

Learning & Development Impact Survey 2025

Benchmarking the changing role of L&D in achieving business success.



Highlights

Short on time?

Explore our AI-generated summary



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In partnership with:



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a bright green button-down shirt, is smiling and looking towards a colleague whose back is to the camera. They are in an office environment with other people blurred in the background.

Introduction

Delivering a blend of critical skills in a manner that engages and retains employees. Supporting broader people and business goals. Understanding how AI and digital technologies will transform work and development. Operating under economic uncertainty and resource constraints. For L&D, **2025 presents a long list of demands.**

But those in the function have been here before and recognize what impactful delivery looks like. Indeed, the Hemsley Fraser 2025 L&D Impact survey revealed a function that understands that many challenges it must face are similar in detail to previous operating paradigms. But that doesn't mean there isn't an evolution in the challenges practitioners must face: from how to use AI effectively to how to develop the right blend of digital proficiencies and human skills needed for individual and organizational success in a constantly transforming business landscape.

Of course, the stakes are high, and challenges are hardly small, but practitioners revealed they are also acutely aware of how to meet learner needs and support organizational objectives and are ready to face up to broader talent and business demands. Positively, despite hurdles to surmount, respondents are also aware of the strategies, partnerships, technologies and learning delivery methods as well as understanding that will allow the function to, yet again, deliver. Once again demonstrating the essential role of the learning function.

For our 2025 L&D Impact Survey we asked 822 L&D, HR and talent professionals across the UK and North America from a wide range of sectors and organization sizes about the latest reality and changes of the L&D practice.

Reflecting on last year

2025, for L&D not least, has been challenging. But for those with L&D responsibilities, this state of play isn't new. Last year, our survey respondents told us they were grappling with tensions over working structures and difficult financial headwinds resulting in budget-related, resourcing, and capacity issues. Twelve months on, little has changed.

This year, investment, or lack thereof, in L&D is top of mind: 53% of respondents said both **economic uncertainty and increased costs** were the top issues. Indeed, an average of UK survey respondents shows an almost half a percentage point cut in budgets going forward.

Although US practitioners are more confident about getting investment, there are across-the-board worries about delivering in changing working structures (RTO vs remote or hybrid) and fronting up to ongoing digital transformation.

Read our 'Navigating Uncertainty' Paper 

“Rapid change leads to shifting learning needs, making it difficult to keep training content up to date”

UK RESPONDENT

2024

Working Structures

Economic Uncertainty

Digital Transformation

2025

Economic Uncertainty

Inflation

Working Structure

The ongoing challenges for L&D

In this squeezed landscape, businesses will have to make tough calls. Here, L&D, again, will have to show its worth. Respondents told us they have the challenge of keeping L&D relevant and engaging for employees as technology and operational paradigms change. All while grappling with shifting foundations, limited resources, and less time for learning. And that's just for typical training, before even considering what AI even means for capability development.

As one respondent told us: *"It's about budget constraints and [finding time for L&D amidst] workload for all employees across the business."*

But L&D can step up. In previous years, the function has looked for efficiency of impact, meeting learners where they are with improved experiences of learning. Now practitioners are looking for ways they can tie L&D to supporting organizational performance objectives, integrating new technology and winning leadership and employee support for initiatives.

They know they must do so as L&D is tasked with big-ticket business demands: **boosting talent retention, engaging employees** and **supporting organizational goals**, much the same as it was in 2024.



L&D delivering impact across 2025

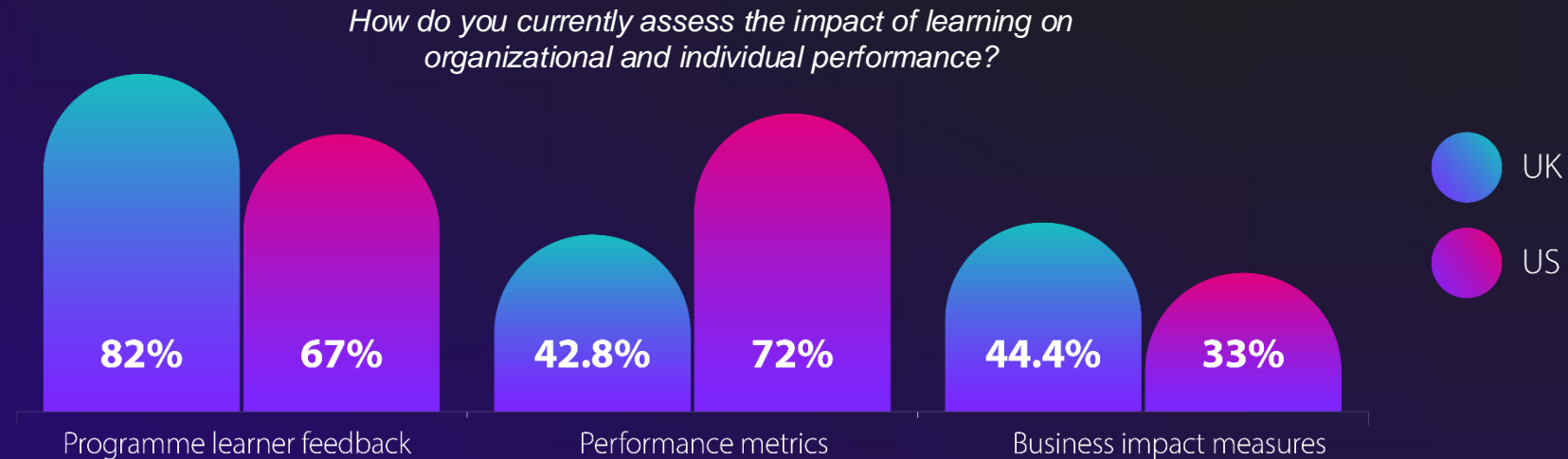
As L&D recognizes the challenges it must contend with, survey respondents are certain they know how to deliver. Both US and UK practitioners told us it was about engaging employees, integrating new technology effectively and managing competing priorities to get buy-in from the boardroom to the proverbial shop floor.

"It's about ensuring time to complete training items, meeting all training needs and ensuring all in-person training is being tracked," one US survey respondent said.

