

The State of Learning 2025

The L&D revolution: How forward-thinking leaders are building tomorrow's workforce



Introduction

L&D's impact is growing, but so are the challenges.

L&D is maturing. Driven by a perfect storm of challenges, organisations are turning to employee education to upskill their workforce and deliver on business objectives.

Armed with a growing toolset that includes Adaptive Learning, AI content creators and AI learning assistants, L&D leaders are delivering value, fuelling growth and creating a competitive advantage for their businesses.

And yet, in an era where ROI is front-of-mind for many, leaders are having to work harder than ever to demonstrate their value. As a result, there's a widespread feeling within the industry that the function isn't always taken as seriously as it could be. Budgets are challenged, initiatives left unsupported and L&D teams aren't being empowered to enact the changes that could help to drive their business forward.

With this in mind, Rise Up - in partnership with People Management - has conducted extensive research among L&D professionals to understand the challenges that they currently face.

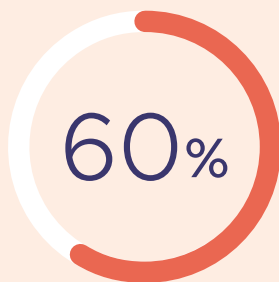
Our study shows how forward-thinking leaders are building tomorrow's workforce, and making L&D central to business success. It also showcases the role that new technology is playing in delivering that success, with more and more leaders embracing the transformative power of cutting-edge methodologies like Adaptive Learning and LIFOW.

In this report, we share findings from our research that will interest L&D leaders and their teams, but also senior managers who are keen to understand more about the halo effect of successful learning strategies. We also present actionable insights and case studies which prove why technology-driven learning is the future for L&D strategy, employee engagement and business growth.



Methodology

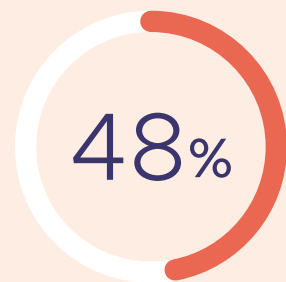
Rise Up partnered with leading HR and L&D publication People Management Insight to conduct research among 300 senior L&D professionals based at companies across the UK. The research was conducted online via a questionnaire sent to People Management's subscriber database in summer 2025.



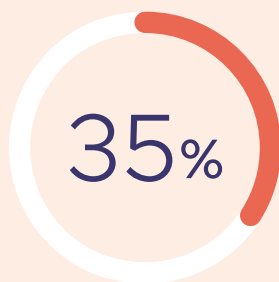
of organisations have a dedicated L&D function



state L&D has improved employee engagement in their organisations



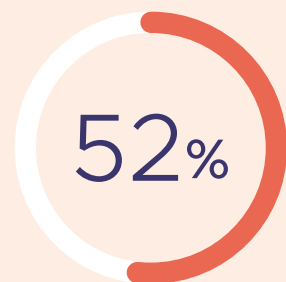
of L&D leaders say L&D is central to their wider business's strategy



are yet to apply AI to any of their L&D processes



say the board approves fewer than half of their L&D initiatives



use AI for content creation, and 30% automate processes

L&D leaders' growing impact on business success

More than half (51%) of respondents revealed that L&D initiatives are central to the success of their organisation, a significant increase from the 41% who made the same claim in 2024.

It's a bold statement that speaks to the increasing importance of L&D. From a growing skills gap to the adoption of AI, in an era where the only constant is change, L&D leaders are playing a vital role in delivering business success.

And the good news for L&D leaders is that organisations are taking note of their efforts. This year, just 38% of those responding believed that L&D is not a primary focus for their company, a significant drop from the 47% who answered the same question in 2024, further emphasising the business-critical nature of L&D.

It's clear that while progress has been made, moving forward, leaders will have to continue to work hard to prove their function's value and take steps to put L&D at the centre of business success.

The question is, do they have enough backing in the boardroom to cement L&D as a strategic imperative?

Do you think that L&D initiatives have a direct impact on your organisation's success?



Business backing for L&D is still patchy

In 2024, just 26% of respondents said their leadership team approved the vast majority (more than 75%) of L&D initiatives at their organisation. Now, that figure has crept up to 30%.

Albeit slow, the stats show that progress is being made. But when it comes to backing L&D initiatives, business support is still patchy.

According to respondents, just 3 in 10 business leaders understand the strategic, transformational power of L&D programmes. So it's perhaps no surprise that just 60% of L&D recommendations receive sign-off from senior management.

