place to support employees to learn any time, any place, any way. Technology has the power to make learning not just more efficient but also more effective through enabling the creation of immersive, engaging and interactive content.



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**6 Address transferable skill gaps as well as technical:** Employers increasingly depend on highly transferable core skills, such as communication, teamworking and problem-solving. Alongside addressing technical skill gaps, learning and development professionals should look to build these essential skills.



**7 Future-proof your organisation by understanding the types of skills you need and how you will source them:** Knowing and understanding the skills you need and how you will source them is critical. By taking a proactive, methodical approach to workforce planning, HR and L&D practitioners play a critical role in supporting businesses to understand current and emerging risks and opportunities and put in place the resources needed to respond effectively.



**8 Ensure that your people managers have the knowledge, skills, behaviours and resources to support learning:** Learning professionals can support line managers by: helping them understand the key role they play in supporting learning, whether this is formal or informal; supporting them to prioritise time and resources for learning; building support for L&D into management objectives; and encouraging them to be role models, to demonstrate how learning is part of everyone's role.



**9 Don't press pause on learning and development; continue to invest in the skills of your workforce:** We know that in times of crisis learning and development activities are often the earliest and hardest hit activity, yet the ability to learn, adapt and continuously improve in the face of such a challenge will be vital.

## 4 Operational context and skills challenges

Our research shows organisations are prioritising the organisational and people development needs of today over those of tomorrow. More needs to be done to focus on identifying the emerging industrial, technological and demographic trends which will reshape organisations and work in the future to prevent internal skills gaps widening.

### Organisations are mainly focused on today's organisational and people challenges

Organisations are mainly focused on the here and now of organisational and people challenges. The top three organisational priorities identified (Figure 1) are:

- achieving growth targets (27%)
- improving customer experience (25%)
- increasing productivity, improving culture and reducing costs (all at 24%).

And the top three people priorities identified are (Figure 2):

- improving line managers' people management capabilities (22%)
- improving staff retention (20%)
- improving employee motivation/behaviour (20%).



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It is encouraging to see that improving line managers' people management capabilities is a top priority for organisations. The importance of tackling people management and leadership deficits to help address weakness in productivity is increasingly recognised by policy-makers and business leaders alike.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as a later section will show, too few organisations are, in practice, providing line managers with the training they need to fulfil this role effectively (just 59% of organisations say they provide line managers with training on how they manage and develop people; section 6).

Figures 1 and 2 show that many of the issues that need to be tackled to create future-fit organisations are relatively low down in terms of both organisational and people priorities. For example, while succession planning (18%), developing future leaders (17%), and increased workforce flexibility/agility (17%) are identified as a top three priority by under a fifth of organisations, only 4% of organisations identify the need to reskill employees affected by automation and just 8% identified developing 'soft skills', skills which are increasingly critical in the age of automation.

Reducing risk is identified as a top priority by just 3% of organisations. This is likely to have shifted in recent weeks as organisations rapidly respond to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

**Reflective question**

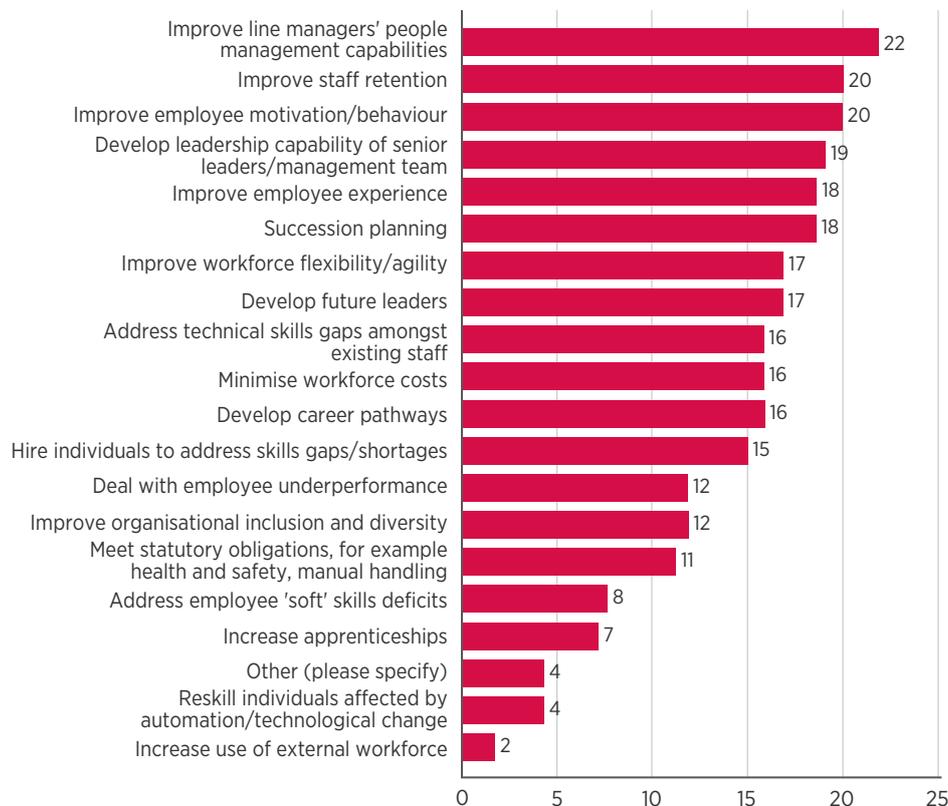
In your context, to what extent is learning focused on immediate needs to the detriment of key capabilities that will be needed in the future?

**Figure 1: What are the top three priorities for your organisation for the next 12 months? Please choose up to three priorities (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Figure 2: And what are the top three ‘people’ priorities for your organisation in the next 12 months? Please choose up to three priorities (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

### General management is identified as the business area with the greatest need of skills development

The organisational area with the greatest need for skills development among employees is general management, identified by a third of organisations, suggesting a degree of alignment with people priorities reported in Figure 2. This is followed by customer service (23%) and IT (12%).

There are limited sector differences, with the exception of sales/relationship management, which is arguably more important for private sector organisations (reported by 20% of respondents) than public (5%) or voluntary (8%) sector employers.

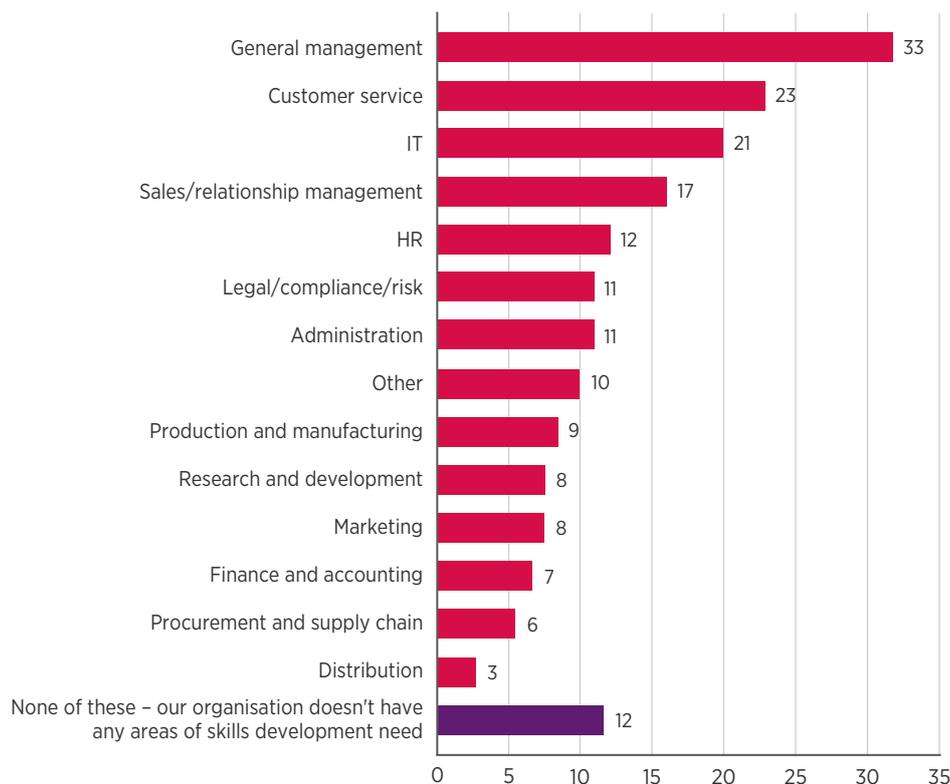
Larger employers (250+ employees) are more likely to identify skills development needs in general management (38%) and HR (16%) compared with smaller employers (figures of 26% and 7% respectively).

One in 12 organisations report that they have no area in need of skills development, with SMEs more likely to report this compared with larger organisations (14% versus 9% respectively). However, this may be due to a lack of capacity and/or knowledge on how to identify skills gaps or weakness rather than to a difference in actual skill gap prevalence.

#### Reflective question

The development of manager capability is increasingly important. In your context, to what extent is this group targeted in learning design and delivery? What are their key development needs?

**Figure 3: In which areas of your organisation are you seeing the greatest need for skills development amongst employees? Please select all that apply (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Only two-thirds think that they are able to effectively address skills gaps in their organisations**

Two-thirds (67%) of the organisations who identify skills gaps think that they are able to effectively address them, with the remaining third reporting they aren't able to tackle them (19%), or that they don't know if they can (14%):

- Smaller employers (under 250 employees) are more confident than larger employers in their ability to tackle internal skills gaps (75% compared with 62% of larger organisations).
- Just 57% of public sector organisations think that they can effectively address skills gaps, compared with 70% of private sector employers and 68% of voluntary sector organisations.
- Organisations that reported that they have higher than average productivity were three times more likely to report that they are able to tackle skills gaps compared with those with below average productivity (figures of 80% and 20% respectively).

Looking at the types of skills gaps employers are facing (Figure 4), technical skills, that is, the specialist knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific role, topped the list of skills that need improvement. In the age of automation, developing technical fluency will be important, as will 'human', 'soft' skills development (read more about the impact of automation on skills in our report *People and Machines: From hype to reality*). It is these skill areas that closely followed technical skills, with communication, teamworking, and resilience and learning skills needing improvement among employees in around a third of organisations.

Sector and size differences in the types of skills in need of development included:

- Resilience and learning skills were identified by a larger proportion of public and voluntary sector organisations (47% and 39%) compared with private sector employers (28%).

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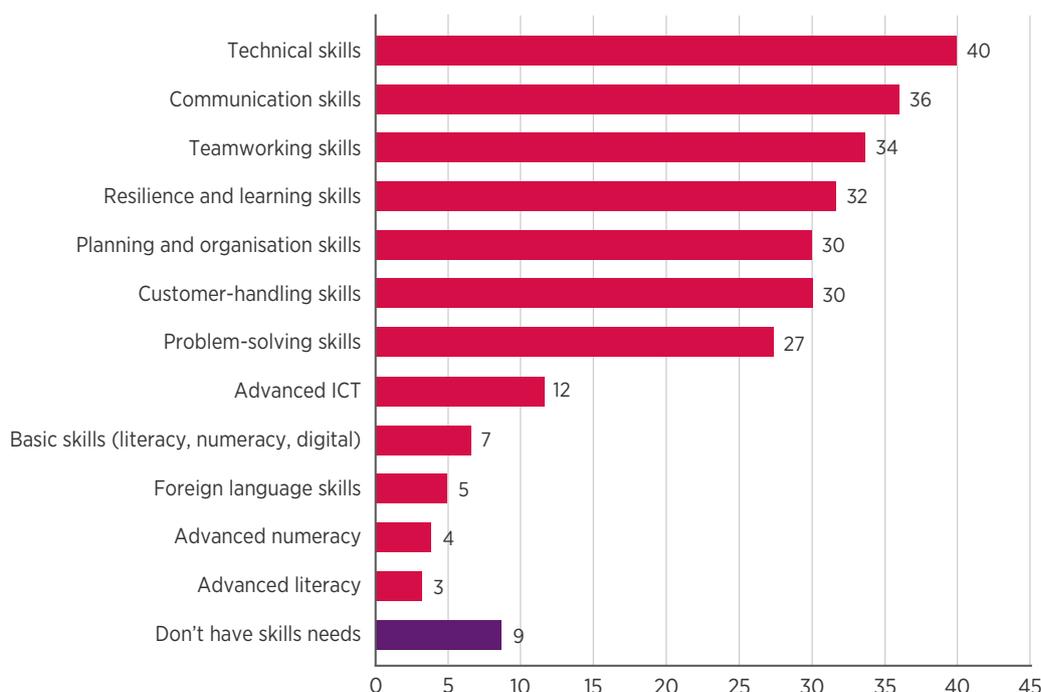
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- Larger employers (250+ employees) were significantly more likely to report the need to develop advanced ICT skills (developing software, applications or programming; use computer syntax or statistical analysis packages) compared with smaller employers (14% compared with 8%).
- SMEs were almost twice as likely (11%) to report that they had no skills in need of improvement among employees compared with larger organisations (6%).

**Reflective question**

In your context, what is the balance of developing technical and soft skills? Is that blend right?

**Figure 4: And which particular skills areas are in greatest need of improvement amongst employees in your organisation? Please select all that apply (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Organisations typically adopt a 'build' approach to address skills gaps**

Dave Ulrich's 'build versus buy versus borrow' resourcing approach is about whether an organisation prefers to develop skills internally ('build'), or via recruitment from outside the organisation ('buy') or from a contingent labour supply ('borrow'). Increasingly organisations are turning towards a fourth option: 'bot', that is, to automate tasks or roles affected by skill gaps. The choice to 'build, buy, borrow or bot' depends in part on the internal and external supply of the skills needed, but is also affected by whether the organisation has the capacity and commitment to train people internally.<sup>2</sup>



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More productive firms are more likely to train and invest to tackle skills gaps: 75% of organisations who report that they have above-average productivity adopt a ‘build’ strategy compared with just 42% of those who report below-average productivity.

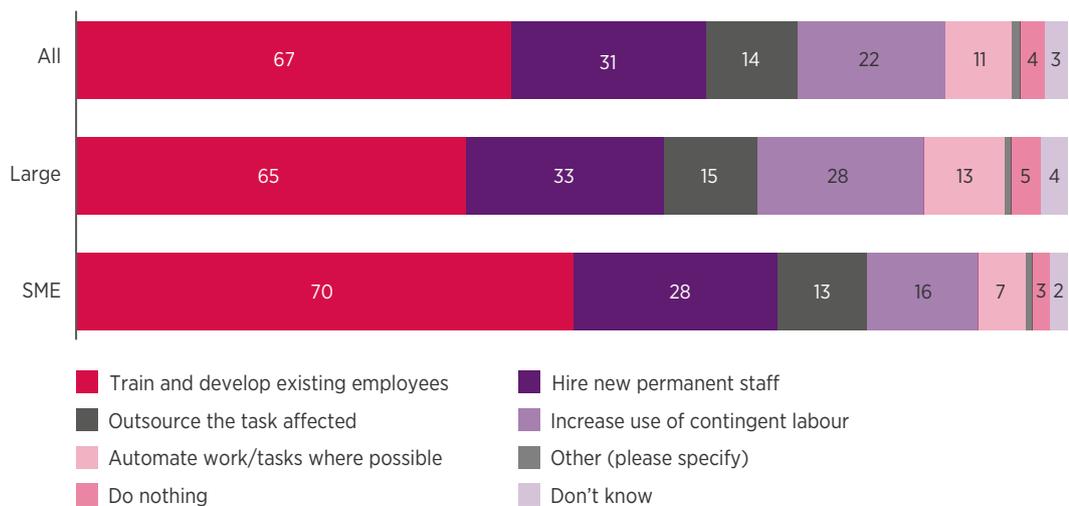
As well as gaining a competitive return on investment in home-grown talent, ‘build strategies’ generally have a positive effect on retention by creating internal opportunities for existing employees. The survey data supports this, with organisations with longer average staff retention more likely to take a ‘build’ approach to tackling skills gaps (48% for those with average retention of five years or more compared with 40% of employers with retention of a year or less).

Figure 5 shows that the most commonly reported response used by organisations to address skills gaps is to train and develop existing staff (67%), followed by hiring new staff (31%). Larger organisations are more likely to increase the use of contingent labour than smaller employers (28% versus 16%) and to automate tasks affected by skills gaps where possible (13% versus 7%). The clear preference to develop skills through training existing staff rather than hiring or outsourcing presents both an opportunity and challenge to organisational learning teams.

**Reflective question**

What is your strategy to meet the challenge of the skills needs you will develop internally, and those which will be met by an external hiring approach? How might this need to change in the future?