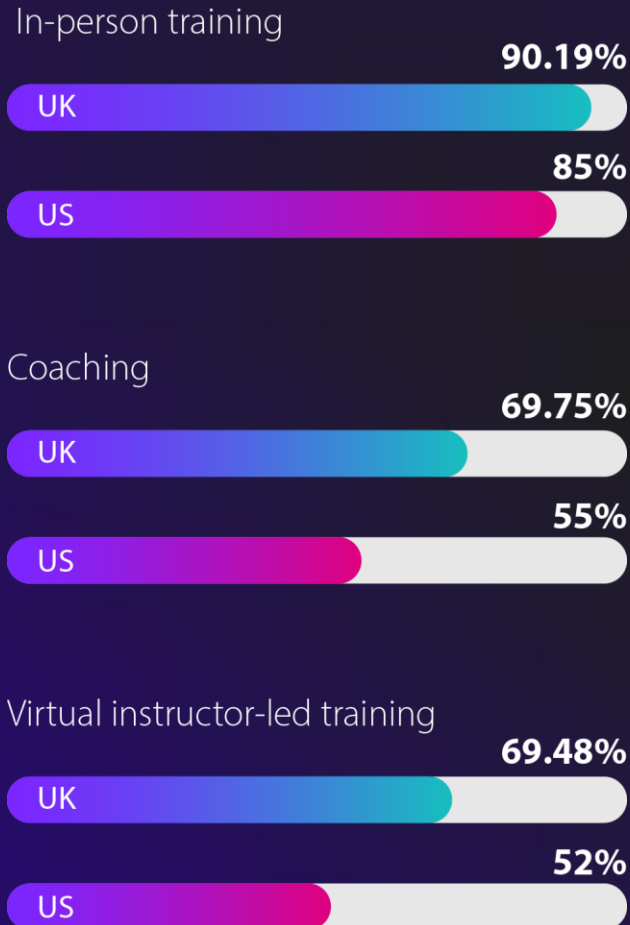
To succeed, L&D is increasingly focused on measurably supporting organizational performance. It's telling that the business impact assessment of development activity had grown 12% YoY. That's not to say L&D is ignoring the individual learner, especially when training activities are concerned with delivering boosted soft skills and being engaging.

Clearly, why the top feedback method on L&D success is **learner feedback, used by 82% in the UK and 67% in the US.**

In fact, Randstad found over four in 10 employees would quit if they were offered no learning while 88% of organisations are concerned about employee retention – with learning their number one retention strategy.



The top 3 learning approaches currently used to enhance the learning & employee performance across your organization in 2025



Learning experience

Clearly interested in how learning delivers, the function is always looking for new ways to be more effective. Often with less investment: with a 7% YoY drop in respondents expecting that it will be more cash that boosts their practice. Instead, practitioners are turning to improving their communication methods, more closely aligning with the business, and providing a better learning experience.

With a stronger focus on both individual and organizational outcomes, L&D can show it is the thread that connects skills, people, and overall performance.

But what does that learning experience look like?

There's remarkable YoY growth in in-person training (77% to 87% overall, with a rocketing 17% YoY growth in the US alone) with coaching and virtual instructor training also central.

Though RTO mandates will play their part, when L&D is expected to not only grow skills but boost engagement and experiences, coming together, when structured effectively, can simply make people feel good. It becomes a strategic tool with benefits beyond training alone

Human skills

Despite broader expectations, L&D ultimately exists to deliver and enhance skills and capabilities. Therefore, it's hardly surprising that the biggest innovation respondents want to see isn't new-fangled ways of showcasing its value to the business, or even new technology, but about soft skill development. Not surprising in the face of constant transformation.

Indeed, **75% of businesses in the UK want more human/soft skills** (7% growth YoY) with the biggest US organisations seeing this as the most important development.

As the World Economic Forum has found, skills are the number one barrier to organizational transformation with four in 10 workers' skill sets becoming outdated over the next five years. Within such change, respondents told us that skills such as change management, leadership, interpersonal and people skills are seen as critical to deliver. Here, it's about getting people up to speed with handling difficult situations, problem-solving, negotiation, teamwork, and wayfinding when the context is pressured or new as well as boosting emotional intelligence.

75%

**of UK businesses
want innovations
in human/soft skills**

1**Leadership & People Skills**

Coaching
Communication
Emotional Intelligence
Critical Thinking

2**Digital & Technical**

AI
Cybersecurity Awareness
Evidence-based Decision Making
Automation

3**Adaptability & Change**

Resilience
Adaptability & Agility
Leading Through Uncertainty
Problem Solving



Click to read the WEF report

With the latest McKinsey & Co data showing that 78% of organisations are using AI in some way, it's not just about soft skills.

L&D understands that a combination of human and technical skills (63% of UK respondents believe is the most important in the face of the growing use of AI), as well as digital proficiency and ability to make decisions based on the right inputs in the face of ongoing digital transformation are key.

Indeed, many businesses will already be experimenting with AI, from Copilot to ChatGPT for learning. For L&D, it's about making sure that it's tailored to what the organization needs.

As one respondent said: *"The future skills and behaviors most critical for our business will revolve around adaptability, digital proficiency, and continuous learning to ensure we remain competitive."*



2 out of 3

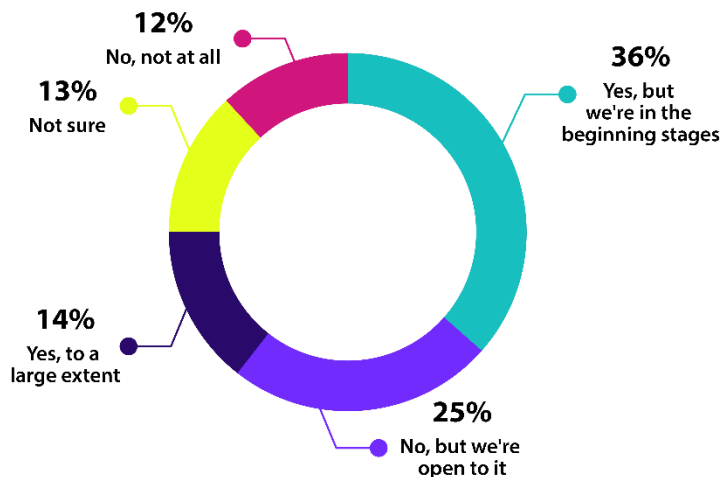
In the UK believe a combination of technical and human skills are most important for organisations.

Leveraging AI

With most organisations using AI across their operations, 75% of all respondents are at the very least open to using AI in learning is positive. But that's not to say AI is now being widely used.