There's clearly a need for L&D leaders to help educate senior leaders on the value of their initiatives, helping them to see how it aligns with business objectives and outcomes.

For now though, it appears efforts to force L&D up the corporate agenda still have some way to go.

What % of your L&D team's recommendations are signed off by senior leadership or the board?



Budget pressures on L&D's business case

Over recent years we've seen L&D rise to prominence as businesses switch on to the potential impact that education can have on employees.

But if this year's report is anything to go by, L&D's role as a strategic tool has begun to stall. Nowhere is this more evident than respondents' budgets, which have ground to a standstill in many organisations.

Driven by rising costs, economic uncertainty and a continued desire to demonstrate watertight ROI, pressure on budgets is nothing new. While around one in five (21%) respondents saw L&D budgets increase, a similar share (22%) admitted spend in this area has decreased. Most (31%) suggested L&D budgets at their business remained the same.

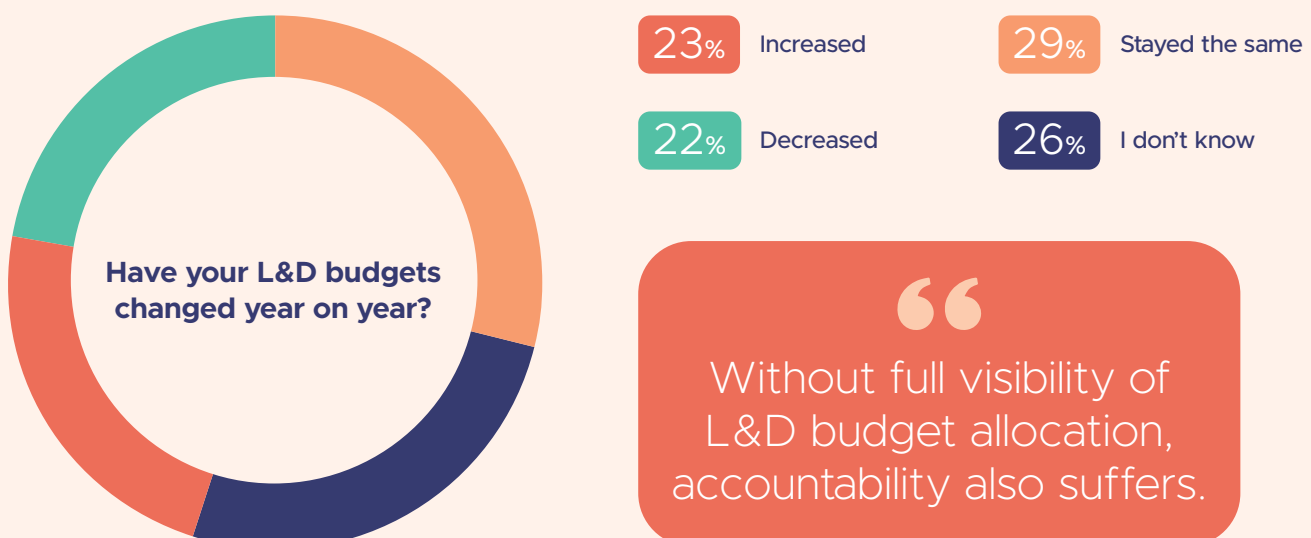
But what's perhaps most concerning about the report's revelations is the level of budget uncertainty that L&D leaders currently face.

Amazingly, one in five (20%) respondents said they don't know how much their business's annual L&D budget is. Though the exact budgetary allowance for L&D leaders will depend on the size of their organisation and the maturity of their function, it's still a worrying figure that potentially highlights a lack of visibility into how much is spent on L&D - and what exactly it is being spent on.

Without full visibility of L&D budget allocation, accountability also suffers. And without accountability, the business case for L&D can fall flat - even though, as we saw earlier, so many leaders hail its positive impact on business outcomes.