**Figure 5: Typical response to tackling skills gaps (%)**



Base: all respondents excluding missing: 1,180; SMEs (under 250 employees): 499; large employers (250+ employees): 682

## 5 The learning function

To respond to a fast-changing and complex external environment, the learning function needs to become more diverse and more agile. It also needs to be business-focused and able to identify how to drive productivity and performance. But it's very difficult to transform learning if you don't have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to know what's possible. The survey results reveal that many organisations are struggling to change, with traditional roles dominating the learning and development function.

### In larger organisations, the learning and development function is usually incorporated within HR

Organisations that have L&D activities tend to incorporate them into the HR function (Figure 6):

- In 45% of organisations, L&D is either a specialist function/role within the HR department (29%) or is part of generalist HR activities (16%).
- L&D activities are split between HR and another area of the business in 14% of organisations. This is particularly the case among larger organisations (250+ employees) (Table 1).

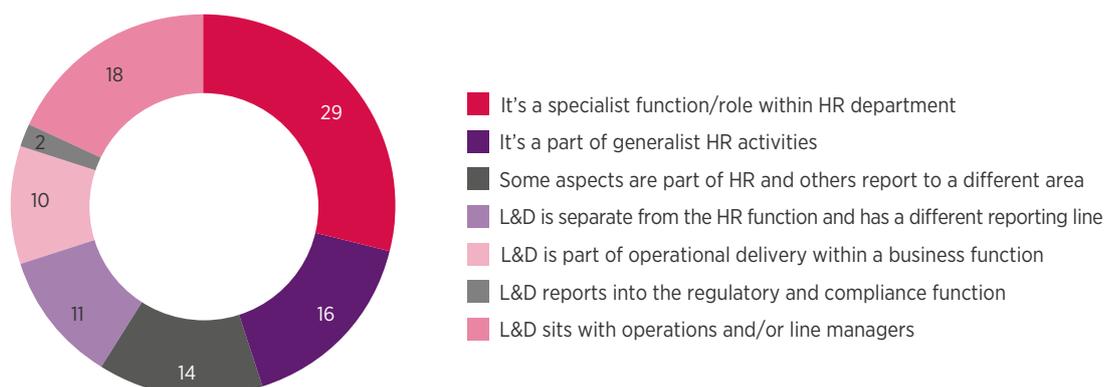
In the remaining 41% of organisations, learning and development activities are completely separate from the HR function – having either a separate function and different reporting line (11%), sitting within the business function (10%) or with operations and/or line managers (18%). This pattern is much more common in smaller organisations, with over a third (36%) reporting that they do not have an L&D function and that learning sits with operations and/or line managers (Table 1).

The increasing shift for learning to be structurally positioned outside of HR and closer to operations has benefits in diagnosing performance needs, engaging managers in the design and delivery process, and facilitating learning solutions in the flow of work.

#### Reflective question

With organisations clearly taking different approaches, is the learning team in your context located in the most effective structural position and reporting line?

Figure 6: The structure of the learning and development function (% of respondents)



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Table 1: The structure of the learning and development function, by size and sector (%)**

	Work sector			Size	
	Private	Public	Voluntary	SME	Large
Specialist function/role within the HR department	28	32	22	11	41
Part of generalist HR activities	18	10	11	22	12
Some aspects are part of HR and others report to a different area of the business	13	14	11	9	17
L&D is separate from the HR function and has a different reporting line	9	18	13	7	14
L&D is part of operational delivery within a business function	9	12	15	12	9
L&D reports into the regulatory and compliance function	3	3	1	4	2
No L&D function, it sits with operations and/or line managers	19	9	25	36	5

Base: private: 913; public: 219; voluntary: 85; SME: 499; large: 682

### Learning and development functions vary considerably in size

The number of people employed in the learning and development function increases with size of organisation, but there is considerable variation, particularly in larger organisations (Table 2), as demonstrated by the difference between the mean (the average) and the median (the middle number) numbers of people employed.

**Table 2: Number of employees in learning and development function**

	Mean	Median
2-9	1	1
10-99	3	1
100-249	19	2
250-999	24	4
1,000+	166	12
SME (under 250)	7	1
Large (250+)	118	8
Total	74	4

Base: all those with L&D function: 972

### Traditional roles dominate the L&D function

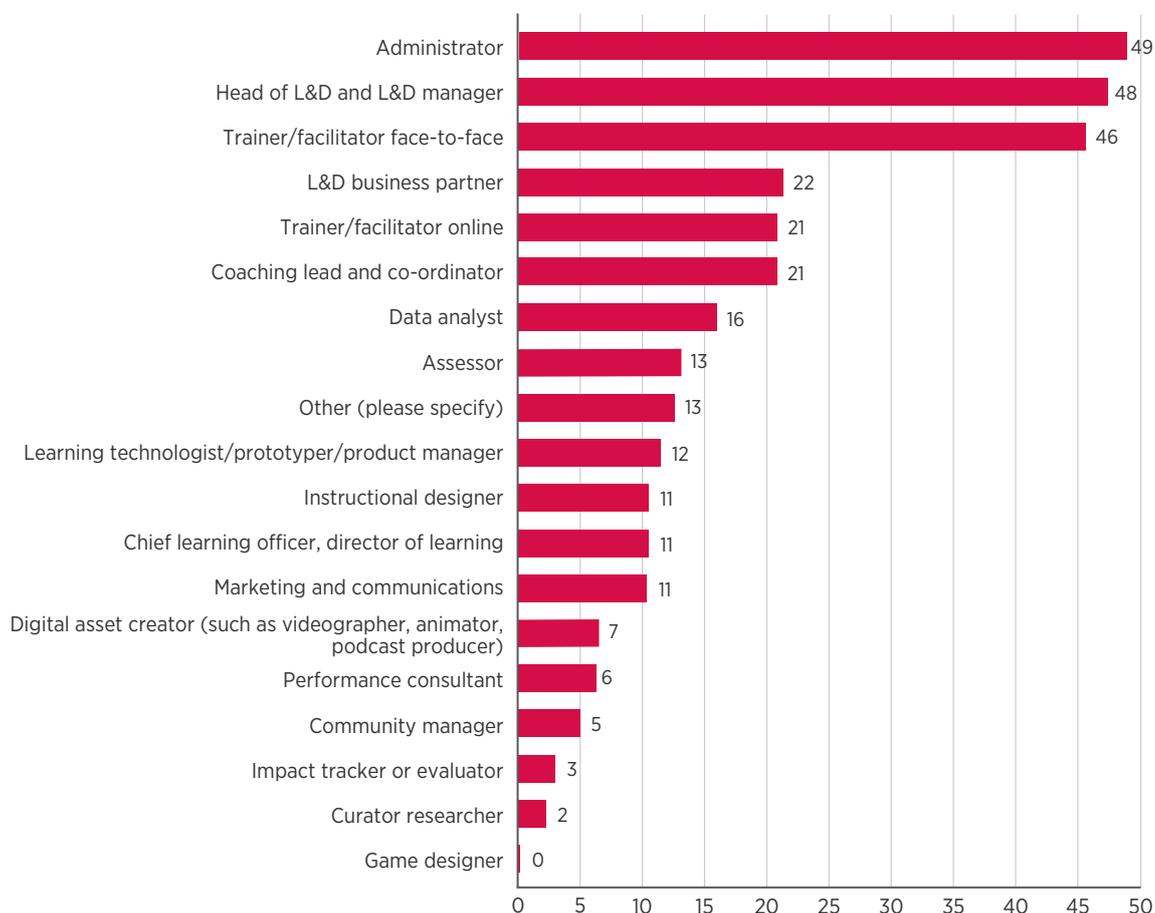
The most commonly reported roles in learning and development functions are administrator (reported by 49% of respondents), head of L&D/L&D manager (48%), and face-to-face trainer/facilitator (46%). These are followed by L&D business partner, online trainer/facilitator and coaching lead/co-ordinator (Figure 7).

On the other hand, design roles, such as learning technologist/product owner (12%), digital asset creator (7%), and instructional designers (11%) – who create, curate, design and support digital learning experiences – are reported by a minority of survey respondents. It may be the case that some of these roles are outsourced, for instance, carried out by freelancers on an ad hoc basis; however, data presented in the following section suggests that the majority of learning content is developed in-house.

For learning to support performance and productivity, it must be closely aligned with the business. While it is encouraging to see the emergence of L&D business partnering (22%), the use of performance consultants, who link business needs with learning solutions, are reported by just 6% of organisations. With an increasing move to provide learning opportunities in the flow of work, traditional learning solutions will be inadequate; however, roles such as face-to-face trainer/facilitator still dominate L&D teams. New roles that support learning in the moment of need, such as digital asset creator (7%), community manager (5%) and curator researcher (2%), are rare. While there is some welcome evidence of the use of data analysts (16%), dedicated evaluation and impact tracking (3%) is a rarely defined role.

Social and collaborative learning – highlighted as one of the top three areas requiring L&D practice improvement in the CIPD’s 2019 report *Professionalising Learning and Development* – is an area which benefits from focused support and resourcing; however, only 5% of organisations report having a dedicated learning community manager.

**Figure 7: Roles that exist within L&D function (%)**



Base: all those with an L&D function (don't know responses removed): 786



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While all role types are more prevalent among larger organisations (over 250 employees) compared with smaller employers (under 250 employees), more emerging learning and development roles are still only reported by a minority of larger organisations (Figure 8).<sup>3</sup>

**Reflective question**

Which emerging L&D roles are essential in your context to design and deliver learning that supports organisational effectiveness? What approaches and resources support learning and performance in the flow of work and what roles and skills are needed to develop these?

**Responsibility for identifying learning need depends on the size of an organisation as well as where the learning function sits**

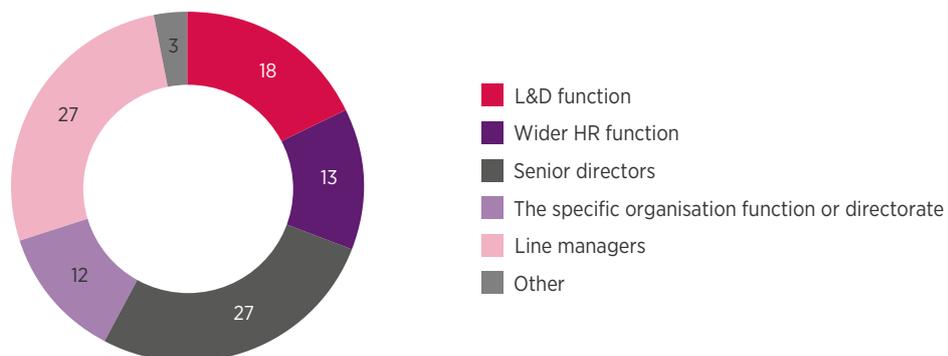
In just over half of organisations, either line managers (27%) or senior directors (27%) have the principle responsibility for identifying learning needs. This is welcome as it places needs assessments closer to the business and operations. This is followed by the learning and development function (18%) and the wider HR function (13%). There are no significant sector differences; however, there is significant variation by organisational size (Table 3):

- Senior directors have a more prominent role to play in identifying the learning required by employees in SMEs (41%) compared with larger organisations (17%).
- Line managers are reported as having a key role to play by both small (29%) and large employers (25%).
- The L&D function has a much bigger role in identifying learning needs in larger organisations – 27% of respondents identified L&D as having principle responsibility, compared with just 5% in SMEs.

**Reflective question**

In specific operational scenarios in your context, who is best placed to provide accurate insights on learning needs and to have meaningful diagnostic conversations with learners and key stakeholders?

**Figure 8: In your organisation, who has principle responsibility for identifying what learning is required by employees? (%)**



Base: all respondents (excluding missing): 1,180

**Table 3: Who has principle responsibility for identifying learning need?  
By employer size (%)**

	All employers	SMEs (under 250 employees)	Large employers (250+ employees)
L&D function	18	5	27
Wider HR function	13	10	16
Senior directors	27	41	17
The specific organisation function/directorate	12	10	13
Line managers	27	29	25
Other (please specify)	3	6	2

Base: all employers: 1,180; SMEs: 499; large employers: 682

## 6 Trends in L&D practices and methods

Face-to-face and in-house methods of delivery and development models remain popular. While use of technology to support learning has increased in importance since the last survey in 2015, organisations are still failing to leverage emergent technologies which enable learning any time, any place, any way.

### Face-to-face delivery is still dominant

In just under half of organisations, the use of digital (47%) and blended learning (43%) is limited, delivering less than 20% of learning (Figure 9). Face-to-face delivery, on the other hand, makes up a considerably larger proportion, contributing to the majority of learning delivered (60–100%) in 44% of organisations. With the desire to facilitate accessible, personalised learning in the flow of work and to support remote working, this is a concern, highlighting the pressing need for digital transformation.

The reliance on face-to-face delivery varies considerably by the size of an organisation (Figure 10). Face-to-face delivery is much more prominent among smaller employers (2–9 employees and 10–99 employees) where in half (58% and 50% respectively) of organisations the vast majority of learning (60–100%) is delivered entirely face-to-face; this drops to just over a third of organisations with more than 250 employees.

Digital learning transformation is most likely in organisations of 250+ employees. While learning technology infrastructure and innovation may be more prevalent in larger companies, this raises the challenge to smaller organisations to leverage the use of readily available technologies such as personal smart devices.

### Reflective question

While face-to-face learning has a place in the learning delivery ecosystem, in your context, what part does accessible, personalised, digitally enabled learning in the flow of work play?

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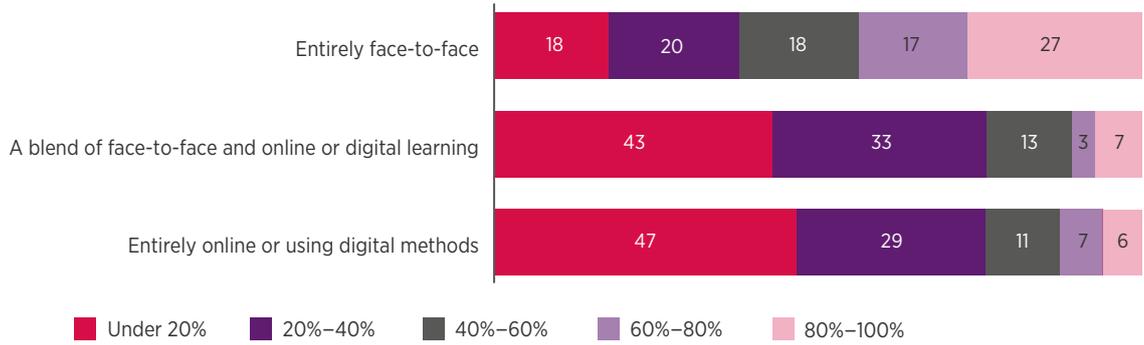
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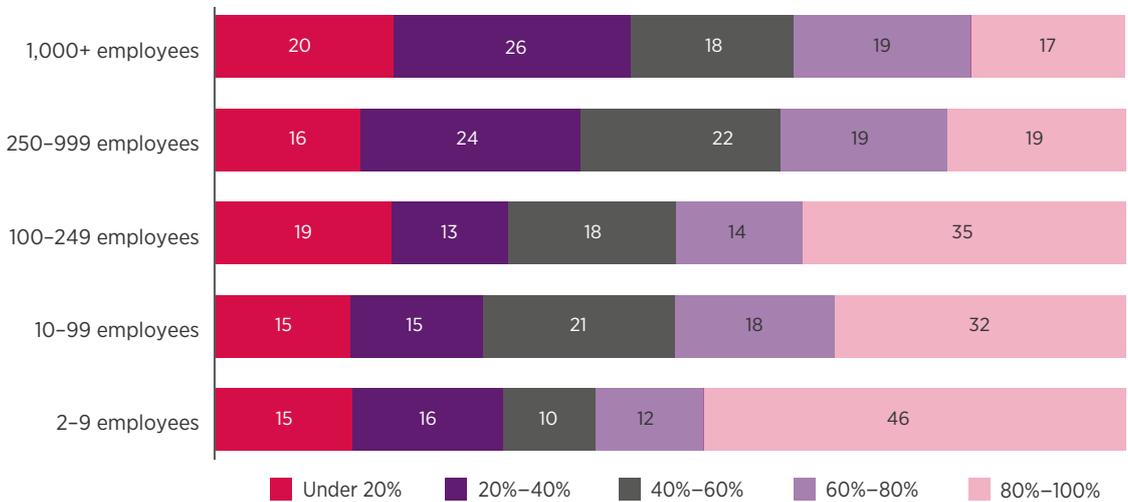
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**Figure 9: Proportion of L&D activity delivered face-to-face, through learning technologies and a combination of both (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Figure 10: Proportion of learning that is delivered entirely face-to-face, by employee size band (%)**



Base: 1,000+ employees: 290; 250-999 employees: 112; 100-249 employees: 65; 10-99 employees: 210; 2-9 employees: 129

**The majority of learning content is developed in-house**

On average, in about two-thirds of organisations the majority of learning and development content is developed in-house. Use of external suppliers – to develop the majority of learning content – is only reported by 15% of organisations, with a further one-fifth (22%) reporting an equal split between in-house development and use of external supplier. The proportion of content developed in-house versus externally is not significantly affected by organisational size or sector.