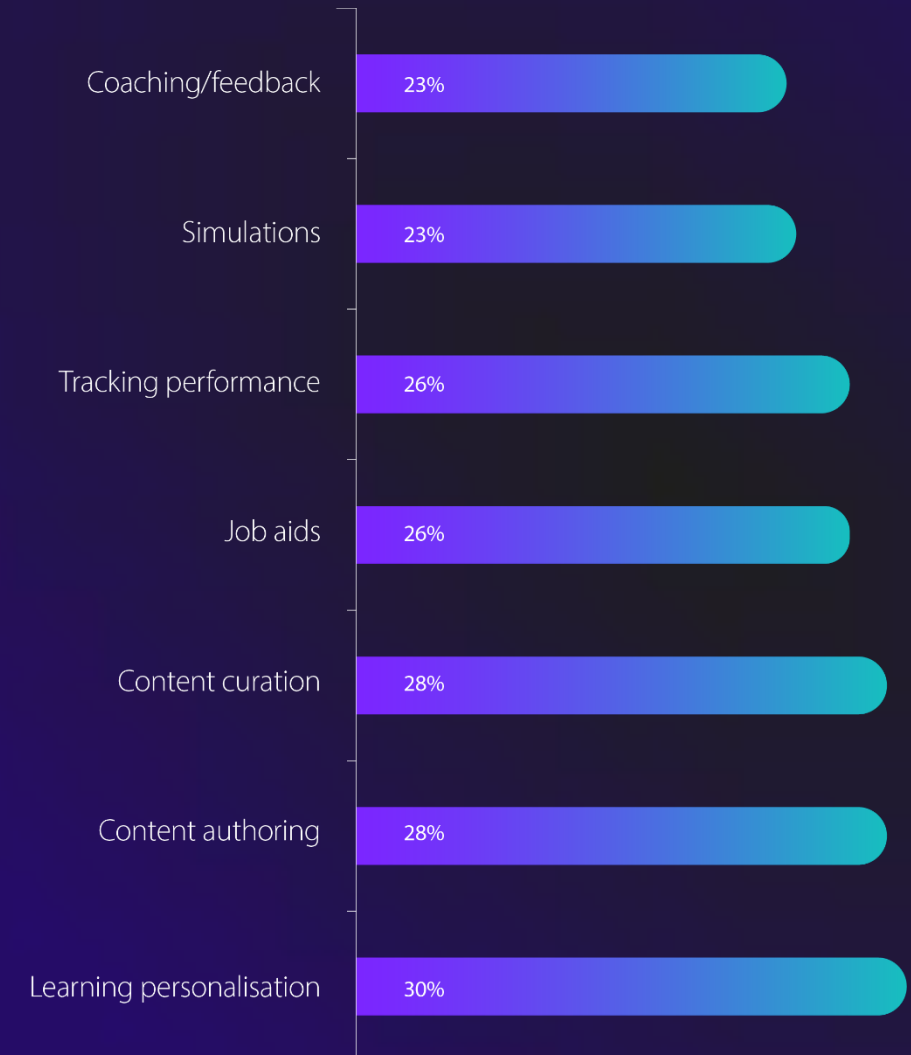
Only 36% of respondents say they are currently using it. For those that are, it is mostly in the beginning stages. Implementation, many will know, is variable, ranging from personalising development to learning support and curating content.

Indeed, there's no one learning utility that AI is being used to support in a standout manner, suggesting an as-and-when-appropriate approach.



Is Gen AI part of your learning and development strategy for 2025?

What are you using Gen AI for?



Who is AI ready?

In fact, with over four in 10 respondents saying they're too busy with workloads to make effective use of AI, it may be that IT functions or individual learners are taking the lead.

Could it be they're missing out on L&D strategic oversight?

Or is it that this not-all-at-once implementation shows L&D at its strategic best? Many respondents are comfortable with the current pace of AI adoption with over 60% saying they're excited for what it will bring, an indicator that here L&D may be aligned with business needs when it comes to not going too quickly with implementation of new technology.

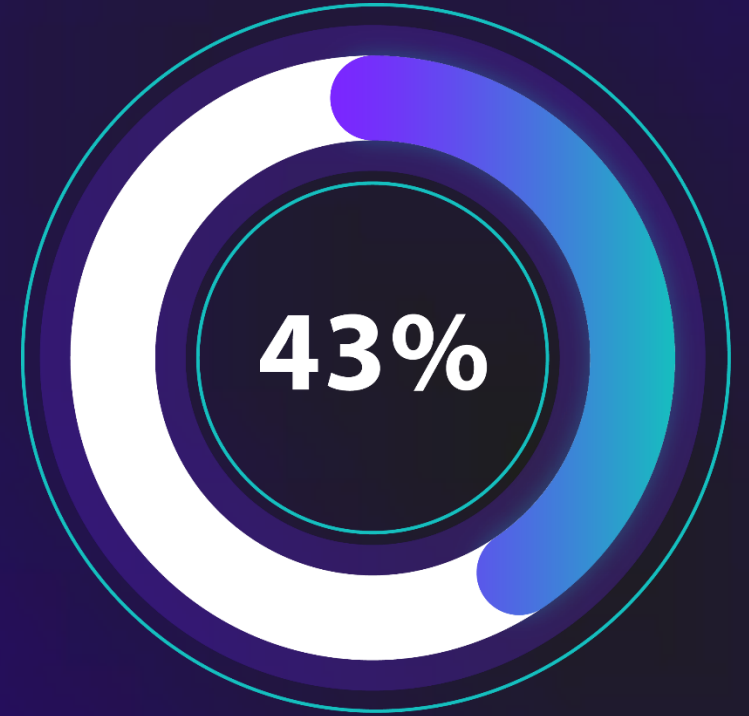
Despite this varied picture, it is undeniable that the utilisation of AI in L&D is on an upward trend. Usually backed with bigger budgets, US L&D functions are ahead of the UK with AI. But even in the UK, there has been a 37% YoY drop in those never using AI in L&D.

And the skills that functions are most obsessed with delivering (change, interpersonal and digital) are exactly the skills that L&D knows will be critical in an AI-changed world.



6 in 10

L&D leaders are excited by the opportunities AI will bring this year



43% of respondents say colleagues are too busy to use AI effectively

Conclusion

L&D continues to face familiar pressures—tight budgets, resource constraints, and the need to drive strategic impact beyond training. But in today's constantly evolving landscape, change is the new norm, and L&D must continuously adapt. The business needs L&D to be effective—58% of respondents are already building strategies to boost employee performance.

While 2024 focused on adapting to hybrid work and exploring AI's potential, 2025 is about doing it smarter: using in-person delivery where it counts, introducing AI at a sustainable pace, and blending soft skills with digital capabilities.

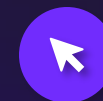
Despite ongoing challenges, L&D is showing it knows the path forward—aligning to business goals, making an impact with limited resources, and building the right skills for success. And while the journey isn't easy, L&D doesn't have to do it alone.

Explore our AI-generated summary



Results in full

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Who took part?

Q1. Which of these best describes your role?

The Hemsley Fraser Impact Survey had 822 responses. 455 responses from the US and 367 from the UK, across L&D, HR OD, digital transformation and organizational development roles.