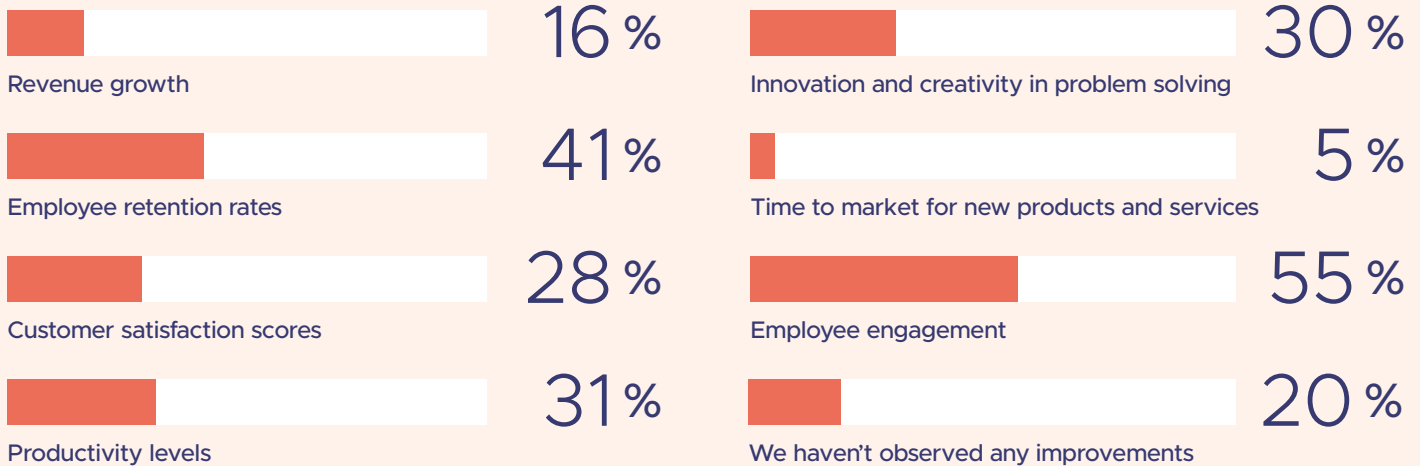
What L&D leaders need is a call to arms: the proof to present to final decision-makers that their area of the business deserves investment because it can propel performance.

Fortunately, there's plenty of evidence in this year's responses to confirm that's the case.



L&D strategy **boosts** businesses inside and out

Which of the following have improved since investing in L&D?



Despite challenges and budgetary pressure, the impact that L&D can have on an organisation remains clear. L&D leaders state a wide range of business outcomes have improved since their organisation invested in L&D. That puts them on solid ground to push for greater use of L&D strategies and technology to fuel further growth.

With their belief that it positively impacts everything from engagement to revenue growth - the message that's coming through from leaders is clear: L&D isn't a cost centre it's a vital tool for business success.

It's encouraging to note that both internal operations - not least employee engagement and retention, which also topped the list in 2024 - and external outcomes such as improved customer satisfaction are benefiting from L&D programmes.

But L&D's effects are most clearly seen in employee loyalty and performance. The top four outcomes of L&D investment all relate to employees being able to perform better, with improvements to creativity, problem-solving and overall productivity; thus pushing up both engagement and retention.

L&D increases employee communication and satisfaction in a boost to wider business culture.

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) respondents stated L&D expenditure can be linked directly to revenue growth at their business - up from 10% in 2024
- The amount of respondents noting an improvement in productivity levels increased from 26% to 32% between 2024 and 2025
- 'Customer satisfaction' mentions increased from 23% to 29% in the same timeframe

Digital learning adoption reaches new heights

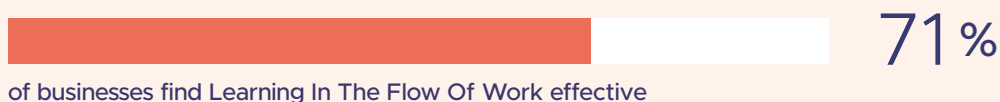
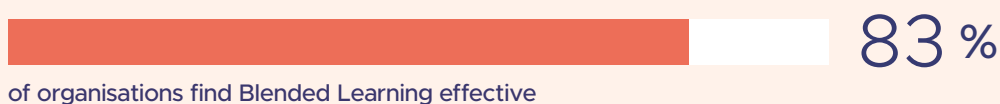
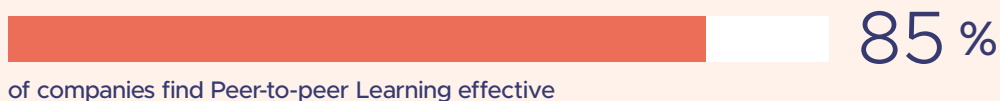
Just as we did in 2024, this year's State of Learning report asked L&D leaders to rate how effective they believe different methodologies have been in engaging learners and improving skills development.

Faced with a perfect storm of challenges, it's becoming increasingly clear that traditional training methods aren't delivering a successful learning experience for employees or the skills that organisations demand. Instead, there's a clear trend towards widespread adoption of digital learning and an understanding of the benefits it can deliver for L&D functions.