Given that in-house development is dominant, it is of some concern that only a minority of organisations report roles in their learning and development functions that support curation, design, online/digital development and learning in the flow of work (section 5).

**Reflective question**

With much free and pay-for quality content now available online, what learning initiatives in your context would benefit from curated resources? Who will source those and how can they be best integrated into the learning?



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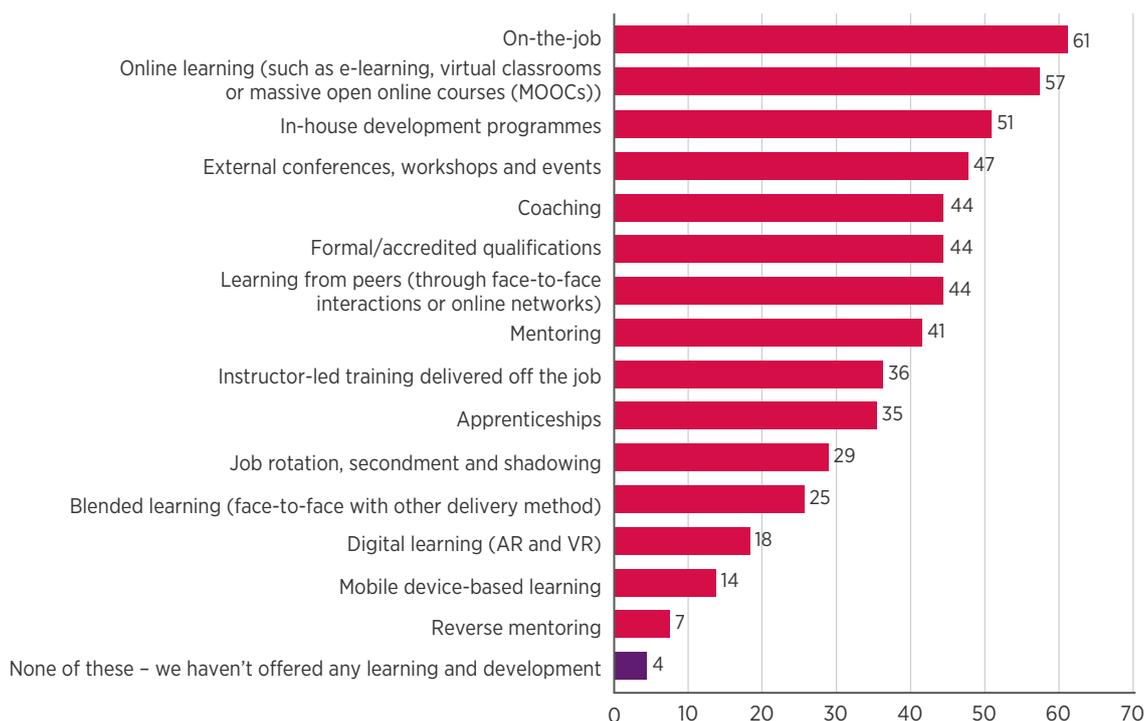
### On-the-job training remains the most popular method

The most commonly reported learning and development method was on-the-job training – used in the last 12 months by 61% of organisations (Figure 11). This was followed closely by online learning, used by 57% of organisations. The popularity of online learning and development methods has increased since the survey was last conducted in 2015 (where it polled at number 4 in the rankings, at 29%<sup>4</sup>).

In-house development programmes, attending external conferences, workshops and events, formal/accredited learning, coaching, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring are also used by around two-fifths of organisations.

Despite the shift towards more forms of online organisational learning, more emergent forms of technology-enabled delivery are considerably less common. Digital (augmented and virtual reality) and mobile device-based learning are used by just 18% and 14% of organisations respectively, suggesting that we have a way to go to achieve ‘any time, any place, any way’ and ‘learning in the flow of work’ models of learning delivery.

**Figure 11: Which of the following types of learning and development has your organisation arranged or funded for employees in the past 12 months? Please select all that apply (%)**



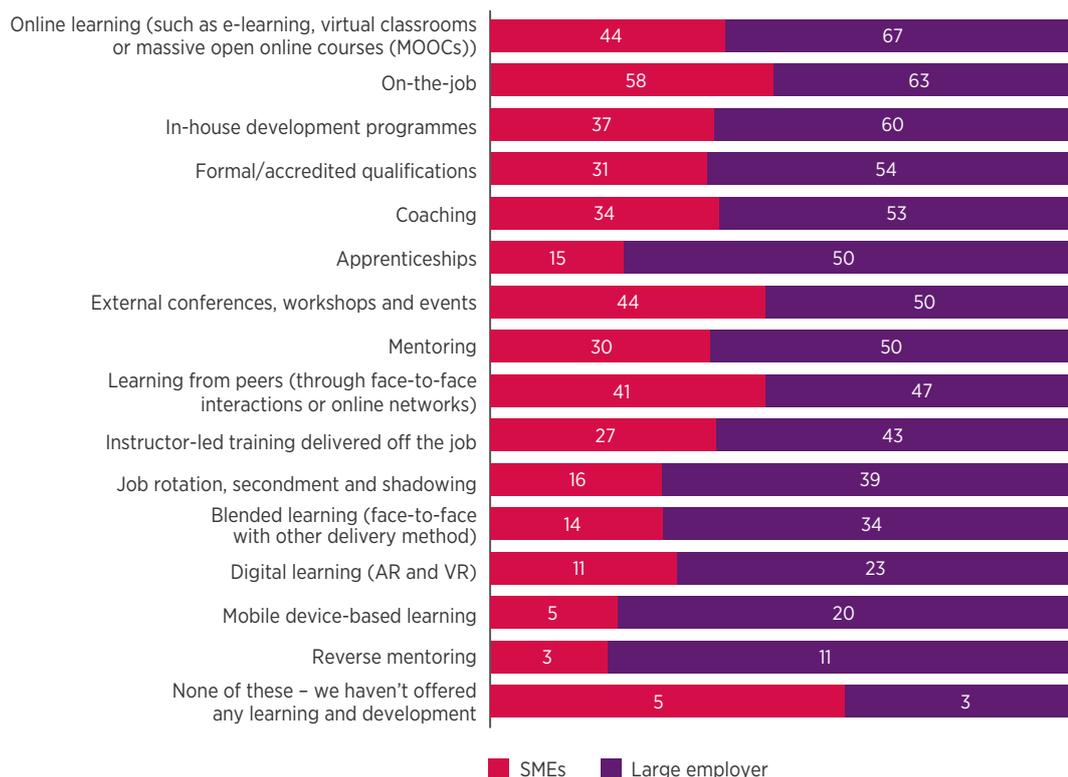
There is a higher prevalence across all types of learning and development activities among larger organisations compared with SMEs (Figure 12). The differences are particularly stark when comparing the prevalence of:

- apprenticeships – delivered by half of large organisations (over 250 employees) compared with just 15% of SMEs (under 250 employees)
- blended learning (face-to-face with other delivery method) – delivered by a third (34%) of large employers and just 14% of SMEs
- mentoring (50% compared with 30%)

- formal/accredited qualifications (54% vs 31%)
- in-house development programmes (60% vs 37%), job rotation, secondment and shadowing (39% vs 16%) are also much more prevalent among larger organisations.

Compared with SMEs, larger employers are more likely to make use of emerging technology-enabled learning and development methods such as augmented and virtual reality (23% vs 11%) and mobile device-based delivery (20% vs 5%); however, they are still only used by a minority of large employers.

**Figure 12: Types of learning and development arranged or funded for employees in the past 12 months (%)**



Base: SMEs: 499; large employers: 682

**Reflective question**

What key barriers do you face in your context to facilitate learning in the flow of work? Who is key to supporting opportunities to successfully use workplace-based solutions such as digital technologies, coaching and mentoring, and social collaboration?

**For those that use them, mobile, digital and online learning has accelerated dramatically, while external delivery methods have declined**

While overall face-to-face delivery is dominant, in organisations where technology-enabled learning has been adopted, its use is increasing dramatically. Figure 13 shows how the pattern of use of different learning and development types has shifted over the last two to three years. This shows the declining importance of some of the more traditional, and most commonly used, methods of learning and development delivery and the growing importance of technology-enabled learning (in organisations that have adopted these learning methods).





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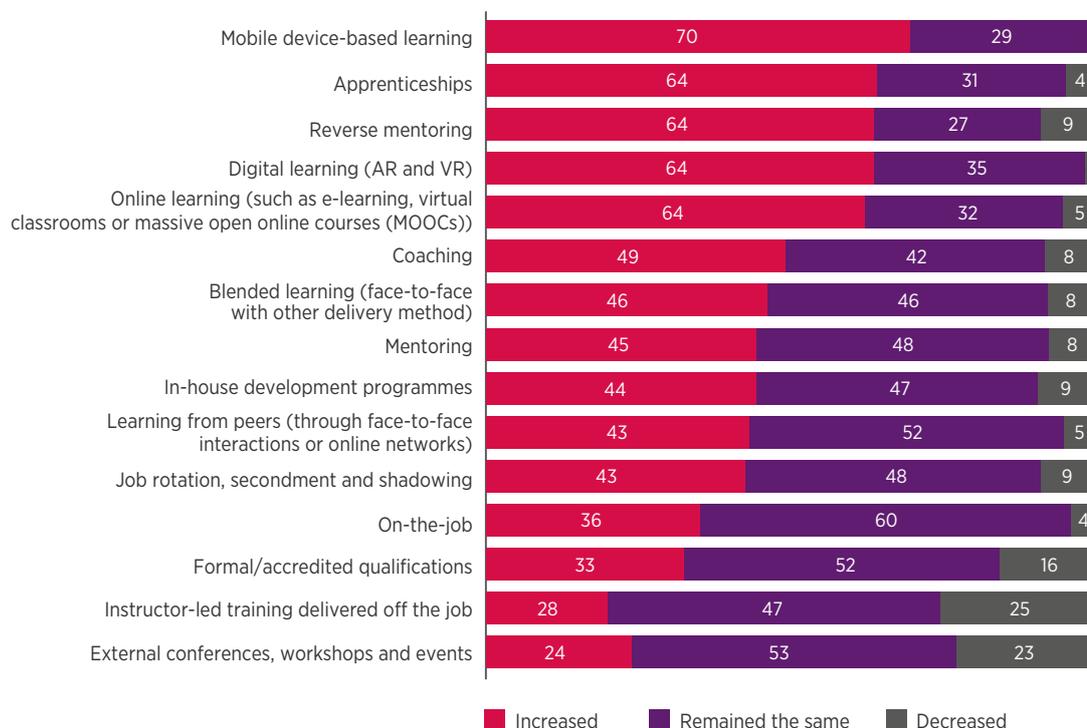
This reflects previous CIPD research on digital learning uptake,<sup>5</sup> which found that, in 2016, 98% of L&D practitioners wanted to increase access and flexibility in providing staff training. A key part of this was ensuring learning could be accessed any time, anywhere, with 59% of L&D professionals wanting their learners to use technology, such as mobile devices. As Figure 13 highlights:

- The vast majority of organisations that currently use mobile device-based and digital learning report that their use has increased over the last two to three years.
- This compares with just a quarter reporting increased use of external conferences, workshops and events. On the other hand, a quarter report that their use has declined.
- Organisations that use formal/accredited learning, instructor-led off-the-job, and on-the-job learning are more likely to report that use has remained the same rather than increased.

**Reflective question**

In many organisations, the learners’ personal smartphones are the most up-to-date and prevalent mobile technology. What opportunities are there to incorporate these mobile devices in the learning delivery ecosystem? If there are barriers to overcome, who can help facilitate change?

**Figure 13: Thinking back over the last two to three years, has your use of these types of learning and development increased, decreased or stayed the same? (%)**



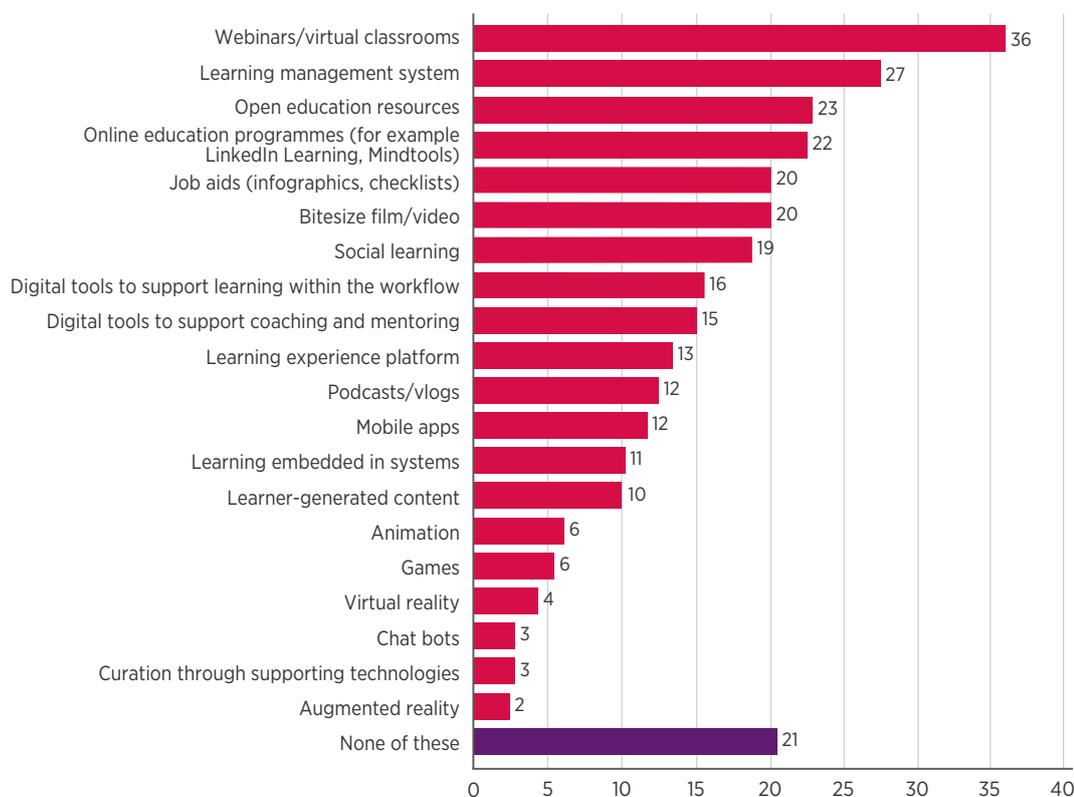
Base = those who have used L&D method: coaching: 540; online learning: 693; digital learning: 219; on-the-job: 738; learning from peers: 535; external conferences, workshops and events: 576; mentoring: 502; reverse mentoring: 87; formal/accredited qualifications: 537; apprenticeships: 427; in-house development programmes: 615; instructor-led training delivered off the job: 438; job rotation, secondment and shadowing: 354; mobile device-based learning: 165; blended learning (face-to-face with other method): 308.

**The majority of organisations use at least one form of technology to support learning; however, uptake of more emergent technologies remains low, even in larger organisations**

Learning technologies are defined as the broad range of communication and information technologies that can be used to support learning (such as online or mobile learning).

Figure 14 shows that 79% of organisations use some form of technology to support learning and collaboration, the most commonly reported including: webinars/virtual classroom (36%), learning management systems (27%) and open education sources (23%). Uptake of more emergent forms of technology to support learning – such as virtual and augmented reality, mobile apps, chatbots, games and animations – remains low.

**Figure 14: Which digital technologies is your organisation currently using to support content delivery and collaboration within your workforce? Please select all that apply (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

While larger employers (Figure 15) have higher rates of use across all technologies, in no one technology does adoption reach over 50%.

Worryingly, one-fifth of organisations do not use any technology to support learning, with smaller employers more than twice as likely to report that they don't use technology than larger employers (31% compared with just 13%).