35%

L&D



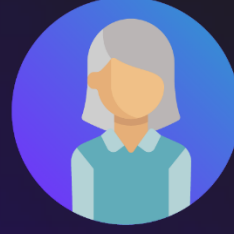
28%

HR/People



11%

Talent/Performance



9%

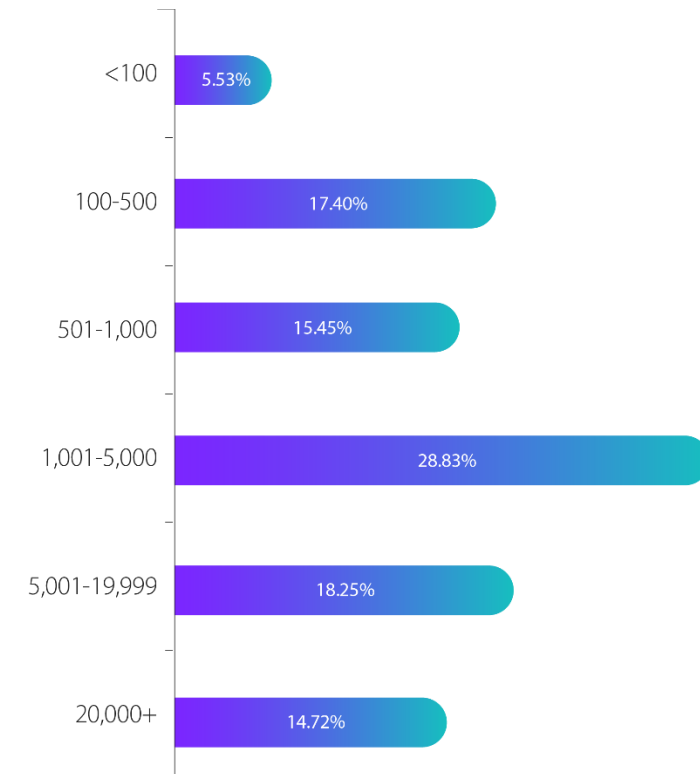
OD

Company size

14

Q2. How many people does your organization employ?

Respondents were from a cross-section of company sizes, including <100 people (5.35%), 100-500 (17.40%), 5,01-1,000 (15.45%), 1,001-5,000 (28.83%), 5,001-19,999 (18.25%) and 20,000+ (14.72%).



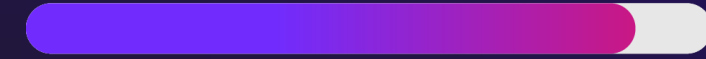
Learning approaches

Q3. Which approaches are currently utilized to enhance learning & employee performance across your organization?

That human-centred approaches are the most utilized by L&D to drive learning and performance outcomes indicates learning practitioners who are aware of the power of bringing employees together with purpose.

RTO mandates may also be a powerful driver but so will the need for soft skill development and to build development-backed cultures that work to train, engage and retain individuals through powerful human moments - all guided by delivering for the business. This isn't to discount online and digital resources, with over half of respondents using a portal to interface learning.

In-person training 87%



Coaching 62%



Virtual instructor-led training 60%



Free online resources 56%



Learning hub/portal 54%



Blended learning 51%



L&D challenges

Q4. *What have been the main challenges facing learning & employee performance at your organization over the past 12 months?*

On both sides of The Atlantic, motivating employees for learning is a major challenge. This speaks to constant change, not only does L&D have pressures on time and capacity to create and deliver impactful, engaging learning but employees too are working in a volatile and changeable world with many pressures on their time. Reflected in time and capacity also being a major challenge for the learning function.

With so much change, creating learning that is relevant both for present challenges and tomorrow's reality is a tough ask: not only in delivering the right skills and adapting to the right technology but in getting buy-in from leaders (showing that learning and delivering measurable ROI) but also from employees. There is remarkable consistency across 2024 and 2025 regarding the top L&D challenges within organisations.



Q5. *How have you and your organization responded to these challenges?*

Enhancing training experiences

- Focusing on structure and schedule
- Prioritizing high-impact and business-critical learning initiatives due to budget constraints.
- Performance-based incentives tied to training completion and application
- Streamlining learning requests

"Trying to put in place continuing learning journeys; personalising training; trying to embrace microlearning and change mindsets from a one-size-fits-all and tick-box exercise."

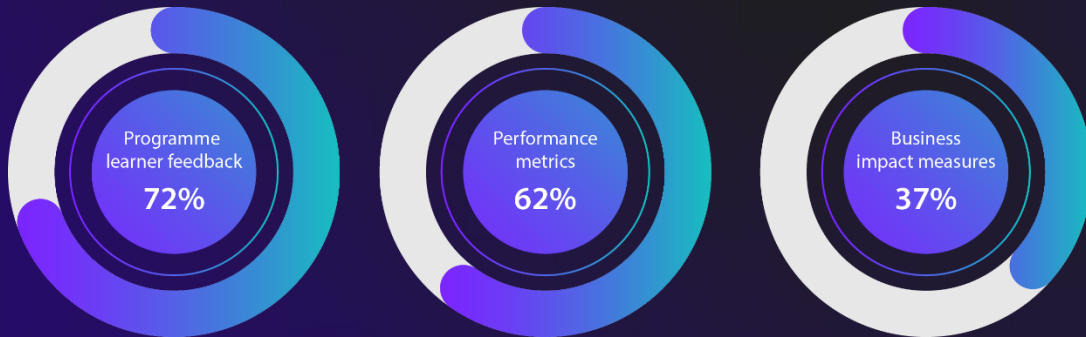


Measurement

Q6. *How do you currently assess the impact of learning on organizational and individual performance?*

It is clear that L&D is increasingly aligned to both organizational level and individual delivery. Not least, there is a 7% YoY growth in the use of the most regularly deployed assessment tactic, 'Programme learner feedback'. Elsewhere, in the UK, there is a 12% YoY growth in 'Business impact measures'.

UK & US Average

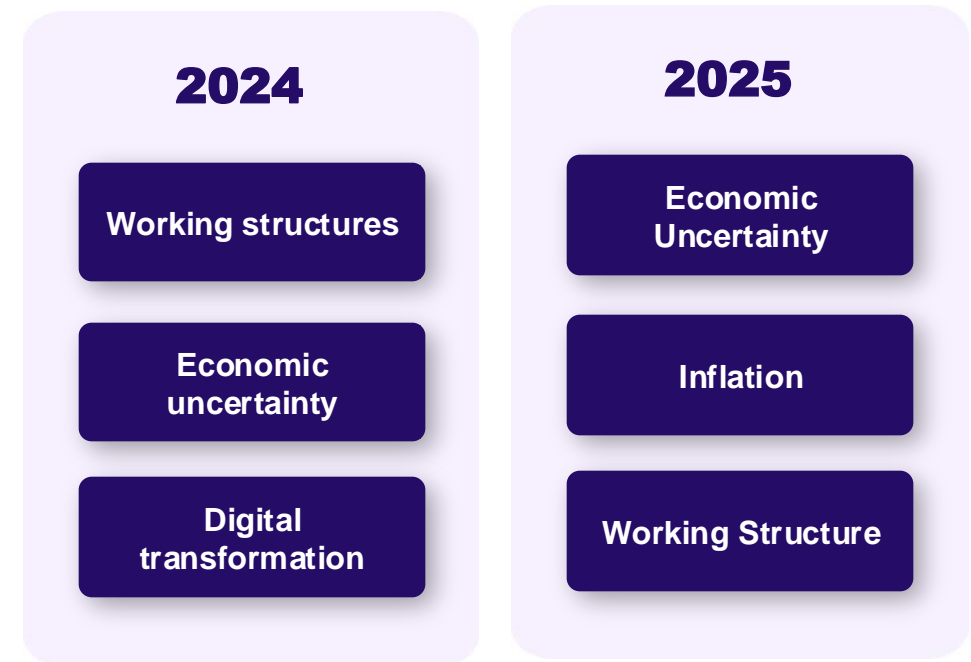


Business challenges

17

Q7. *What are the top three challenges your business is facing in 2025?*

Inflation, increased costs and economic certainty (53%) are the most common answers for top business challenges, with working structures and digital transformation also critical. Compared to 2024, there has been a slight inversion, with battles of hybrid work 12 months ago, leading to it being considered that working structures were the biggest challenge.