Today, just 6% of L&D leaders state that **Learning In The Flow Of Work (LIFOW)** isn't effective: in 2024 that figure was 15%. Moreover, 18% rated LIFOW very effective - triple the share in just a year. Belief in the impact of Adaptive Learning is also growing, with 95% of respondents emphasising the effective impact it can have on organisations. Beyond LIFOW and **Adaptive Learning**, Blended Learning also garnered positive perceptions, with 83% of respondents saying it is an effective approach.

These results show that the adoption of new technologies are starting to reach maturity. With wider adoption, these dynamic learning methodologies are making a positive impact on the workforce helping organisations to develop the skills they need to thrive both now, and in the future.

How effective have the following digital learning methodologies been in driving learner engagement and skills development in your organisation?



All of these learning methodologies present a powerful mix of L&D options, boosting learner and skills development, and prompting more positive outcomes for the wider business.

Digital learning is working, but is it being adopted?

L&D leaders know that with the right tools they can align learning with business goals to deliver success. They are adopting new tools and techniques as part of progressive strategies that are delivering real impact.

Our report shows that both LIFOW and Adaptive Learning are now more common than ever before. Today, just 22% of L&D leaders fail to include LIFOW in their L&D strategy. This represents a marked improvement on the 49% who answered the same question in 2024.

Similarly, just 41% do not have Adaptive Learning in place, a significant drop from 60% in 2024.

Clearly, more and more organisations are switching on to the benefits that L&D tech innovation can have on their organisations.

So what's behind this pronounced shift?

The answer lies in these innovations' ability to meet many of the challenges that modern businesses face.

With less than **1% of their working week dedicated to learning**, L&D leaders have realised that LIFOW can help them to make the most of this time by embedding education directly into employees' day-to-day lives.

At the same time, as organisations grapple with the rapid pace of change and an urgent need to upskill employees, Adaptive Learning can help deliver the skills they need fast. With its ability to drastically reduce time-to-skill by as much as 37%, it's no wonder that L&D leaders are adopting this powerful tool to meet their organisations' educational needs.



L&D leaders have more to do on **AI adoption**

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in all aspects of the workplace has continued at pace in 2025, so it's no surprise to see its impact has extended to L&D.

Today, the number of L&D leaders whose organisation have yet to apply AI has dropped to just a third (33%), down from more than half (55%) in 2024. A significant drop that highlights the growing impact of technology on the sector.

Asked to rate the use of AI to enhance L&D initiatives at their business, a total of 20% marked performance excellent or good. In 2024, the comparative total was just 11%.

L&D leaders are already using AI to pick up a huge range of tasks. Around 1 in 3 (33%) automate processes with the technology. By some distance, content creation for training is the most frequent AI-driven task (53%).

But while adoption of these tools and technologies is increasing, not every L&D leader has a full understanding of how to effectively use them.