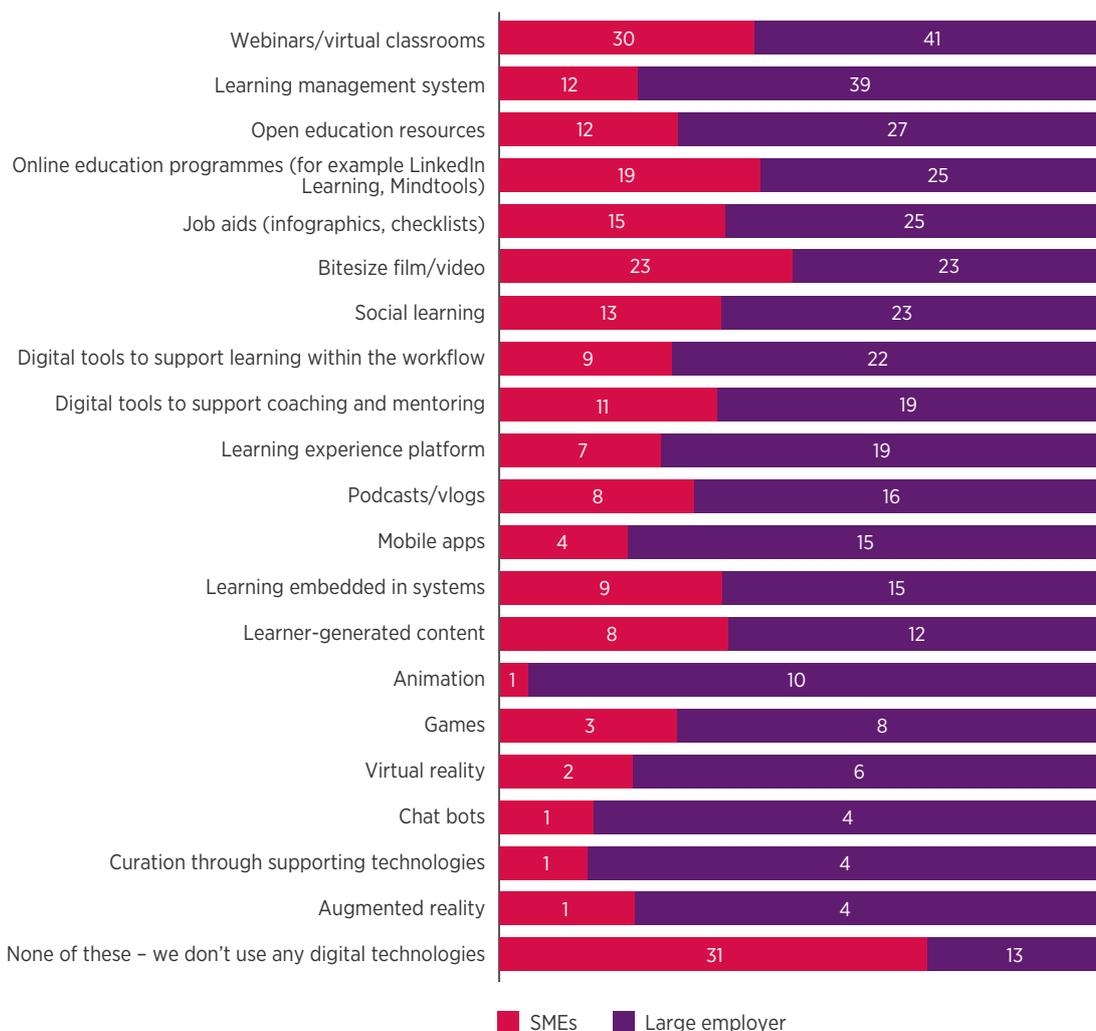
The use of online resources such as open programmes (23%) and video content (20%) is also leveraged by organisations, highlighting the value of freely available content.

Social learning is now facilitated in about one in five organisations. In the 2015 CIPD report *L&D: Evolving roles, enhancing skills*, social collaborative learning was reported as the

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top focus among L&D professionals and it now appears to be a growing trend. However, our 2019 report *Professionalising Learning and Development* found that only around half agreed their L&D team had the skills to facilitate collaborative learning. Upskilling the learning function will be key to ensure that organisations can make the most of digital tools and social, collaborative methods of learning.

**Figure 15: Use of technology to support learning and collaboration, by size of organisation (%)**



Base: SMEs: 499; large employers: 682

**Reflective question**

What technologies do you benefit from in non-work settings, for example, mobile apps and social networks? In your context, what ways can technologies now commonly used in everyday life be used to facilitate effective organisational learning?

With webinars and virtual classrooms now the most widely used technology to support learning, to what extent are the learning team and staff equipped to effectively use this approach?

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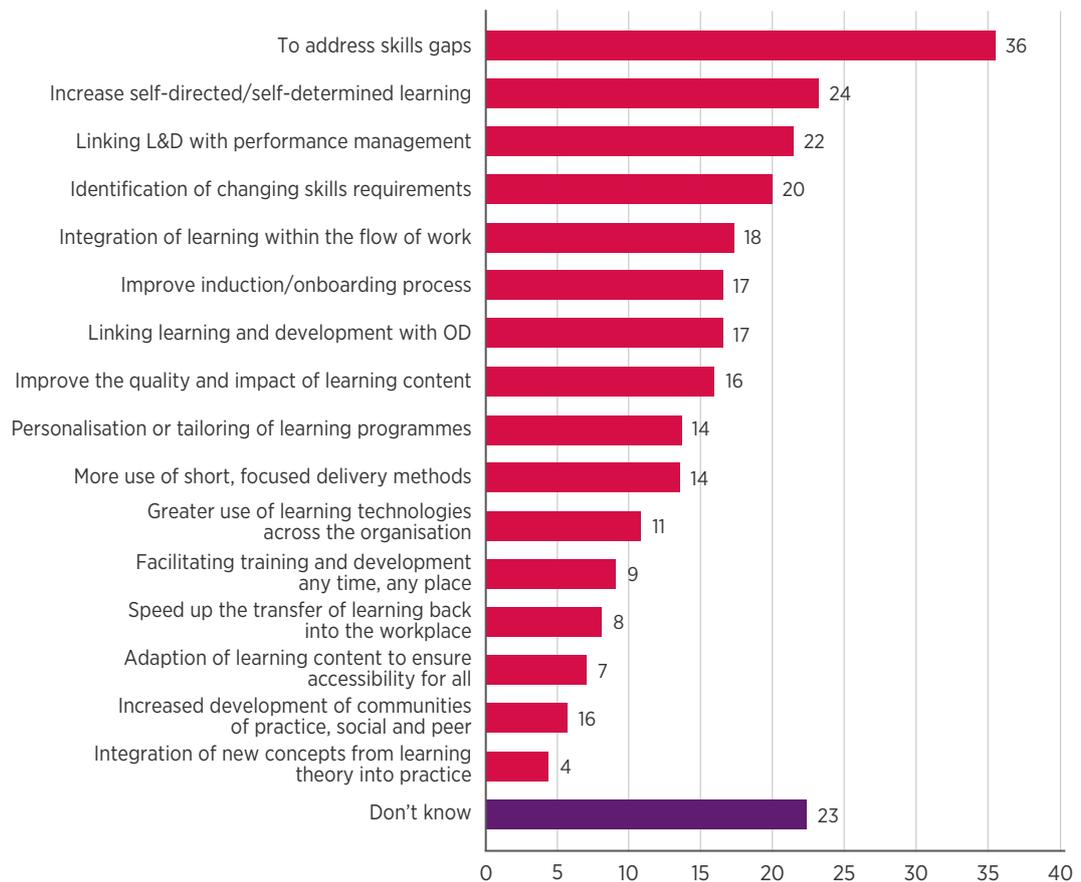
**Learning skills priorities and barriers**

The learning and skills priorities most commonly identified by employers are: addressing skills gaps (36%); increasing self-directed learning (24%); and linking learning and development with performance management (22%). All indicate an alignment to empower staff to support organisational effectiveness.

However, facilitating learning and development any time, any place is only reported as a priority by 9% of organisations, which is of some concern given the aspiration to support on-the-job learning. Speeding up the transfer of learning back into the workplace is also low on the list of organisations’ skills and learning priorities, which is crucial if learning is to translate into impact and improved performance.

It is highly concerning that 23% of respondents reported that they don’t know what their organisation’s current learning and development priorities are. Examination of the characteristics of those who reported this lack of awareness revealed that they come from a wide range of roles, including senior/chief executives, HR managers and other HR roles, as well as line managers.

**Figure 16: What are your current learning and development priorities for your organisation? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Reflective question**

Thinking of your context, in what areas might unnoticed learning needs exist? Who might be vital in the organisation to support the surfacing and diagnosis of these learning needs and opportunities?



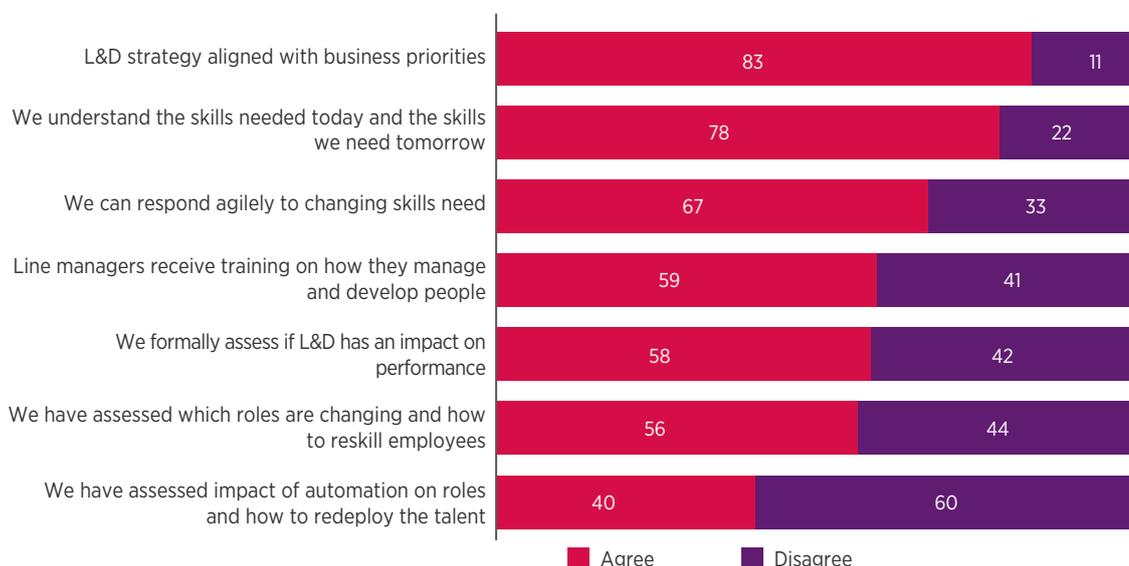
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**The majority of organisations report that learning is aligned to business need**

Figure 17 shows that the vast majority of organisations report that their learning strategy is aligned to organisation need (83%), that they understand the skills they need today and the skills of tomorrow (78%), and that they can respond agilely to changing skills needs (67%). While encouraging, this suggests perhaps a level of overconfidence among respondents given that Figure 16 suggests that 23% don't know what their L&D priorities are.

While organisations are confident that they understand the skills needs of today and tomorrow, only 40% have assessed the impact of automation on roles and just over half (56%) have assessed how roles are changing and how to reskill employees. However, given that only a very small minority identified reskilling individuals affected by automation/technological change as a top organisational priority (4%; Figure 2), this evidence implies more organisations are adopting a future-focused outlook to learning and skills than the previous section suggests.

**Figure 17: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on the key aspects of your organisation's L&D strategy and programmes? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Reflective question**

In your context, what learning is vital now to support the future needs of the organisation?

**The biggest barriers to delivery of learning and skills initiatives are time, money and management support, calling into question the value placed on learning in some organisations**

The vast majority (86%) of organisations identified at least one barrier to the delivery of learning and skills initiatives (Figure 18). Lack of learning time (41%), limited budgets (40%) and lack of management time or support (29%) topped the list of barriers to delivery.

With an increased aspiration to deliver learning in the flow of work, challenges relating to a lack of time for learners to learn coupled with the challenge of managers providing support are concerning.



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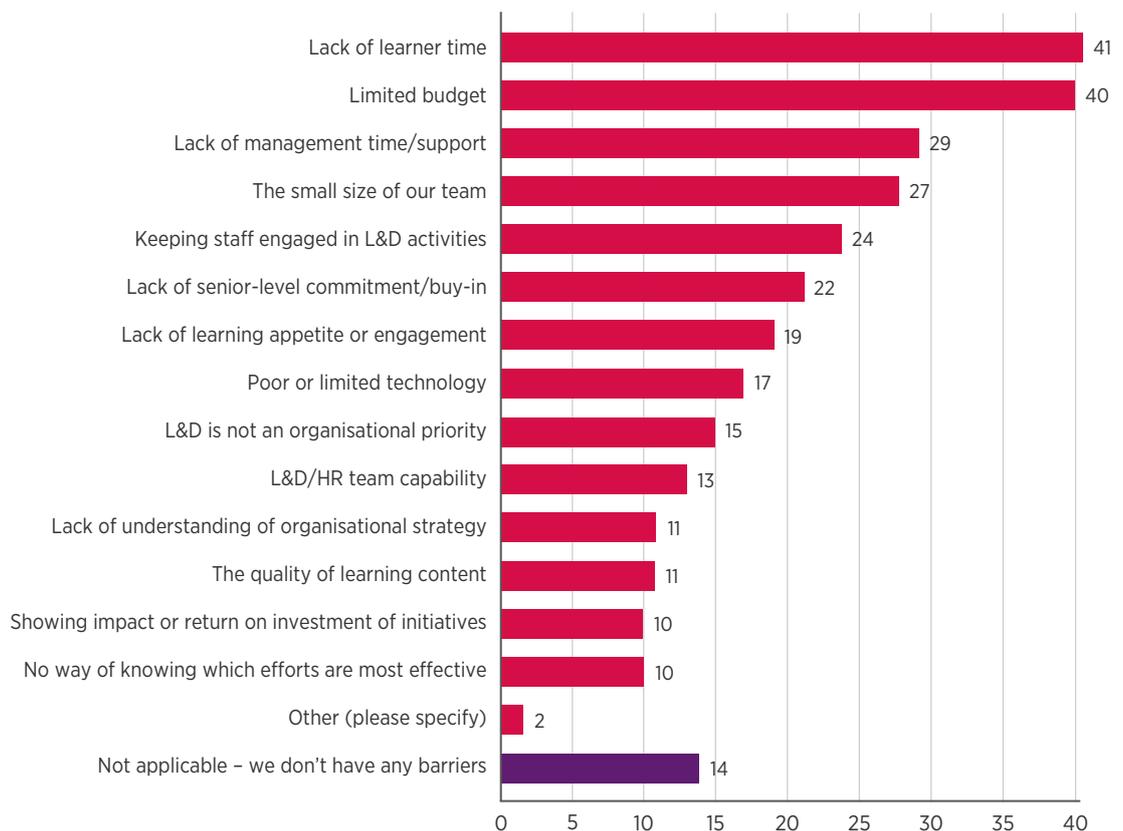
Issues to do with the size (27%) and capability (13%) of the learning and development team were also identified as barriers by a substantial minority of employers. One in ten report that not being able to prove impact, as well as not knowing which interventions are effective, are barriers to delivery, an issue that we explore in more detail in section 8 of this report.

Lack of senior-level understanding, commitment or buy-in was also identified as a barrier by over a fifth (22%) of organisations, and in one in fifteen organisations, learning was not seen as a priority.

Differences in the prevalence of barriers to delivery between SMEs and large organisations include:

- Overall, SMEs are less likely to report barriers to delivery of learning and skills initiatives; the only barrier with a higher incidence is the size of their learning team (39% compared with 19% of larger employers).
- Larger employers are more likely to report barriers to delivery than smaller organisations, in particular L&D/HR capability (18% compared with 7%), lack of senior commitment or buy-in (26% vs 16%) and lack of management time or support (32% vs 23%).

**Figure 18: Are any of the following barriers to the delivery of your skills and learning initiatives? (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Reflective question**

Managers are vital in the successful diagnosis, design and delivery of learning. Thinking of your context, what tactics are currently used to involve managers in effective learning? In what other creative ways could their insights and support be proactively gained?



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## 7 The wider learning environment

Organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things. While organisations think that they have the vision, strategy and resources in place to support organisational learning, results suggest that wider HR practices and building blocks at line management and individual level need strengthening.

Workplaces need to invest in the learning and development of their workforce to stay future-fit in a complex and competitive world of work. Creating a supportive environment for learning is an important part of ensuring employees and the wider organisation have the right capabilities to adapt and respond to challenges in an agile and effective way. We discuss the benefits of embedding learning throughout an organisation in our report [\*Creating Learning Cultures: Assessing the evidence\*](#).