Performance objectives

Q8. What are the top three learning and development challenges you anticipate for 2025 in supporting your organisation's performance objectives?

L&D clearly sees what the organization is grappling with. A sentiment analysis of the most common responses shows that the biggest barriers L&D sees in supporting organizational performance are financial constraints, buy-in and engagement and integrating new technology.

“Employees may not feel motivated to engage in training, especially when under pressure.”

“Lack of clarity on how learning contributes to career progression.”

“Time to complete training items, meeting all training needs and ensuring all in person training is being tracked.”



Human skills

Q9. What future skills and behaviors are most critical for your business?

Backdropped by constant change, and the need to centre the human (not least to engage and retain top talent), many of the in-demand critical skills L&D is tasked with delivering focus on the human.

In the UK, everything from coaching, team development, leadership communication and adaptability are key. Indeed, leaders and top performers will also need to be organizational nodes that can become learning leaders, too.

The US is similar, interpersonal skills are critical, not least in handling difficult situations and building relationships that can underpin organizational success. Last year, our survey showed the same: human skills were the top capability L&D was expected to deliver.

1

Leadership & People Skills

Coaching
Communication
Emotional Intelligence
Critical Thinking

2

Digital & Technical

AI
Cybersecurity Awareness
Evidence-based Decision Making
Automation

3

Adaptability & Change

Resilience
Adaptability & Agility
Leading Through Uncertainty
Problem Solving



Learning strategy

Q10. Which of these is driving your learning and development strategy?

L&D has long been expected to deliver outside of mere development strategising, and design and delivery of learning. With better alignment to organizational goals (Q12) near the top of the function's list for what will accelerate the impact of learning on the business, it's hardly surprising that talent retention, employee engagement and business goals are the top three drivers of L&D – with 9% YoY growth in the US for talent retention as a driver and 15% YoY growth in the UK for engagement and self-fulfilment.

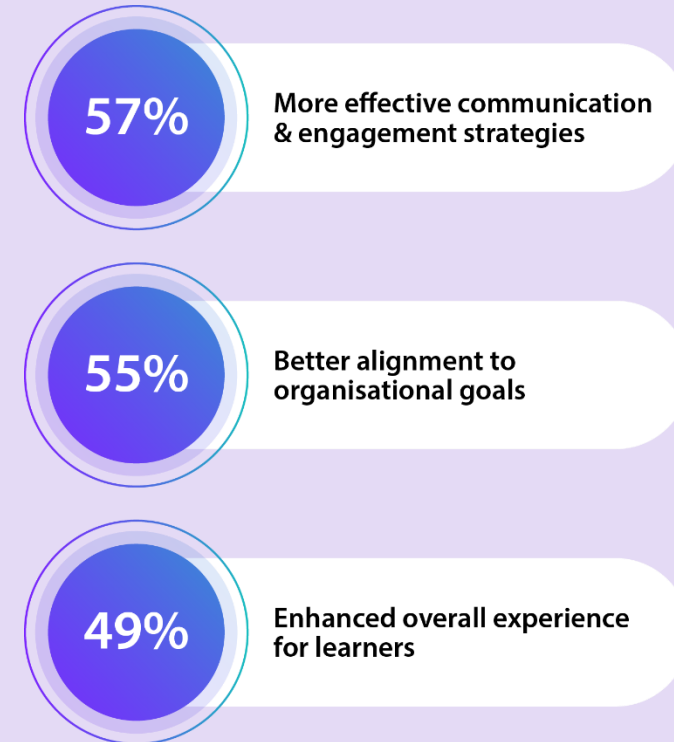
This is not to say delivery of critical skills via development isn't a primary concern (showcased by Q9 & Q13 responses) but rather the function is broadly self-aware, understanding how skills are critical for business success but also can deliver for the wider talent management strategy.



UK & US Average

Q11. Thinking about the next 12-18 months, what do you think will accelerate the impact of your learning strategy on business success?

More effective communication and engagement strategies are expected to have the biggest acceleration impact on strategies over the next 12-18 months. It was the most common answer at 57%.

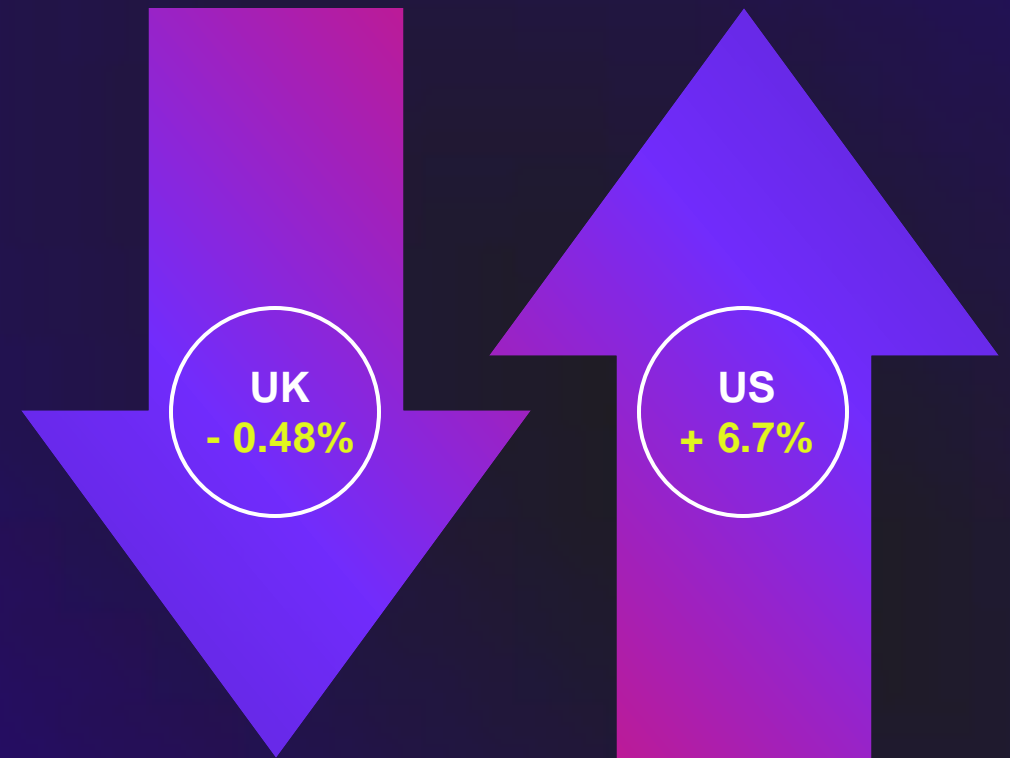


Budgets

***Q12.** Will your organization plan to increase its learning and development budget for the year ahead?*

Similar to 2024, the UK responses show a bearishness on investment, while in the US, there is confidence that L&D investment is coming. In the UK, there is an average expectation of a 0.48% decrease in budgets; in the US, there is a 6.7% increase expectation.