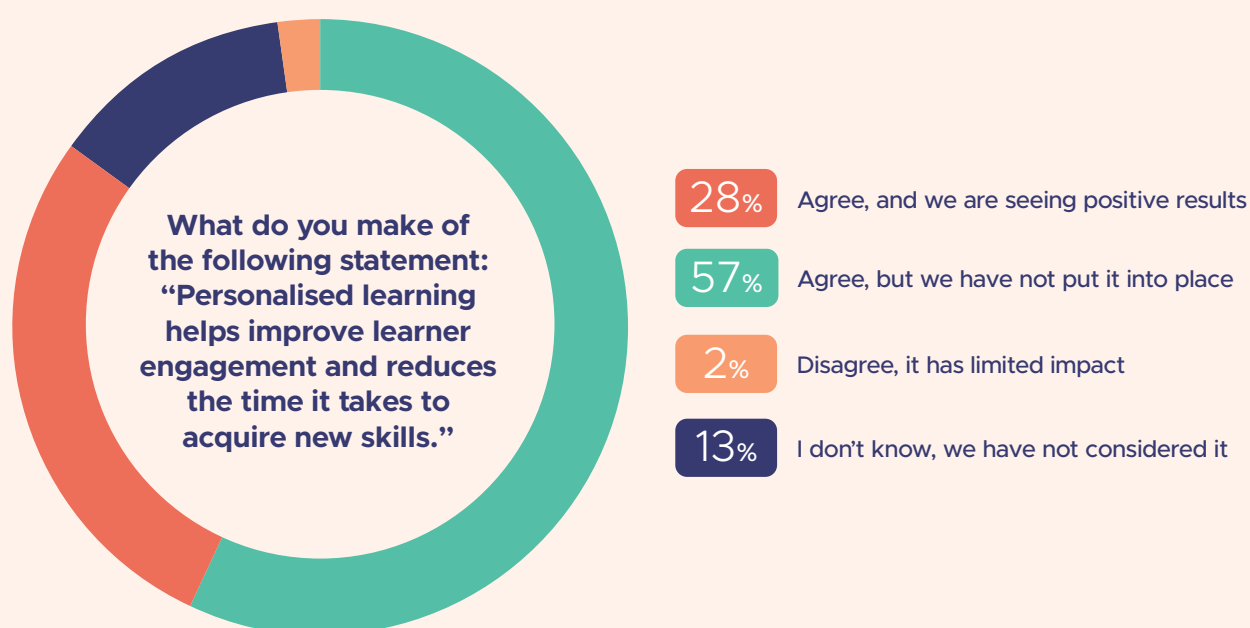
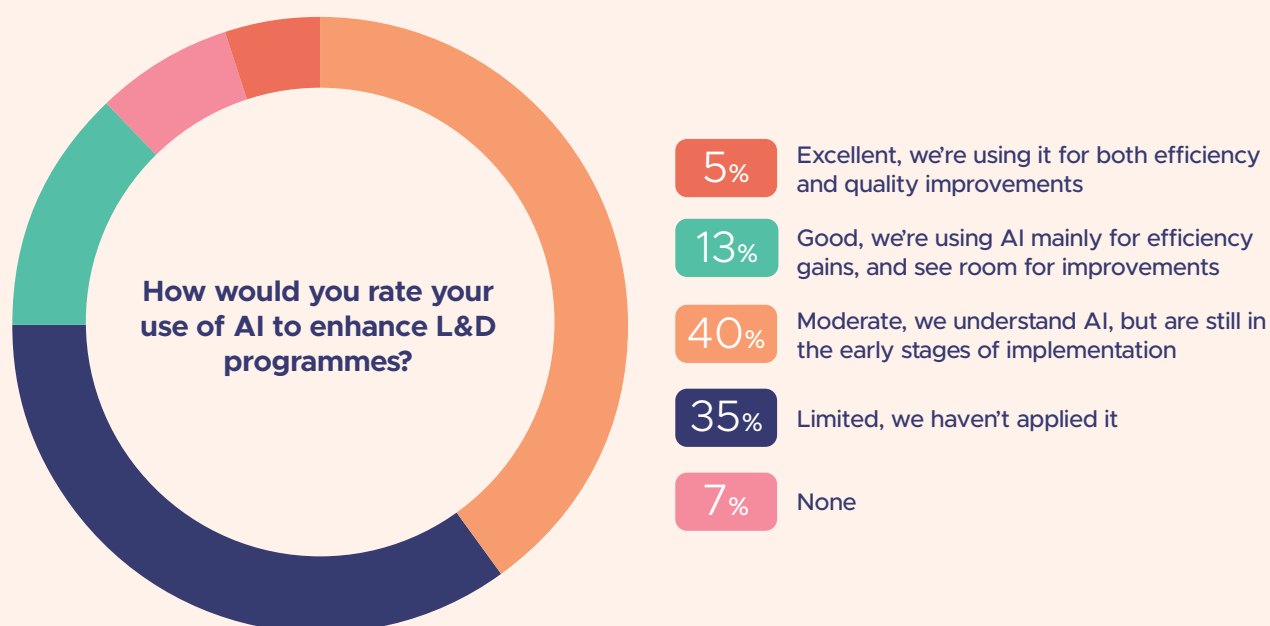
Only a fifth (21%) of L&D leaders we spoke to say they personalise learning paths with AI. Yet, more than half (56%) of respondents agree that personalised learning helps to improve learner engagement, while also reducing time to skill.

This tells us that while they believe in the transformational potential of these new tools and technologies many organisations are yet to realise the full power - and implications - of harnessing them for employee education.



As AI technology becomes an increasingly prominent part of our lives, it's clear L&D leaders need to do more to exploit its potential to transform the industry.

Getting to grips with AI is a key challenge but also a major opportunity for L&D leaders today. The technology can underpin a more efficient and cost-effective approach, from tailored learning to measuring success.



Accelerate your AI journey

AI's widespread application and clear benefits make it an imperative for any L&D programme. But, as we've seen, many organisations are yet to implement the technology - and some which have are unable to get the most out of it.