There are several levels of learning in an organisation: individual, team and organisational.<sup>6</sup>

- **Organisational learning:** Businesses need structures and systems in place to support learning, as well as a shared vision for learning and transformation.
- **Teams:** Teams are a key place where social learning and dialogue can occur. Managers have a key role to play in ensuring that their employees also have the relevant support for learning.
- **Individuals:** For individual employees, learning needs to take place in a supportive environment that allows employees to apply their learning.

To support organisational, individual and team learning, organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things to drive adaptation and innovation. While this is often referred to as learning culture, our recent research<sup>7</sup> has argued that it is more useful to call this the learning environment, and to focus on tangible organisational practices and behaviours. This section looks at the survey evidence on the practices organisations have in place to support organisational, individual and team learning.

### Organisational learning

The majority of organisations think that they have the vision, strategy and resources in place to support organisational learning. Figure 19 shows that organisations either strongly agree or agree:

- Their learning strategy is aligned with organisational goals (78% agree or strongly agree).
- Their leaders value learning and development (75%).
- Employees can easily access the information and learning resources that they need (71%).
- There is a clear vision and strategy for learning and development (63%).
- They adapt processes and behaviours based on organisational learning (63%).
- They have systems in place for knowledge transfer and management (59%).

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In organisations that report employees to be either highly satisfied or satisfied, 90% agree that leaders value L&D (compared with just 38% in organisations where employees are dissatisfied), 89% that learning is aligned to business (versus 57%) and 81% that L&D information and resources are accessible (versus 46%).

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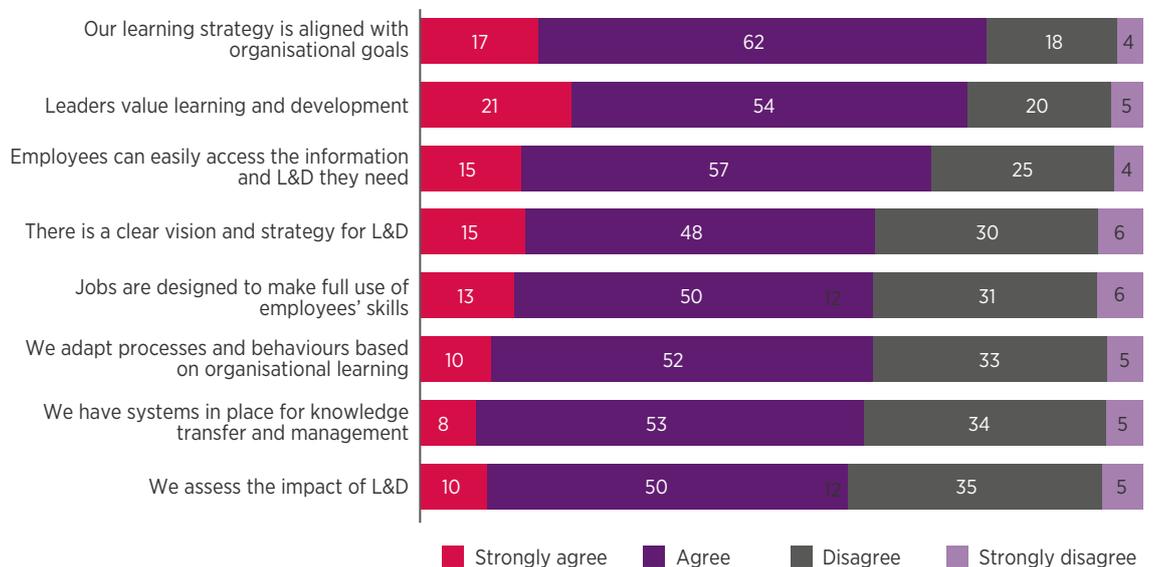
As well as having the vision, strategy and resources in place to support organisational learning, wider people management practices play an important role in shaping how people can apply the new skills they learn, as well as deploy the skills they already have. This is influenced by the way in which work is organised and how jobs are designed; well-designed work that provides opportunities for growth and a supportive workplace culture that fosters commitment and engagement all contribute towards people staying motivated and deploying their skills more fully. Our research, *Driving the New Learning Organisation*, highlights the importance of this holistic people experience to nurture innovation and continual learning.

Embedding learning into the organisation’s way of doing things not only calls for the right processes and tools. It also requires a leadership approach that provides a collective vision for learning, and that encourages people to speak up, ask questions and share ideas. This means fostering psychological safety, so that no one feels that they will be penalised if they ask for help or admit to a mistake.

In organisations that report employees to be either highly satisfied or satisfied, around half report that staff are encouraged to innovate (52%), problem-solve (51%), have systems in place for knowledge-sharing (47%), and that there is a climate of trust (46%). In organisations where employees are dissatisfied, only a small minority report these wider workforce practices (figures of 19%, 35%, 26% and 8% respectively).

Positively, the majority of respondents also agreed that leaders value learning and development. Figure 20 reveals that while the majority of respondents may feel that they have the right organisational vision, structures and systems in place to support learning (see Figure 19), a smaller proportion report that these wider people management practices, which support voice, autonomy, trust, knowledge transfer and innovation, are prevalent characteristics of their organisations. And, as we discuss in section 6, lack of learner time and limited budget for learning are common barriers to learning strategies, suggesting that senior-level buy-in does not always translate to resource for learning.

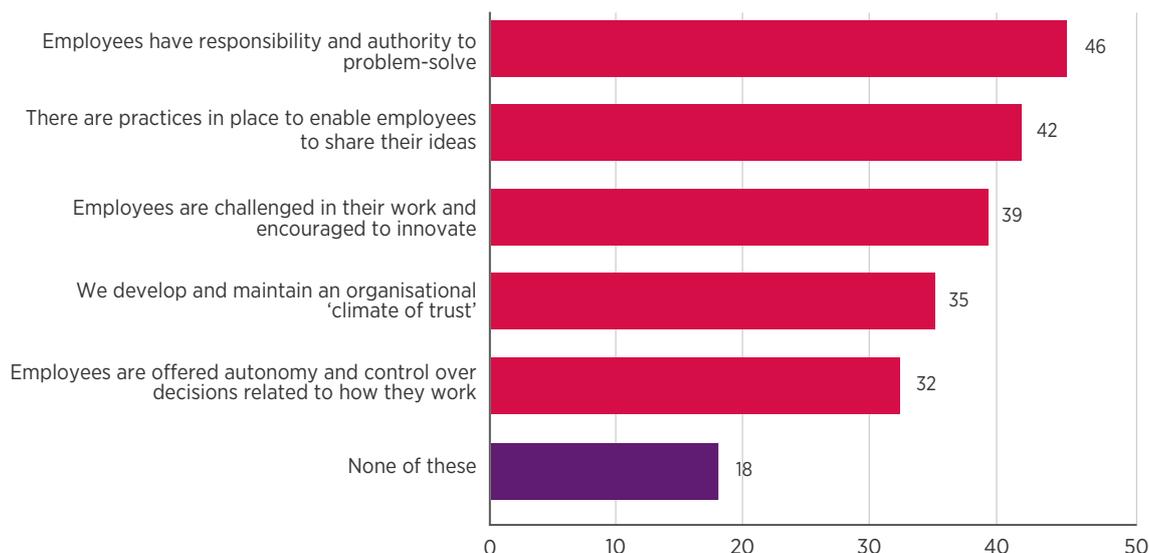
**Figure 19: The learning environment – the organisation (%)**





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**Figure 20: Prevalence of broader working practices/organisational characteristics (select as many as apply) (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Reflective question**

Empowering employees is key to positive organisational environments. In your context, how are learners empowered to define their learning needs and engage in creative ways of development that suit their unique context?

**Teams: the role of the line manager**

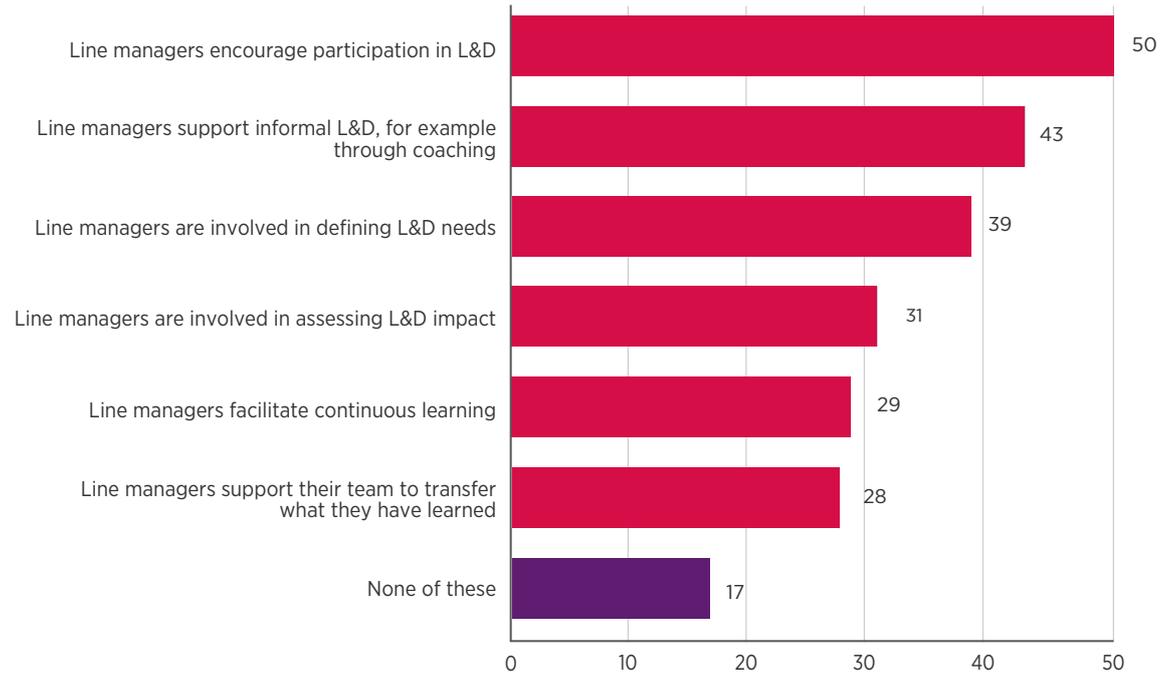
Line managers are critical in supporting continuous learning at work and need to be supported to enable them to take more responsibility for the growth and development of their people in their daily working lives. They are key to shaping workplace culture and fostering a work environment that is productive and supportive of learning. This means identifying learning needs, encouraging participation in learning, helping to assess learning impact, supporting both formal and informal learning and valuing non-training ways of learning, adopting modern learning practices themselves, and encouraging the sharing of knowledge and experiences in their teams.

In organisations that report their employees are highly satisfied or satisfied, line managers are twice as likely to facilitate continuous learning and be involved in determining learning and development needs compared with organisations where employees are dissatisfied. They are also much more likely to support informal learning, learning transfer and help assess the impact of learning.

Yet, research<sup>8</sup> suggests that good-quality line management has declined in recent years, and our survey highlights that many organisations don't have in place the people management support needed. Figure 21 shows:

- Just half (50%) of organisations report that line managers encourage participation on learning and less than a third report they facilitate continuous learning and support their teams to transfer what they have learned back into the workplace (29% and 28% respectively).
- Under a third (31%) of organisations report that line managers are involved in assessing L&D impact and just 39% are involved in determining learning needs.

**Figure 21: Which of the following statements about line managers reflect the wider learning environment in your organisation? Please select all that apply (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

### Reflective question

In your context, how do managers actively encourage learning and development, and what further support may help them champion development opportunities?

Which managers role-model a proactive engagement with formal and informal learning? How do they demonstrate that and how can that be replicated across the organisation?

### Individual learning

Learning needs to take place in a supportive environment that allows employees to apply their learning. Employees need to understand why they are engaging, and the benefits for them individually, as well as for their team and the wider organisation.

In supportive learning environments, learning takes places using many methods, including using face-to-face and digital methods and by leveraging peer-to-peer and socialised learning communities. A supportive learning environment also allows time for a pause in the action and encourages thoughtful review and reflection; when people are too busy,

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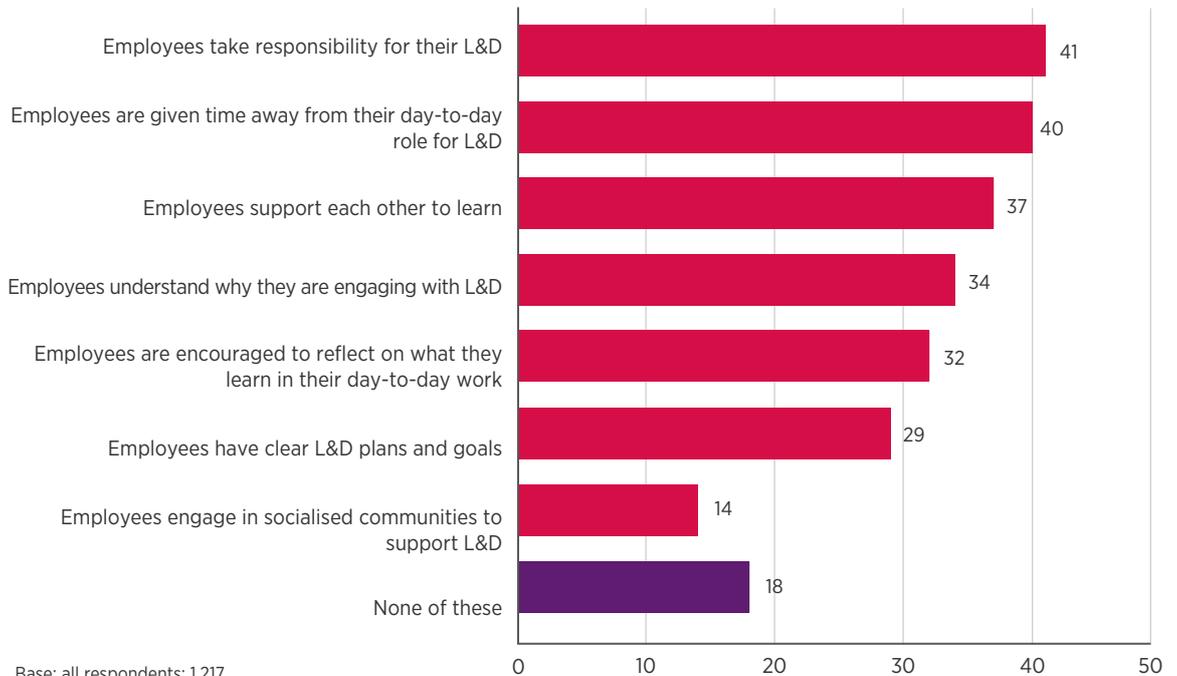
stressed by deadlines and schedules, they are less able to diagnose problems and learn from their experiences.

Previous CIPD research, *Over-skilled and Underused*,<sup>9</sup> found that fewer than half (47%) of UK employees agree that their job offers good opportunities to develop and use their skills. Our survey suggests that many organisations are struggling to create a supportive learning environment for their employees (Figure 22):

- Employees get time away from their day-to-day jobs and take responsibility for learning in only 40% of organisations, while only 29% of organisations report that their employees have clear learning and development plans in place.
- Just a third of organisations report that employees understand why they are engaging in learning and development (34%) and are encouraged to reflect on what they learn in their day-to-day job (32%).
- Peer-to-peer learning is more prevalent than socialised communities of learning (14%), but is only reported by just over a third (37%) of organisations.

In organisations where employees are either highly satisfied or satisfied, individuals are more than twice as likely to have clear development plans and goals (36%) and understand why they are engaging in learning and development (41%), compared with organisations where employees are dissatisfied (figures of 16% and 19% respectively).

**Figure 22: Which of these statements about employees reflect the wider learning environment in your organisation? (select all that apply) (%)**





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**Reflective question**

In your context, how are learners supported to reflect on and apply learning in the workplace? Who is responsible for this vital activity?

How are learners encouraged to take responsibility for their learning needs?

## 8 Evaluation and impact

Most organisations assess the impact of their L&D initiatives, although evaluations are often limited to participant satisfaction and many encounter barriers. Where L&D has a clear vision and strategy and is aligned with business needs, evaluations tend to be more prevalent and the data collected more widely used.

Previous CIPD research has highlighted the importance of evaluation and analytics in L&D practice. Our report *Driving Performance and Productivity* found that evaluation is far more common in high-performing organisations compared with lower-performing organisations – with high-performing organisations able to use this data to improve their learning offering.

**Most conduct limited to evaluations of L&D effectiveness**

Positively, we find that the majority (70%) of organisations evaluate the impact of their L&D initiatives in some way (Figure 23), although this is at varying levels. The most commonly reported way that the majority of L&D initiatives are evaluated is by participant satisfaction (28%); however, only a small minority are evaluating the wider impact on business or society (12%) and just 16% assess the behaviour change of participants by assessing the transfer of learning into the workplace.