Reminder: This data was collected between January – March 2025



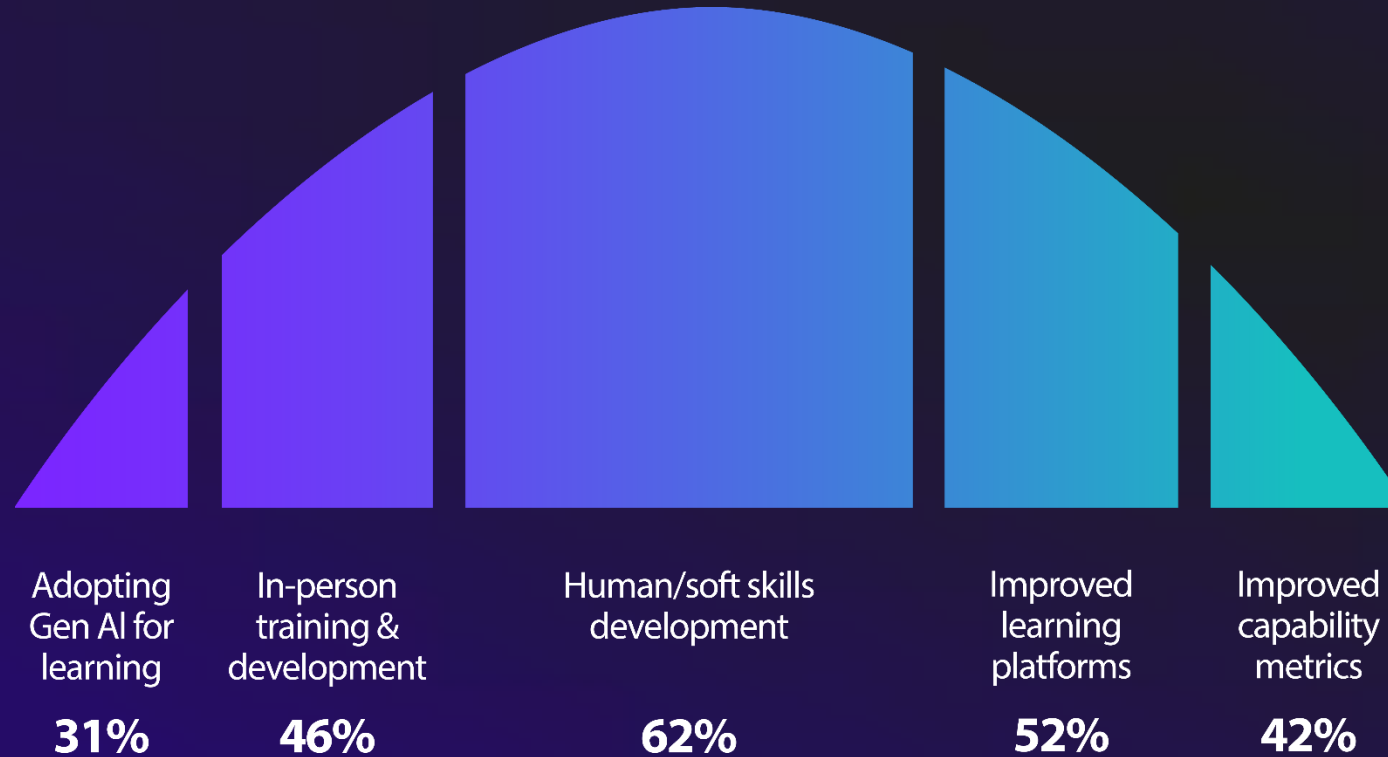
What % of change do you believe your organization plans in the learning and development budget for the year ahead?



Innovations

Q13. *What learning and development innovations would you like to see in 2025 that could enhance organizational performance?*

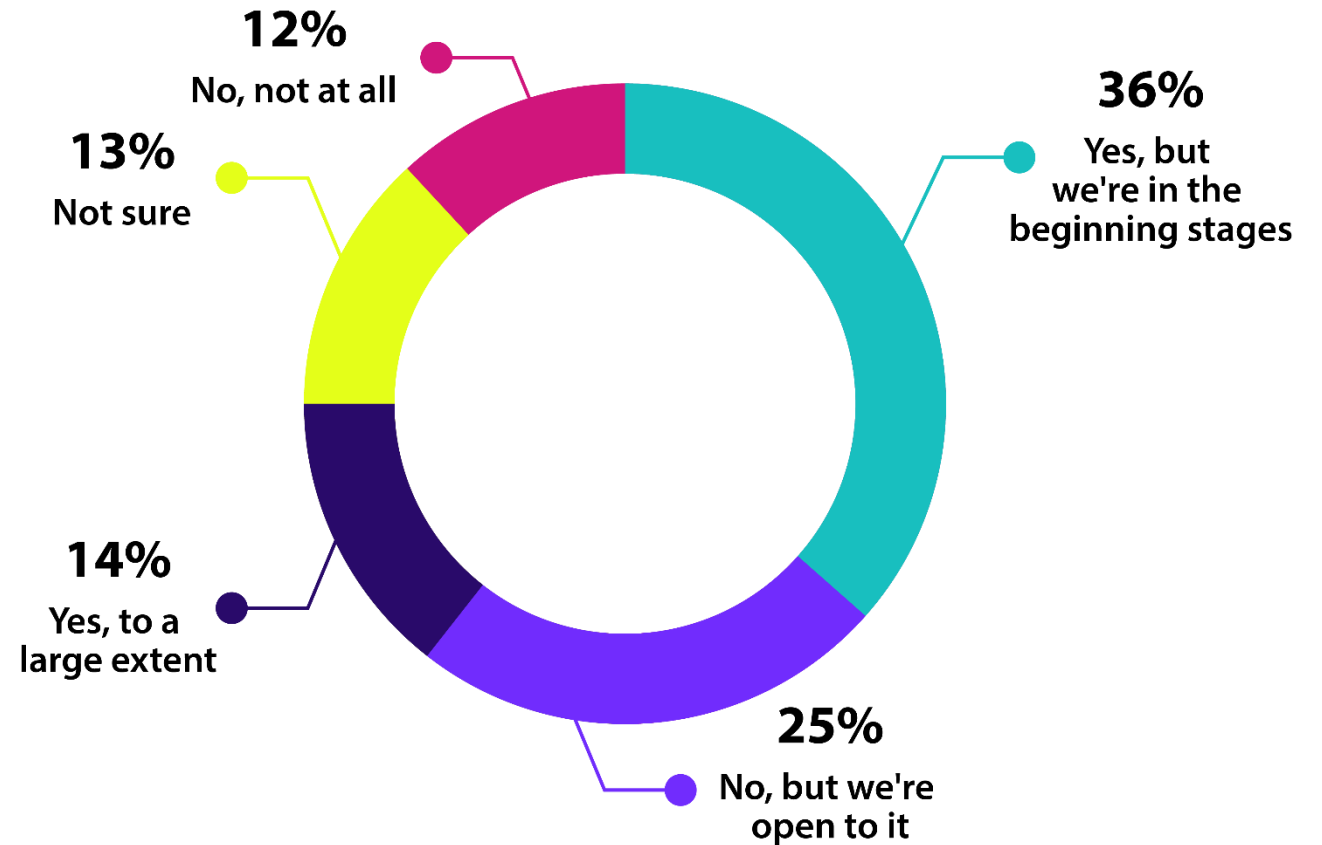
Top of mind for L&D innovations that could enhance organizational performance in 2025 are human/soft skills (62%), improved learning platforms (52%), and in-person training and development (46%). In 2024, the most in-demand innovation was also human/soft skills development.