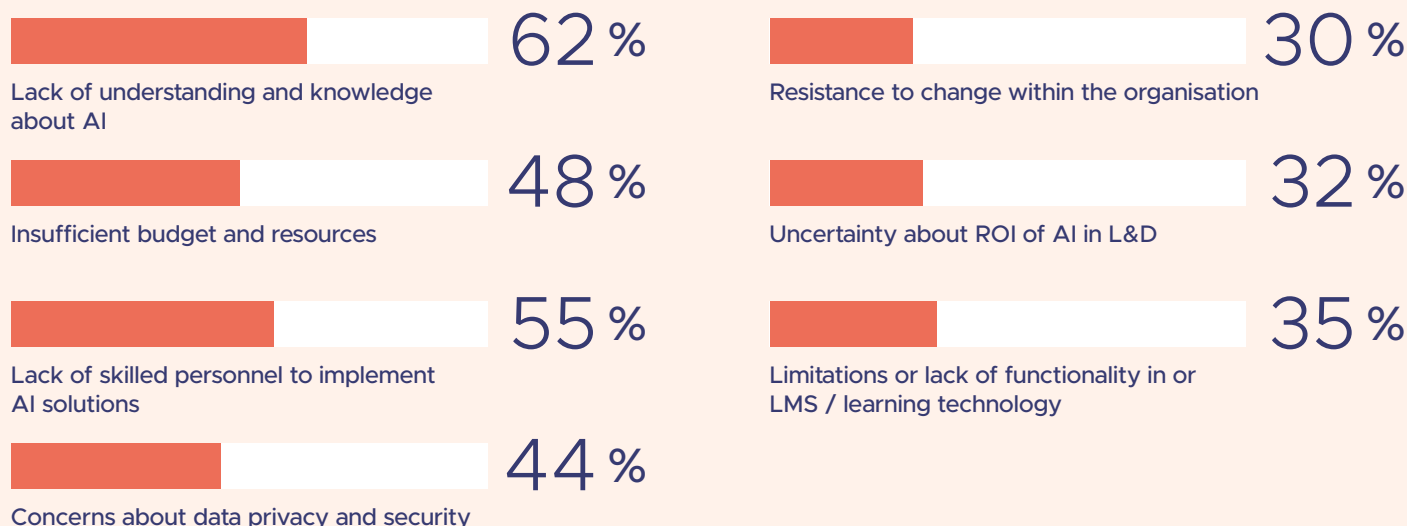
There are many barriers blocking the path to more widespread adoption and better use of AI for L&D.

Chief among these is a lack of understanding of AI tools, with 61% of L&D leaders stating this is the main issue - although this has fallen from 71% in 2024.

A further 54% revealed their business lacks the right skills in-house to implement AI. Once again, budget is also an issue, with 47% claiming insufficient funds are available for the technology.

Legacy systems and integration issues were seen as a further issue by 36% of respondents, and 27% stated institutional aversion to change at their business proved a blocker.

What do you see as the main barriers to using AI effectively in L&D

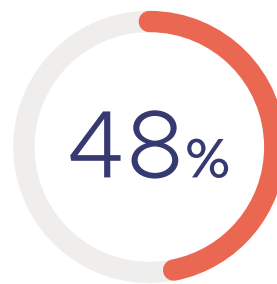


Barriers to AI implementation can be torn down by working with a Learning Tech partner that can support your business to make a seamless switch to new technology, no matter your existing L&D systems and strategy.

Time-to-skill is a powerful way to assess the effectiveness of AI in L&D programmes.

This metric includes time saved for the L&D team involved in training launches, and reducing the time taken by individual learners to achieve new skills.

There's no shame in starting small with any form of new technology, including AI. Testing it on specific processes is a great way to build workforce confidence in using the tools. It can demonstrate how effective the tech is at boosting creativity, efficiency and employee engagement.



of respondents cite insufficient investment in L&D as a reason AI tools aren't used



Constructing new skills with AI-driven L&D

Rise Up teamed up with online training provider Click2Learn to bolster the Structural Timber Association's (STA) accreditation process with an AI-driven initiative.

Goal:

Professional body the STA provides accreditation to thousands of installers, designers and manufacturers of timber frame structures. The organisation needed to upgrade its Installer Training Scheme to meet the construction sector's growing demand. The STA identified slow, manual certification and physical learning workbooks as inefficient ways to equip users with the right skills and accreditation.

Solution:

The STA engaged with Click2Learn to develop a new L&D model - and the supplier wrapped in its technology partner Rise Up. Together, we introduced an AI-powered proctoring tool; underpinning anytime, anywhere certification. AI tracks the installer's progress as they complete the exam, removing the need for an in-person test and invigilator.