Compared with private (11%) and voluntary (12%) organisations, public sector organisations are marginally more likely to evaluate the wider impact of initiatives on the organisation (15%).

Evaluations are considerably more common in organisations where L&D is aligned with business strategy, where learning is valued by senior leaders, and where there is a clear vision for learning and development.<sup>10</sup>

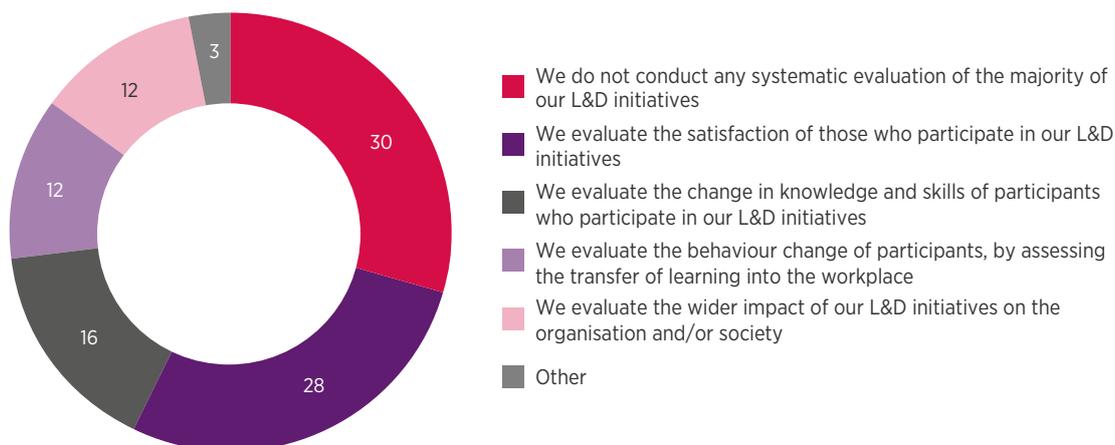
**Reflective question**

How is the evaluation of learning effectiveness linked to organisational key performance indicators and outcomes?



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**Figure 23: How are the majority of L&D initiatives evaluated? (%)**



Base: all L&D and HR professionals: 445

### Smaller organisations struggle to evaluate the effectiveness of L&D initiatives

A substantial minority report that they do not conduct any systematic evaluation of the majority of their L&D initiatives (30%). This proportion is higher among smaller organisations (under 250 employees), with over a third of SMEs (35%) falling into this category compared with just over a fifth (26%) of large employers (250+ employees).

This is likely due to the fact that many small firms lack the capacity that comes from a dedicated HR or L&D function, with learning and development sitting instead with line managers and operations (see section 5 of this report). This further highlights the crucial role that managers have to play in learning impact measurement.

#### Reflective question

To what extent is quality of learning evaluation linked to capacity to undertake the task? Who needs to allocate time and resource to ensure adequate impact measurement takes place?

### Most evaluations focus on learner feedback and reflection

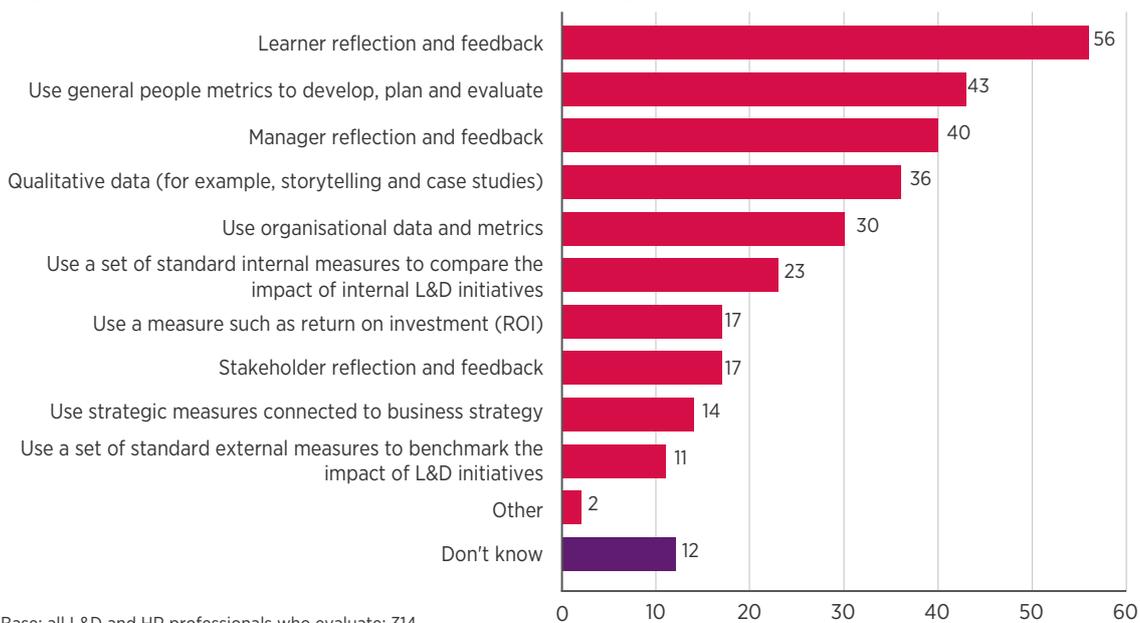
Learner reflection and feedback is the most commonly reported method used to assess the effectiveness of L&D interventions, used by over half of those who evaluate (Figure 24). Use of general people metrics (for example, quantitative metrics such as absence, retention, engagement and performance) to develop, plan and evaluate, alongside manager feedback and reflection, are also used by 43% and 40% of organisations respectively.

However, more data analytic driven approaches – such as return on investment (ROI) and organisational metrics – and methods that seek external validation (either through stakeholders or external benchmarks/metrics) are considerably less commonly reported.

There are few sector differences in the methods used, although private services organisations, unsurprisingly, are more likely to use business metrics than organisations in other sectors.

The more aligned L&D is with business strategy, the more likely they are to use all of the evaluation methods listed – indicating that the more embedded learning is in operational delivery, the more sophisticated and rigorous the impact measurement. In addition, all except the use of HR and business metrics are more common in organisations that encourage and enable the development of L&D capability.

**Figure 24: Measure used to assess effectiveness of learning and development initiatives (%)**



**Reflective question**

In your context, to what organisational metrics do key learning initiatives relate and to what extent are these connections made?

**Evaluation data is most often used to inform business/organisational strategy and to update L&D interventions**

Evaluations are most commonly used to inform business strategy or organisational development and to update the L&D intervention (Figure 25). A third share the results of evaluations internally, while just 14% do so externally.

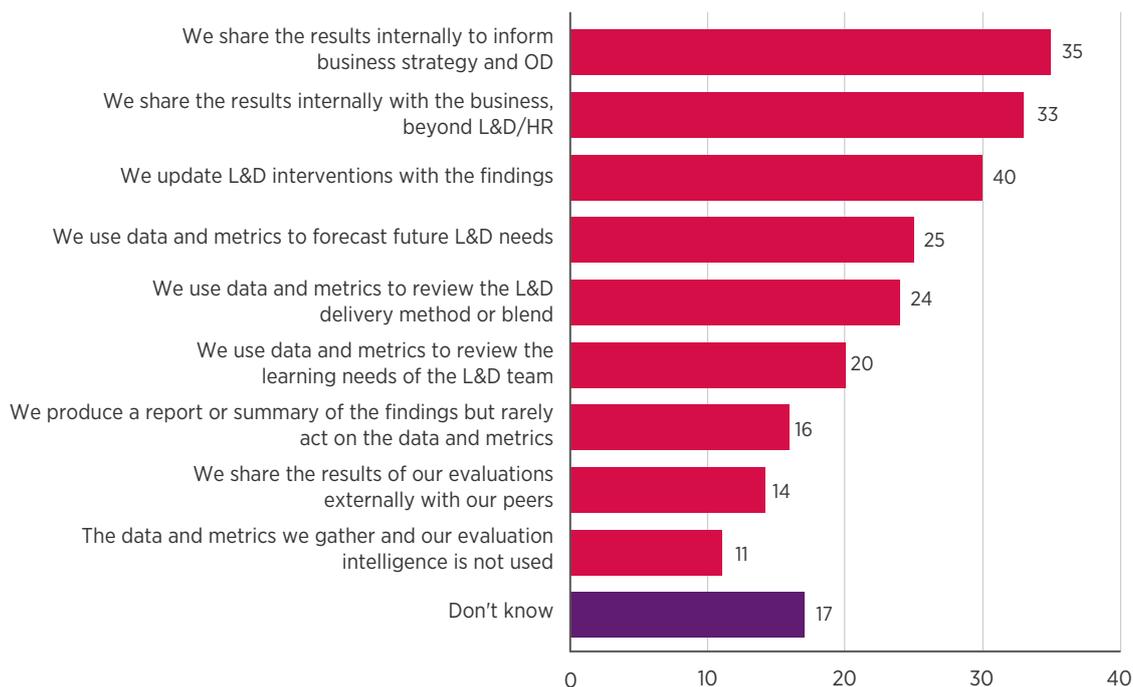
It is of concern that a substantial minority report that they produce a report but rarely act on the findings (16%), that the data and metrics are rarely used (11%), or that they don't know how the evidence they gather is used (17%).

Larger organisations are somewhat more likely to report that they 'produce a report or summary of the findings but rarely act on the data' or that they do not use the metrics and evaluation intelligence they gather.<sup>11</sup>



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**Figure 25: How evidence from evaluation is used (select all that apply) (%)**



Base: all L&D and HR professionals who evaluate: 314

**Reflective question**

In your context, how is learning evaluation and impact measurement shared with key stakeholders? To what extent is this an embedded, systematic process to support organisational improvement?

**The vast majority of organisations report barriers to evaluating learning and development initiatives**

The vast majority (81%) experience barriers in evaluating their L&D initiatives (Figure 26). Lack of learner or management time (32%) and pressure of other business priorities (28%) are the most commonly reported obstacles, followed by funding (24%).

The lack of learner and management time highlights that learning is often viewed as a separate activity and not linked to the workflow.

Many also report barriers within L&D/HR, in particular the pressures of other priorities (22%), quality of L&D data collected (21%) and L&D/HR capability to conduct the evaluation (17%).

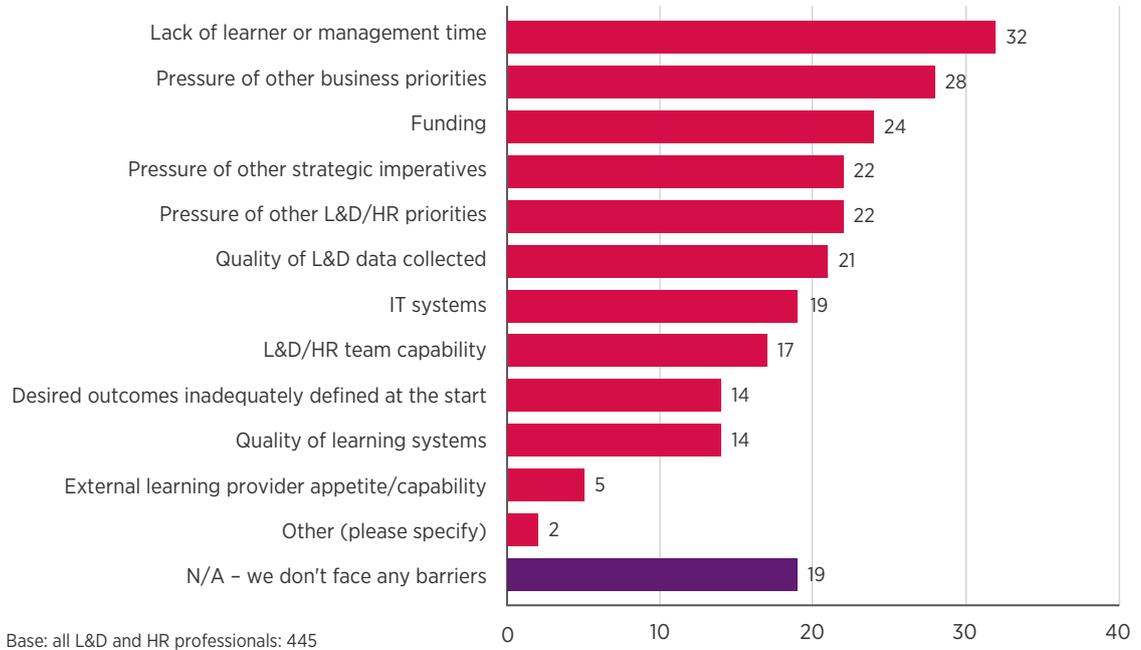
Larger organisations and those in the public sector face a higher prevalence of barriers to evaluation:

- Public sector organisations are significantly more likely to report barriers to evaluation (94% compared with 79% of private sector and 80% of voluntary organisations), with funding (37%) and lack of learner or management time (41%) standing out as particular challenges.
- Larger organisations are more likely to report barriers to evaluation compared with smaller employers, with the following barriers more prevalent: HR/LD capability (23% of

larger employer versus 8% of SMEs); pressure from other strategic imperatives (27% vs 15%); and pressure from other HR/L&D imperatives (26% vs 15%).

- Overall, SMEs are less likely to report barriers to evaluation compared with larger employers; over a fifth (23%) report that they face no barriers compared with just one in sixteen of large organisations.

**Figure 26: Barriers to evaluation of learning and development (%)**



**Reflective question**

How can learning impact measurement be embedded in work practice with evaluation undertaken as an integral part of work activities?

## 9 Learning and development resources and budgets

Organisations are having to do more with less. Learning and development functions have experienced increased workloads but a squeeze on budgets, headcounts and use of external suppliers.

**There is considerable variation in L&D budgets**

Most organisations with more than 250 employees have a learning and development budget (83%). Smaller organisations, on the other hand, are less likely to have a specific budget (33%).

Figure 27 shows there is considerable variation in L&D budgets. Just over a third have an annual budget of less than £150 per employee, while 22% have a budget of more than £750 per employee per annum.

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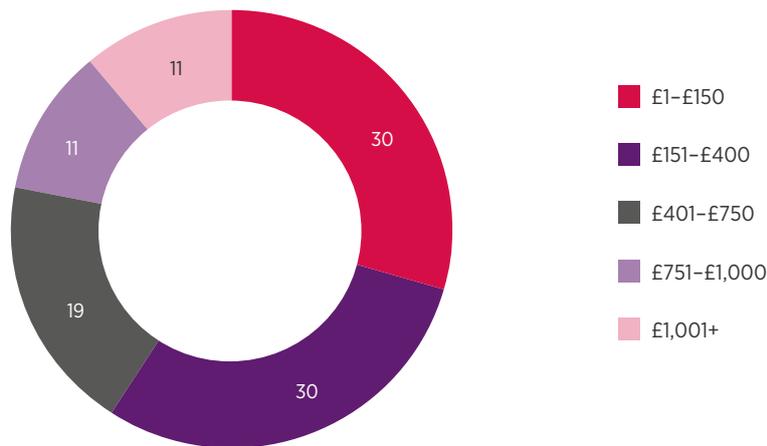
Private sector organisations are more likely to have larger L&D budgets compared with public organisations; 26% of private organisations have a budget of over £750 per employee compared with just 15% of public sector employers. The differences by organisation size are minimal, although larger employers tend to be slightly more concentrated at either end of the spectrum compared with smaller employers.<sup>12</sup>

Senior directors (42%), followed by the learning and development (24%) or wider HR function (20%), tend to be principle owners of the learning budget within organisations (Figure 28). The specific function/directorate and line managers own the budget in just 6% and 5% of organisations respectively. These figures are very low. If the shift towards learning in the flow of work and performance improvement is to be achieved, increasingly line managers will need to be empowered, which may require dedicated budgets allocated to operational teams.