Generative AI

Q14. Is Gen AI part of your learning and development strategy for 2025?

At least 75% of respondents were open to using AI in their L&D strategy across 2025. Notably, only 14% were using it to a large extent, with 36% of respondents just getting to grips with effectively implementing the technology.



Empowered by AI

Q15. What are you using Gen AI for?

If not the top concern, AI is having a growing impact on learning delivery and design. Indeed, a recent Fosway study showed that 47% of organisations are concerned with how to manage the impact of automation and AI. Hardly surprising given that over three-quarters are respondents say they are at least open to AI being part of their L&D strategy.

With less budget available, in the UK it is content authoring (38%) and creation (37%) that are the most popular uses of AI – a nod, perhaps, to free-to-use or cheaper price point generative models.

In the US, performance tracking (35%) and learning personalisation (35%) are top which suggests more mature use for a market that is more bullish on investment and further ahead (14% use AI to a large extent compared to 3% in the UK) with AI. But it's hardly likely L&D controls all AI implementation: IT may take the lead as will individual employees and use is spread between many utilities. Here, job aids (26%), simulations (23%) and learner support (22%) are all noticeable AI uses.

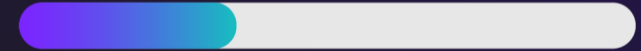
There are many similarities to how AI was used in 2024, with a fairly even spread across learning personalisation, content curation, translation and creation of job aids - showing an approach tailored to individual need.

UK

Content authoring **38.28%**



Content curation **37.32%**

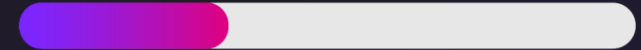


Learning personalisation **20.10%**



US

Tracking performance **35%**



Learning personalisation **34%**



Job aids **31%**



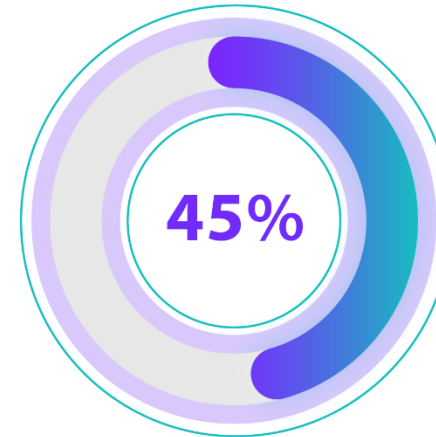
Balancing act

Q16. *What is the most important skill set workforces need to help them cope with AI's impacts on organisations, their processes, and the way people interact?*

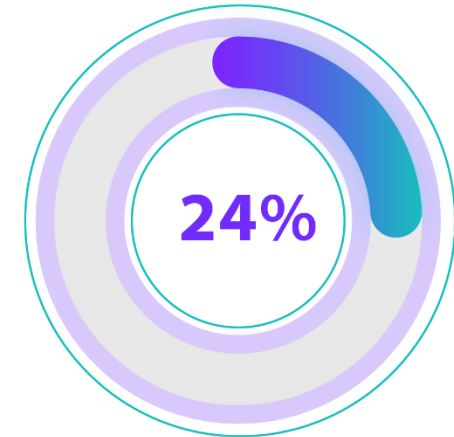
When it comes to understanding what skills are needed to help manage the organizational impact of AI, L&D is clear about what is most necessary.

Here, 45% of respondents said a balance between technical and human skills is essential, followed by almost a quarter of respondents (24%) saying human skills, such as emotional intelligence, are critical.

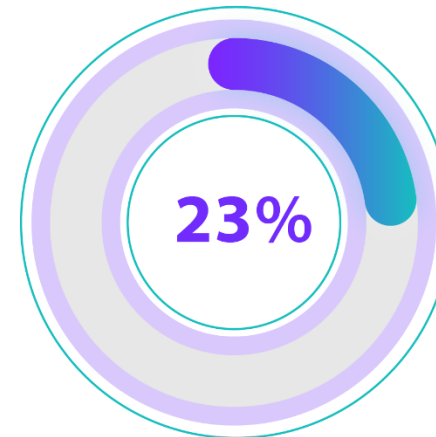
A combination of technical and human skills



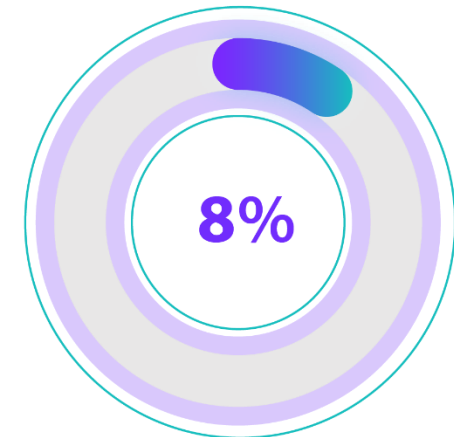
Human skills and capabilities like emotional intelligence, health and resilience; and complex problem solving



AI technical skills, ability to understand how AI works, the technology behind it, how to physically use it



Don't know/not sure



I'm excited about the opportunities AI will bring in 2025

61%



My organisation is adapting AI at the right pace, ensuring buy-in from employees and positively impacting the right areas of the business

44%



My colleagues are too busy with current workloads to make effective use of new tools like AI

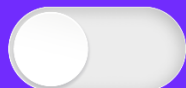
43%



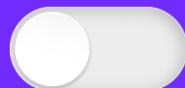
***Q17.** Please read the following statements about the use of AI and indicate your agreement as it applies to your organization.*

When it comes to appetite for AI, L&D is optimistic about the benefits it can bring. More than six in 10 respondents (61%) said they are optimistic for the benefits AI can bring with other popular responses being they are implementing the new technology at the right pace cognisant of buy-in (44%) while others say they are too busy with work loads to effectively use new tools (43%). A mixed adoption landscape.