 1,000

registered users have accessed the proctoring tool

 1 hour

for time to certification, down from half a day

 £75,000

estimated saving from reduced delays in building projects

We also provided the organisation with a bespoke, branded portal linked to its member website. Here, users can access a wealth of newly digitised content via a searchable index that enables rapid access to information as part of a new Learn In The Flow of Work approach.

Impact:

The proctoring tool has been accessed by more than 1,000 registered users, with 500 passing the exam during Spring and Summer 2024. Time to certification has been cut from half a day to just one hour.

Overall, there has been an estimated £75,000 saving from reduced delays in building projects based on time saved, hourly rates and number of users.

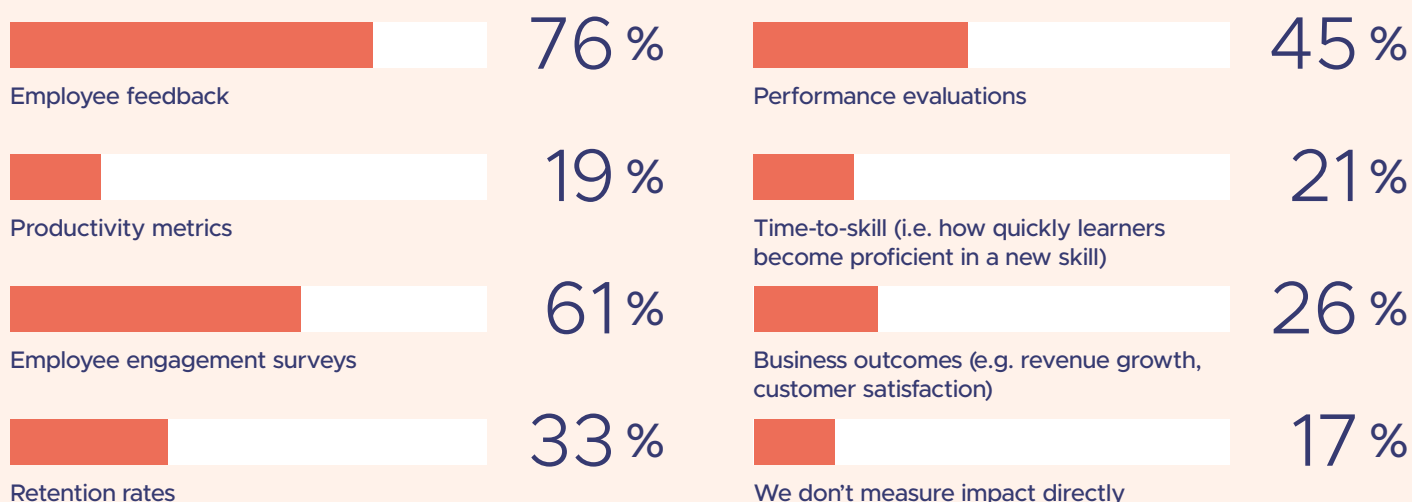
 **Dan Briscoe, Managing Director, Click2Learn**

We couldn't have implemented this project successfully without Rise Up's technical expertise. The solution demonstrates excellence in using advanced learning technologies to enhance efficiency, access to and speed of learning, and overall industry standards.

It's interesting to note that almost 1 in 3 (32%) L&D leaders said a major barrier to adopting AI for their function is uncertainty about ROI provided by the technology. Of course, the issue of ROI has long plagued L&D leaders, so it's important to recognise that AI is not a silver bullet that will suddenly change that.

That 32% however, represents a common challenge among L&D professionals in general: how to prove the value of their work and secure boardroom buy-in and budget.

At present, L&D teams use a range of techniques to collect data and measure the impact of programmes:



It's clear that traditional metrics that L&D leaders have leaned on for decades are still heavily used when it comes to demonstrating ROI. But these can only tell you part of the picture.

If L&D leaders want to truly communicate the effectiveness of their efforts, they need a new kind of metric, one that can closely align the outcome of their initiatives with business success.

That metric is time-to-skill. Yet just 22% of respondents are currently tracking it.

Time-to-skill is the ultimate KPI for L&D. It's an end-to-end measure that covers everything from identifying skill needs, to developing training materials, delivering them and achieving proficiency within your workforce. No other metric communicates the inherent value of L&D quite as effectively as time-to-skill. And crucially, in an era where agility and the ability to rapidly reskill employees is a business imperative, no other metric can demonstrate ROI quite as effectively either.