Differences in ownership by size of organisations include:

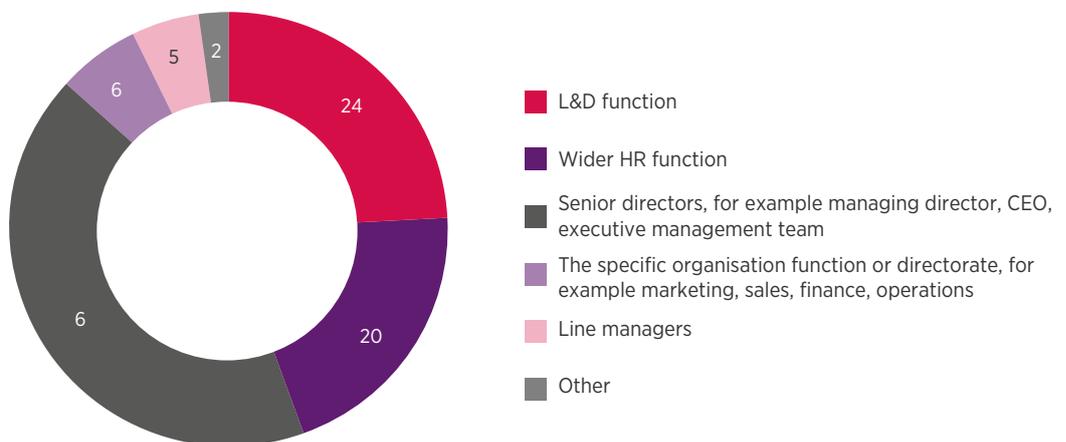
- In smaller organisations (who are less likely to have L&D or HR functions), senior directors have a more prominent role, having principle ownership in 58% of organisations, compared with just over a third (35%) in larger employers.
- In larger organisations, the L&D function (31%) is more likely to ‘own’ the learning budget, compared with just 9% of SMEs.

**Figure 27: Budgets per employee per annum (%)**



Base: all those with a budget: 608

**Figure 28: Who owns the budget? (%)**



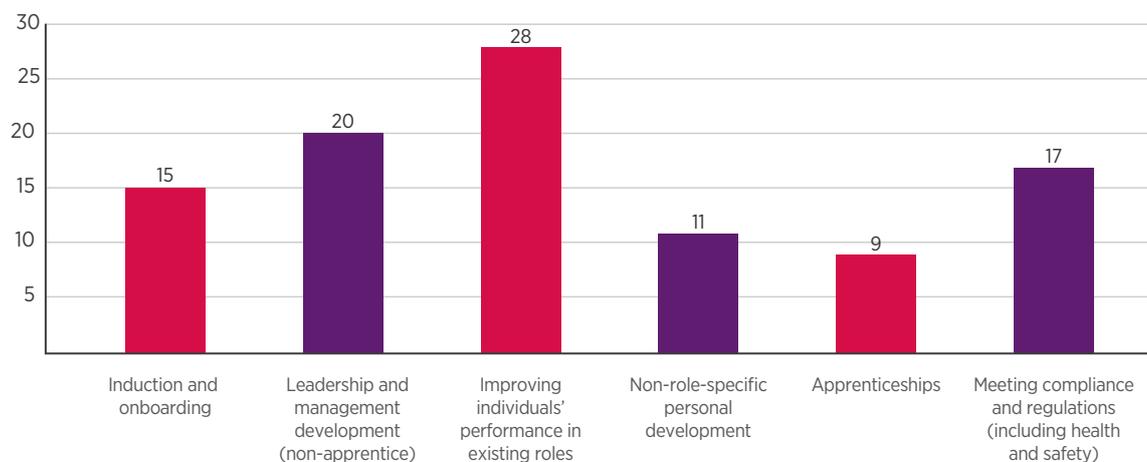
Base: all those with a budget: 608

Figure 29 shows that the largest proportion of development budgets goes towards improving individuals' performance in existing roles, followed by leadership and management development and meeting compliance regulations.

Larger organisations, with more than 250 employees, tend to devote a higher proportion of the budget to induction/onboarding and compliance, and smaller organisations (under 250 employees) tend to spend more proportionately on improving individuals' performance in existing roles.<sup>13</sup>

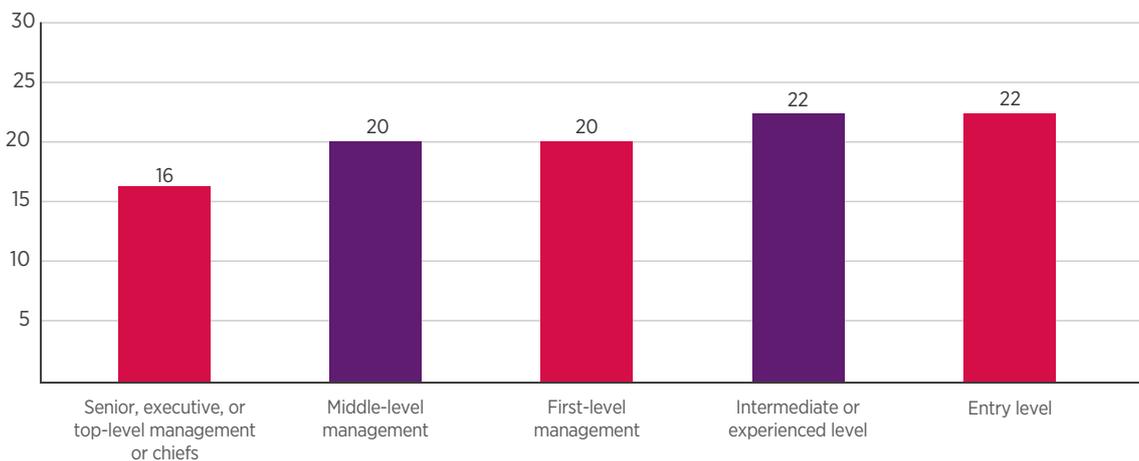
Encouragingly, learning and development budgets are relatively evenly distributed across the workforce (Figure 30), with similar proportions allocated from entry-level to middle-management employees, and the lowest mean score at senior/executive level.

**Figure 29: Budget split by area of focus – mean scores (%)**



Base: all those with a learning and development budget: 608

**Figure 30: Budget split by seniority of employees – mean scores (%)**



Base: all those with a learning and development budget: 608

**Reflective question**

In your context, how are learning budgets distributed across different parts of the organisation and roles? Is this an intentional decision?

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**The workload of the learning and development function has increased for the majority of organisations**

Figure 31 shows that while workloads have increased for the majority of organisations, a quarter have seen a decline in headcount, budget and use of external suppliers:

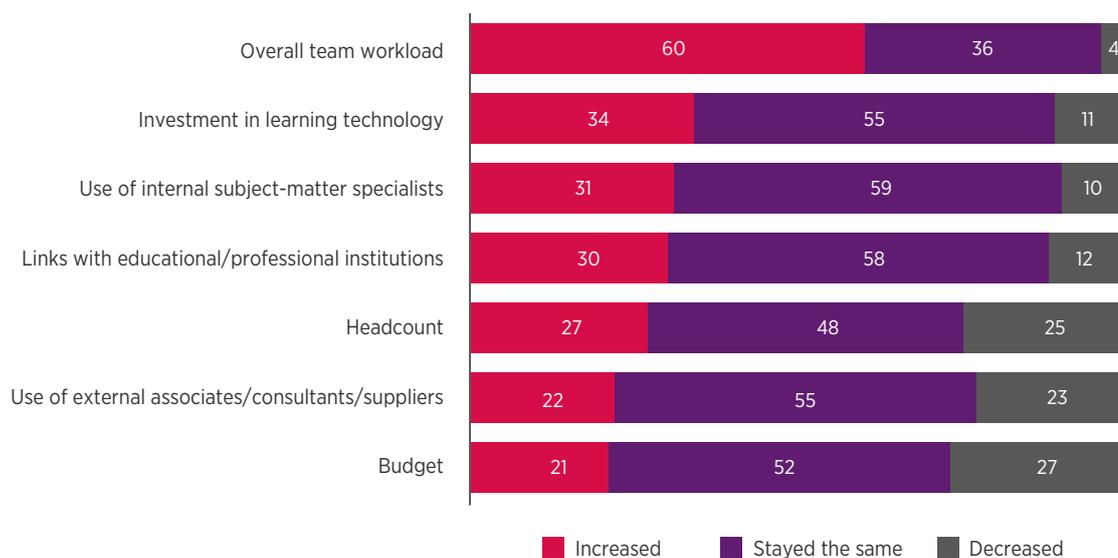
- The majority (60%) of organisations report that the overall workload of their learning and development functions have increased over the last 12 months, with just 4% reporting a fall.
- Around a quarter of organisations report a reduction in headcount, budget and use of external suppliers/contractors.
- A third of organisations have increased their investment in learning technologies.
- Around 30% have increased the use of internal subject-matter experts and links with educational/professional institutions.

Those organisations who reported that their budget had decreased in the last 12 months were most likely to report increases in workload (71%), decreases in headcount (60%), and they were less likely to have seen increase in learning technology investment (24%) or use of external consultants/suppliers (17%).

On the other hand, organisations that reported that learning and development budgets had increased over the last 12 months were also more likely to report increased workload (72%). However, they were much more likely to report growth in headcount (62%), increased investment in learning technologies (64%), and increased use of internal subject-matter experts (53%).

Public sector organisations are much more likely to have seen budget reductions (40% compared with 24% of private and 20% of voluntary) and less likely to have seen increased investment in learning technologies (26% compared with 37% of private and 32% of voluntary), or increased headcount (20% compared with 28% of private and 26% of voluntary). However, the same proportion as the private sector report increases in workload (59% versus 60%).

**Figure 31: Change in L&D function in the last 12 months (%)**



Workloads have increased in organisations that have expanded their L&D budget, headcount and use of external associates (presumably to meet growing demand/increased activity) and in those where resources have reduced, presumably as many are seeking to ‘do more with less’.

**Reflective question**

In your context, what are the key resourcing challenges and opportunities that underpin the success of organisational learning?

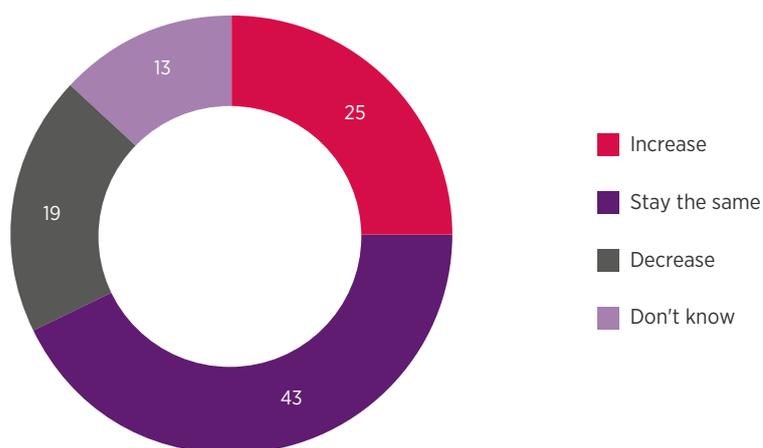
**Predictions for the future of L&D funding are determined by past experience**

The majority expect that L&D budgets will either remain the same (43%) or increase (25%) over the next 12 months (Figure 32). It should be recognised that these figures will have likely changed since the survey was conducted, as learning and development budgets are often first to feel the squeeze in times of economic crisis:

- Smaller organisations are more likely to report that their budgets will remain the same or increase compared with larger employers (81% compared with 63%).
- The public sector outlook is far less positive than the private or voluntary sector. Public sector employers are much more likely to report a squeeze on L&D budgets, with 28% expecting a reduction compared with just 16% and 18% respectively of private and voluntary sector organisations.

Organisations’ predictions for the future are significantly related to their experience of the past 12 months in all sectors. Those that have experienced reductions in L&D funding and headcount over the last 12 months are more likely to report they anticipate a decrease in funding over the next 12 months.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 32: Learning and development budgets for the next 12 months (%)**



Base: all those with an L&D budget: 608

**Reflective question**

How are the operational experiences in your context over the past year likely to influence the nature of the learning provision?



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## 10 Conclusions and recommendations

The world of work is changing at a relentless pace, driven by rapid technological advances, globalisation and wider economic and societal trends. To respond to these challenges, organisations must be resilient and agile, and be able to learn and adapt. In such a context, the role of learning and development is critical to ensure that organisations are able to address current and emerging learning and skills needs.

In this rapidly evolving context, learning needs to evolve and it must be accessible, agile and flexible. Learning must be increasingly in the flow of work, not in the classroom; via digital technologies which enable learning to be available any time and anywhere; and through curation, not just creation. Learning solutions need to be designed to improve performance and productivity, and be based on science, not guesswork. However, this research highlights that many organisations are struggling to adapt.

### Recommendations for practice



#### Align your learning and development strategy with organisational need.

Alignment is a critical issue when developing a learning and development strategy. If learning is to positively impact business performance, it has to get much closer to the business and there needs to be greater clarity in the learning team about business drivers.<sup>15</sup>



#### Increase the knowledge and capability of your learning function.

For learning and development to become more relevant, agile and effective in organisations, L&D professionals must increase their knowledge and capability.<sup>16</sup> Our research, *Professionalising Learning and Development*, demonstrates that continuing professional development has clear business benefits and highlights key areas for L&D development.

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The CIPD's new [Profession Map](#) provides the foundational values, knowledge and behaviours that underpin effective learning design, delivery and impact.

It can be used to:

- build capability in yourself, teams and organisations
- develop expertise in emerging areas of practice
- drive sustainable organisational change
- help you be a more confident, decisive and credible people professional
- prove your value as an expert on people, work and change.

It's built around the overarching purpose of the people profession: to champion better work and working lives.

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#### Demonstrate value through evaluating learning impact.

Without being able to measure learning impact, valuable time and resources are wasted. Measuring the impact, transfer and engagement of learning and development activities can't just be done by a questionnaire. Effective learning and development evaluation needs to be linked to learning needs and focused on evaluating learning outcomes, not inputs.<sup>17</sup>



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**Consider the wider learning environment in your organisation.**

To support learning at an individual and organisational level, organisations need to create an environment that embeds learning into the way they do things. Creating an organisation that supports learning is not the sole responsibility of L&D professionals; it requires organisation-wide vision, buy-in and action. However, L&D professionals are key in shaping this vision. Our recent report, [\*Creating Learning Cultures: Assessing the evidence\*](#), sets out practical steps for practitioners to ensure learning is supported at every level of the organisation.<sup>18</sup>

**Embrace technologies that support learning and collaboration.**

It's never been more important to ensure that organisations have technology in place to support employees to learn any time, any place, any way.<sup>19</sup> Implementing effective digital learning and collaboration tools will continue to be vital as some organisations work remotely, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 'in person' group learning activities are limited. To support effective implementation, practitioners should ensure they apply what we already know about offline transfer to technology, address any learner barriers, and make an assessment of the theory behind the tools to identify if it has the right features to deliver learning experiences.<sup>20</sup>

**Address transferable skill gaps as well as technical.**

Technology is driving a revolution in the workplace, transforming both the way we work and the job opportunities available. To thrive in this new environment, employers increasingly depend on highly transferable core skills, such as communication, teamworking and problem-solving. Alongside addressing technical skill gaps, learning and development professionals should look to build these essential skills.<sup>21</sup>

**Future-proof your organisation by understanding the types of skills you need and how you will source them.**

Knowing and understanding the skills you need and how you will source them is critical. 'The right people, with the right skills, in the right roles, at the right time and the right cost' is what will ultimately deliver the right results for an organisation. By taking a proactive, methodical approach to workforce planning, HR and L&D practitioners play a critical role in supporting businesses to understand current and emerging risks and opportunities and put in place the resources needed to respond effectively to whatever scenario lies ahead. Our guidance on [\*Workforce Planning Practice\*](#) sets out the key steps for practitioners.<sup>22</sup>

**Ensure that your people managers have the knowledge, skills, behaviours and resources to support learning.**

People managers are key to shaping workplace culture and fostering a work environment that is productive and supportive of learning. Yet, while improving people management capabilities is identified by organisations as their top people priority, our research shows that many organisations are failing to equip them with the skills and resources they need to support learning.<sup>23</sup> Learning professionals can support line managers by: helping them understand the key role they play in supporting learning, whether this is formal or informal; supporting them to prioritise time and resources for learning; building support for L&D into management objectives; and encouraging them to be role models, to demonstrate how learning is part of everyone's role.<sup>24</sup>



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**Don't press pause on learning and development; continue to invest in the skills of your workforce.**

We know that in times of crisis, learning and development activities are often the earliest and hardest hit activity, yet the ability to learn, adapt and continuously improve in the face of such a challenge will be vital.