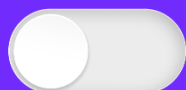




AI is in demand, but access is limited — respondents want AI-powered learning tools, yet many face tech restrictions.



LMS/LXP frustrations persist — teams are either lacking effective systems or struggling with poor platform integration.



Data-driven learning needs a boost — there's strong interest in better analytics, dashboards, and measurement tools.



Digital overload risks soft skills — concern that heavy reliance on AI/digital learning is undermining critical thinking and face-to-face development.

What's missing?

***Q18.** From a performance and learning perspective, what approach, resources or technologies do you feel your organization is current missing?*

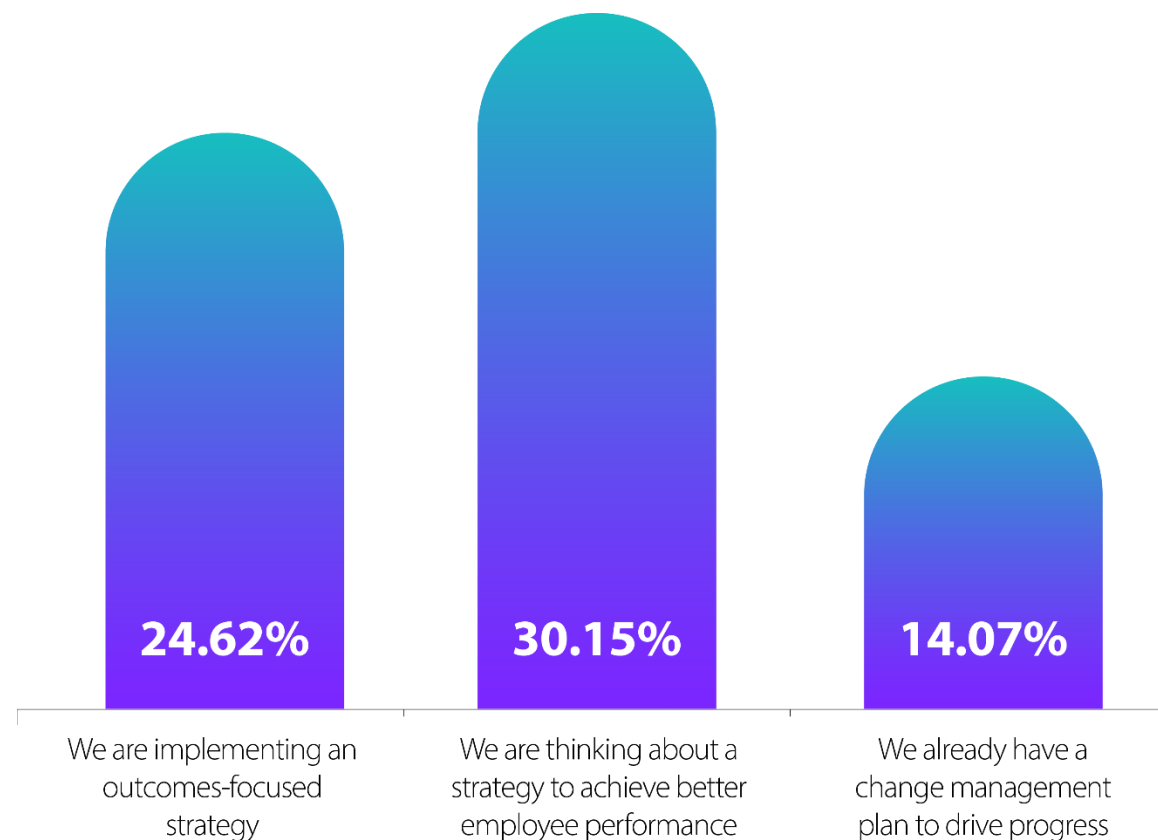
A sentiment analysis of respondent answers to the approaches they feel are missing from performance and learning support showed more appetite for AI in learning and development (such as AI-created learning pathways), more LMS for integrated learning, better data analytics and more human/soft skills development.



Employee performance

Q19. Which of the following best describes your organisation's strategic approach to supporting employee performance?

When it comes to improving employee performance, most organisations are still at the creating or thinking about the strategy stage (30.15%), with only 24.62% at the implementing the strategy and even less (14.07%) who have a change management plan that delivers on performance and organizational goals.



AI summary

Disclaimer: Findings summarized by AI, refined by Hemsley.

Learning & Development continues to prove its strategic value amid ongoing challenges—tight budgets, hybrid work structures, and fast-paced digital change. Despite these pressures, L&D remains critical in driving business success through skill development, employee engagement, and organizational performance.

Top Priorities for L&D

- **Human-Centered Skills:** 75% of UK organisations would like innovations in human skills, Prioritizing soft skills like change management, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness—recognising them as essential for transformation and retention.
- **AI Adoption with Caution:** While 75% are open to using AI in L&D, only 50% are actively doing so—primarily for content creation and personalisation. The emphasis is on blending human and digital capabilities to future-proof talent.
- **Performance-Driven Learning:** There's a growing focus on impact: Learner feedback continues to be the top success metric (82% UK).

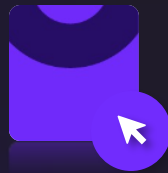
Key Insights

- **In-Person Learning Resurgence:** A 17% rise in the US shows the value of human connection in driving engagement and culture. Human-centered approaches are the most utilized by L&D (in-person & coaching)
- **Universal Pressures:** Budget constraints, time limitations, and maintaining learner motivation remain top challenges. With so much change/uncertainty, creating learning that is relevant for present challenges and tomorrow's reality is tough.
- **Strategic Alignment:** L&D is expected to contribute directly to organizational goals, not just training outcomes.

What's Needed Next

- **More Strategic Use of AI:** Expand personalized pathways and support tools, allow people the time to explore new tools and ways of working. 43% of respondents say colleagues are too busy to use AI effectively.
- **Stronger Comms & Engagement:** Improve communication with both leaders and learners to secure buy-in and increase learning uptake.
- **Greater Focus on Human Skills:** Providing timely opportunities to develop both technical and human skills, alongside one another.





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