That's why it should be L&D's North Star.

The future of L&D in **focus**

As we've seen, L&D leaders have their fingers firmly on the pulse of their function. Many know what strong strategies can bring to their organisation and the people it employs. Others are already getting to grips with new technology that promises to streamline L&D delivery for greater success.

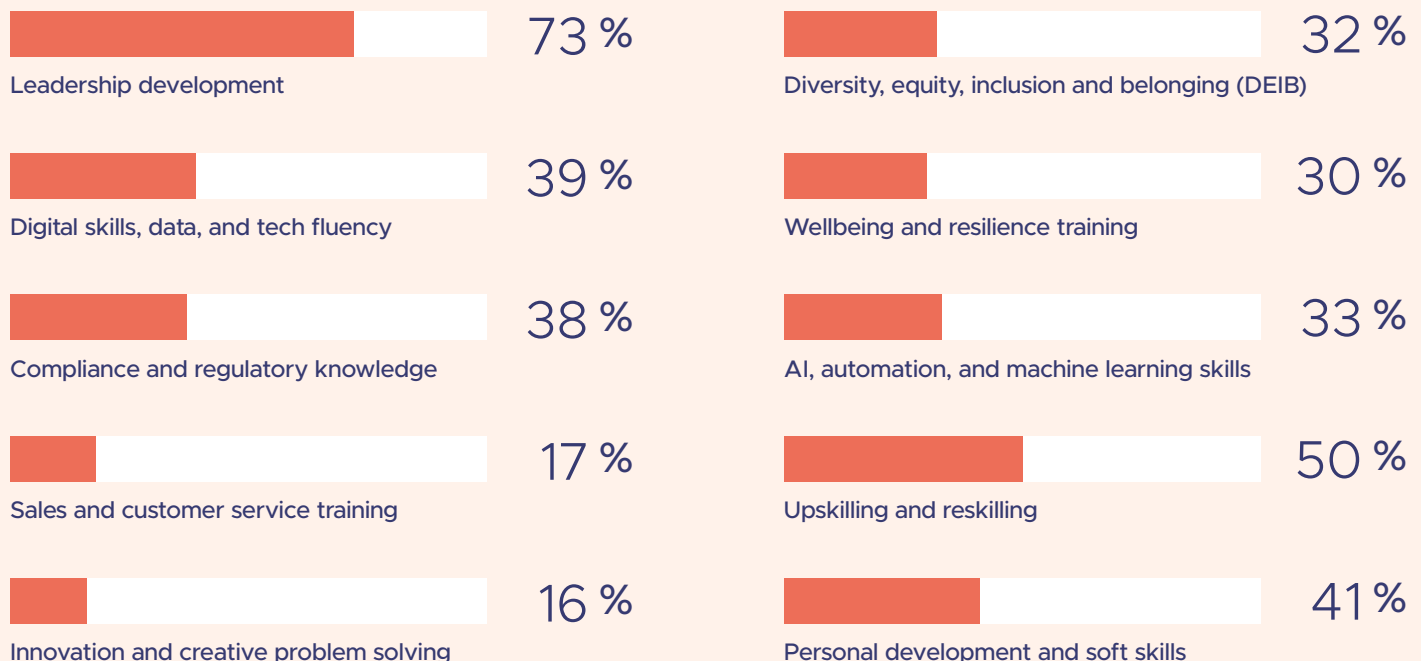
L&D professionals are doing this against a backdrop of patchy investment and senior leadership involvement. Armed with information on the many advantages L&D provides for businesses, they will hope to change minds and boost budgets so their programmes have an even greater impact.

While 45% revealed in our research that they intend to maintain their current LMS/learning tech, a further 35% plan to invest in new tech during the next 12 months. 1 in 10 (10%) already switched tools within the past year.

Upskilling and reskilling generally across the workforce is key for 49%. A further 4 in 10 view helping to improve digital skills, data and tech fluency as their top priority.

Overall, L&D leaders have a lot to get done in 2026 - but they know the prize is more proof that strategic learning works, persuades employees to stay and can turbocharge business growth.

What are your top learning priorities for 2026?



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- ✓ Through the right channels, by seamlessly integrating learning into your business apps.
- ✓ At the right time, according to the unique needs of your learners thanks to our Adaptive Learning engine .
- ✓ Validate and embed skills, track progress, and adjust pathways to boost retention.

+93%

engagement with recommended learning paths

+95%

course completion via blended learning features

+45%

faster course completion rate with Rise Up's mobile application

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