## 11 Appendix: methodology and sample

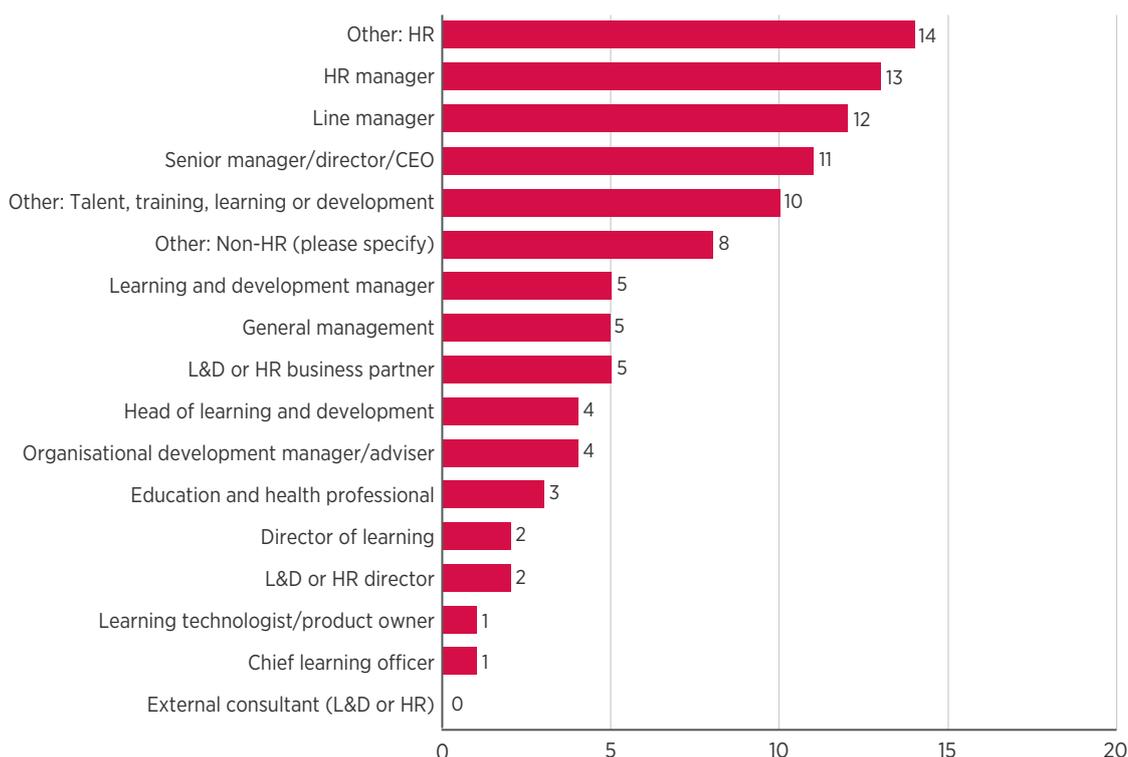
This is the CIPD's relaunched *Learning and Skills at Work* survey report, in partnership with Accenture (previously known as the *Annual CIPD Learning and Development* survey). It examines current practices and trends within learning and development.

The survey consisted of 38 questions completed through an online questionnaire. The sample was collected via a YouGov panel, as well as marketed to learning and development professionals through the CIPD's network to provide supplementary insights. The survey field work was conducted in February 2020. In total, 1,217 people responded to the survey.

### Sample profile

The survey was targeted at people in HR/learning and development or in senior roles as the questions require specific knowledge on learning and development practices and policy. Over half (56%) report they are responsible for, or involved in, determining the learning and development needs of their organisation. Figure 33 shows a broad spectrum of respondents, with over half (55%) coming from either an HR or L&D background, while around one in twelve are line managers and 11% are senior managers or directors.

**Figure 33: Sample characteristics: role of respondents (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217



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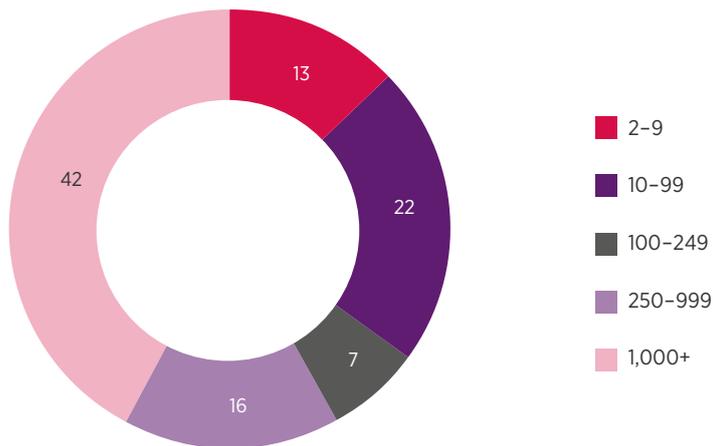
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Respondents work for organisations of all sizes (Figure 34). Nearly three-quarters work in the private services sector, just under a fifth in the public sector (18%), with the remaining 7% working in the voluntary and charitable sector (Figure 35). A more detailed sector breakdown is provided in Figure 36.

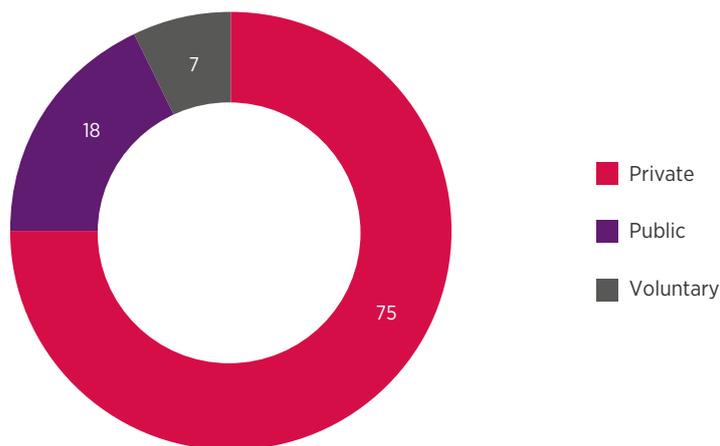
The survey also asked respondents to provide details on organisational productivity, retention rates and employee satisfaction (Figures 37, 38, 39).

**Figure 34: Sample characteristics – size of organisation (%)**



Base: all respondents: 1,217

**Figure 35: Sample characteristics – sector (%)**

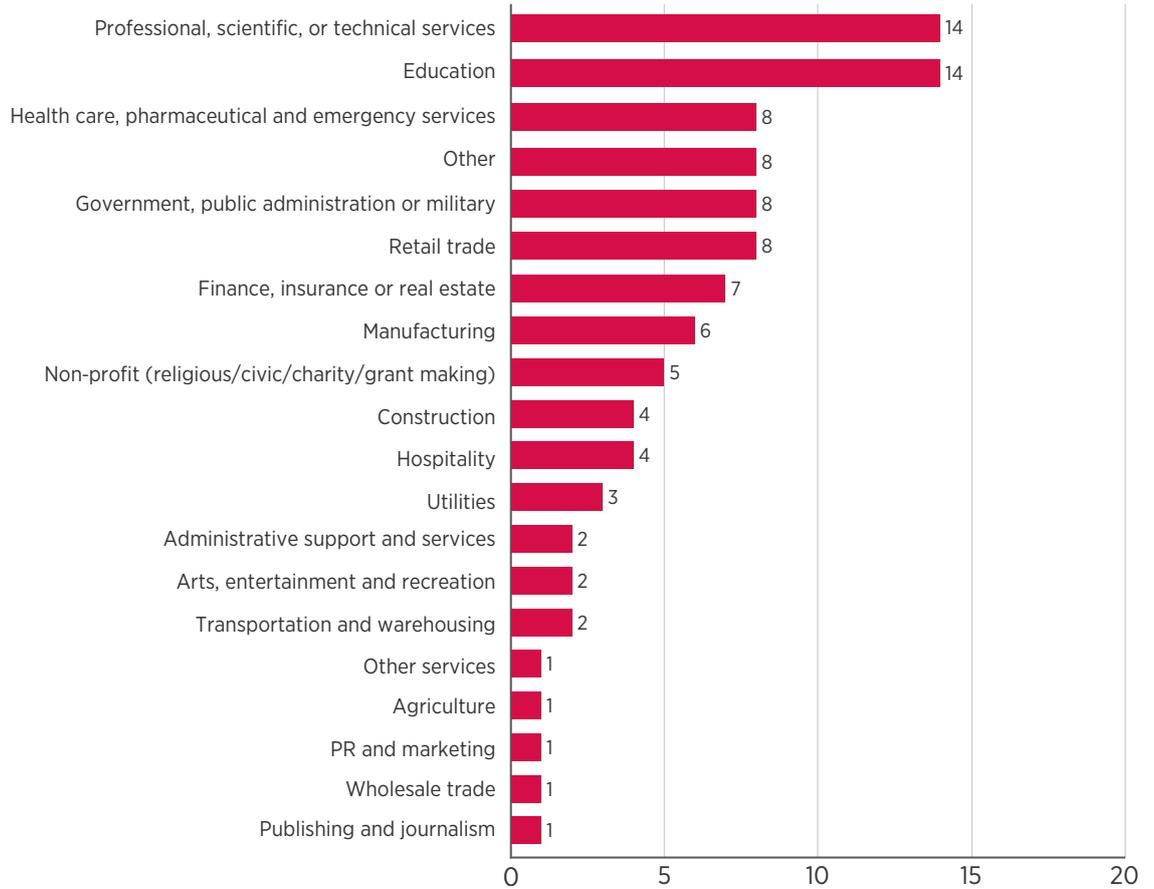


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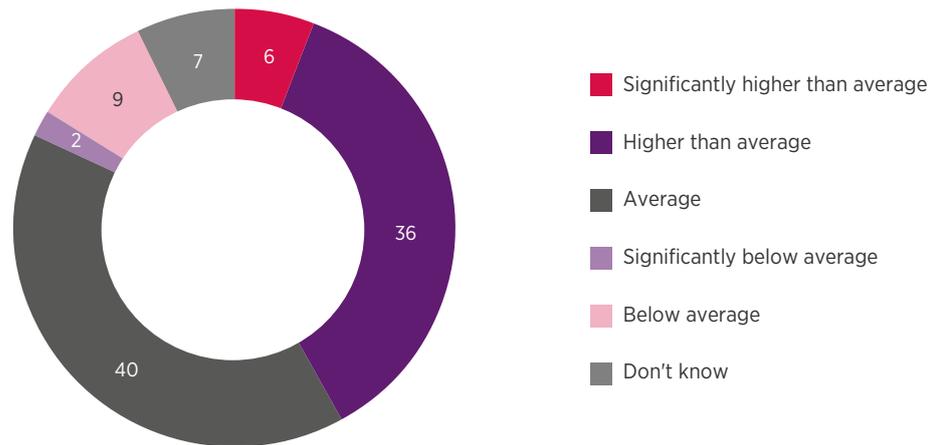


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**Figure 36: Sample characteristics – detailed sectors (%)**



**Figure 37: Sample characteristics – perceived productivity (%)**

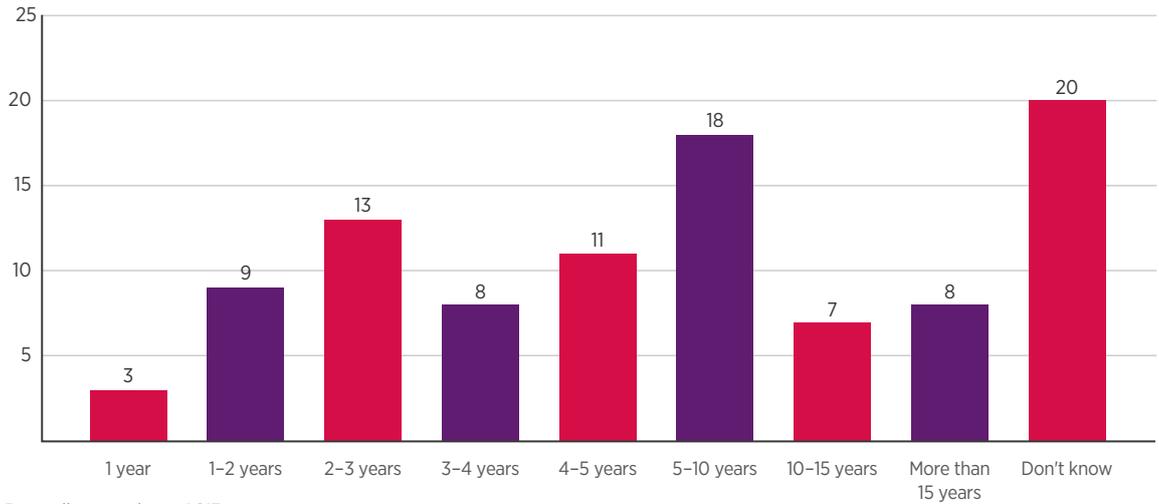


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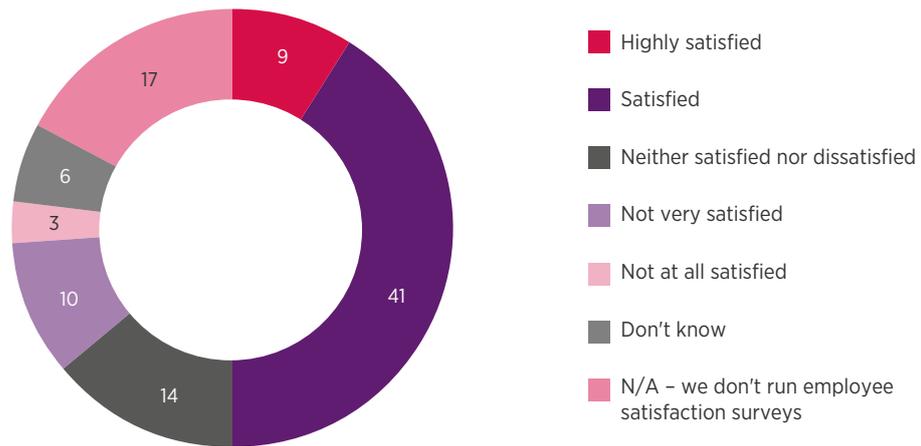


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**Figure 38: Sample characteristics – average job tenure (%)**



**Figure 39: Sample characteristics – employee satisfaction (%)**



## 12 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See for example: ‘Productivity puzzles’, speech given by Andrew G. Haldane, Chief Economist, Bank of England, London School of Economics, 20 March 2017; McGowan, M. and Andrews, D. (2015) *Labour market mismatch and labour productivity: evidence from PIAAC data*. Paris: OECD.
- <sup>2</sup> CIPD. (2018) *Workforce planning practice*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- <sup>3</sup> Large organisations vs SMEs: learning technologist/product manager (16% vs 4%); instructional designer (14% vs 6%); digital asset creator (10% vs 1%); performance consultant (8% vs 3%); and community manager (6% vs 3%).
- <sup>4</sup> Please note figures are not directly comparable due to sample variation and size and question wording changes.
- <sup>5</sup> CIPD. (2017) *The future of technology and learning*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.



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- <sup>6</sup> Marsick, V.J. and Watkins, K.E. (2003) Demonstrating the value of an organization's learning culture: the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. Vol 5, No 2. pp132–51.
- <sup>7</sup> CIPD. (2020) Creating learning cultures: assessing the evidence. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- <sup>8</sup> Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Green, F. and Henseke, G. (2017) Productivity in Britain: the workers' perspective. First findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2017. London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, UCL Institute of Education.
- <sup>9</sup> CIPD. (2019) Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK skills. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- <sup>10</sup> 82% of organisations who agree, or strongly agree, that learning is aligned to organisational goals conduct evaluations compared with just 62% of those who don't. 81% of organisations who agree, or strongly agree, that leaders in my organisation value staff L&D conduct evaluations versus 60% that don't. 75% of organisations who agree that their organisations have a clear vision and strategy for L&D conduct evaluations versus 40% who don't evaluate.
- <sup>11</sup> 18% of large organisations produce a report or summary of the findings but rarely act on the data compared with 14% of SMEs; 13% of larger organisations report that they do not use the metrics and evaluation intelligence they gather compared with just 8% of SMEs.
- <sup>12</sup> 32% of large employers have a budget of less than £150 per employee per annum compared with 26% of SMEs, while 12% of larger employers have a budget of over £1,000 per employee compared with just 9% of SMEs.
- <sup>13</sup> Induction/onboarding mean score 16.4 for larger employers compared with mean score of 11 for smaller employers; compliance mean score 19.2 for large employers and 12.7 for smaller organisations; improving performance in existing roles mean score 23.15 for large employers and 38.5 for smaller organisations.
- <sup>14</sup> 60% of organisations whose budget increased in the 12 months expect that it will increase in the next 12 months. While 76% who experienced a fall in the last 12 months expect a reduction in the next year.
- <sup>15</sup> Lancaster, A. (2019) Driving performance through learning: develop employees through effective workplace learning. London: Kogan Page Publishing.
- <sup>16</sup> CIPD. (2019) Professionalising learning and development. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
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# CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ United Kingdom  
**T** +44 (0)20 8612 6200 **F** +44 (0)20 8612 6201  
**E** [cipd@cipd.co.uk](mailto:cipd@cipd.co.uk) **W** [cipd.co.uk](http://cipd.co.uk)

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