Learnovate

Learnovate Learning Signals Survey 2026

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

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Welcome

AI use soaring in Ireland

This year's Learning Signals report offers deep insight into how the AI boom is affecting L&D professionals and leaders as they seek to equip learners for an AI-forward world.

Along with our findings and respondent commentary, we're including expert insights and strategic suggestions drawing on our research and industry conversations over the past year.

These span everything from engaging learners and mitigating cognitive offloading to balancing competing demands and making strategic decisions and much more.

Moving forward together

We are really grateful to everyone who took the time to support our survey and share their views and experiences. Whether you are in industry, training, higher education, technology development or any area focused on building skills and knowledge, your input is valuable and collectively helps to inform Ireland's L&D and EdTech community.

At Learnovate, we believe meaningful conversations, knowledge sharing and collaboration are essential to driving progress. We are committed to creating opportunities for our members to connect, exchange insights and learn from colleagues and industry peers.

This spirit of collaboration and mutual support has long been at the heart of the education and learning community. As the sector navigates a period of unprecedented change, these connections will be more important than ever in helping us learn from one another, respond to emerging challenges and shape the future together.



Nessa McEniff
Learnovate Managing Director

Introduction

Over the past four years of conducting annual *Learning Signals* surveys[1], Learnovate has seen a marked shift in priorities across the L&D landscape in Ireland.

In 2023, respondents told us engaging learners was the biggest challenge they faced. That's still a significant pain point, but the exceptional pace of change, particularly around AI adoption, means digital transformation and skills gaps are huge concerns in 2026.

While AI is top of everyone's agenda, L&D professionals are trying to figure out the right next steps. As one survey respondent told us, "We have the certainty that incorporating AI is the way to go but the uncertainty of how big to go and when."

Moreover, those in L&D roles must continually grapple with budget constraints, operational road bumps and leadership indifference as they try to bridge the skills gap.

The survey results show a sector determined to enable more human connection and better learning outcomes, regardless of the tools and methodologies involved.



[1] Learning Signals Survey 2023–2026

Key findings

As more organisations actively deploy AI in and for L&D, what do we understand about how to get it right and the barriers that stand in the way?

55%

say managing technology and digital transformation is now the top challenge facing those in L&D.

28%

of organisations are actively deploying AI, up from 23% last year.

48%

of organisations don't have (or aren't developing) a proactive strategy to address skills gaps.

79%

say making learning relevant to learners is the most important way to motivate them (up from 51% in 2023).

2026 themes

1. L&D under pressure
2. Striking the balance on AI
3. The digital skills strategy gap
4. Why resonance matters



01
L&D under pressure

L&D professionals are facing rapid change, but they rarely have all the time and resources they need to manage that change while working to achieve their goals.

Throughout our 2026 survey, respondents pointed to the combined pressure of rapid technological change – much of it driven by AI – and continued resource constraints.

AI is somewhat of a wild card on both sides of the L&D equation. It's a rapidly evolving area where learners need more skills, and it's a transformative tool for L&D and edtech leaders to use in delivering learning, improving administration and enhancing insights.

How can those in L&D help to maximise smart use of AI in their organisation? It not only requires gaining buy-in from management and senior leaders, but also navigating much operational complexity.

Complexity exacerbates the pressure

Trying to work wonders with limited resources isn't a new challenge in L&D, but the pace of change has accelerated dramatically.

It can be a struggle to keep up with the options available, and identify the most appropriate AI-powered tools to achieve their objectives and enable learning outcomes for learners.

As macroeconomic factors squeeze budgets more than ever, L&D professionals remain under pressure to prove return on investment instead of purely being seen as a cost centre.

Moreover, L&D leaders and professionals must often try to work with colleagues in IT to integrate multiple tools and platforms, including legacy LMS systems. That isn't always straightforward, especially when their own technical skills may be lagging.

At the same time, they find themselves faced with a challenging choice – try to run digital transformation projects in-house without sufficient specialist skills and workforce capacity or seek sufficient budget to outsource the work to experts.

Leading voices in learning

"AI is a technological tidal wave, a large amount of energy coming toward you that you didn't anticipate and you're not quite sure what to do about, but you can't ignore it.

It's here. It's a tidal wave. Don't believe anybody who predicts it."

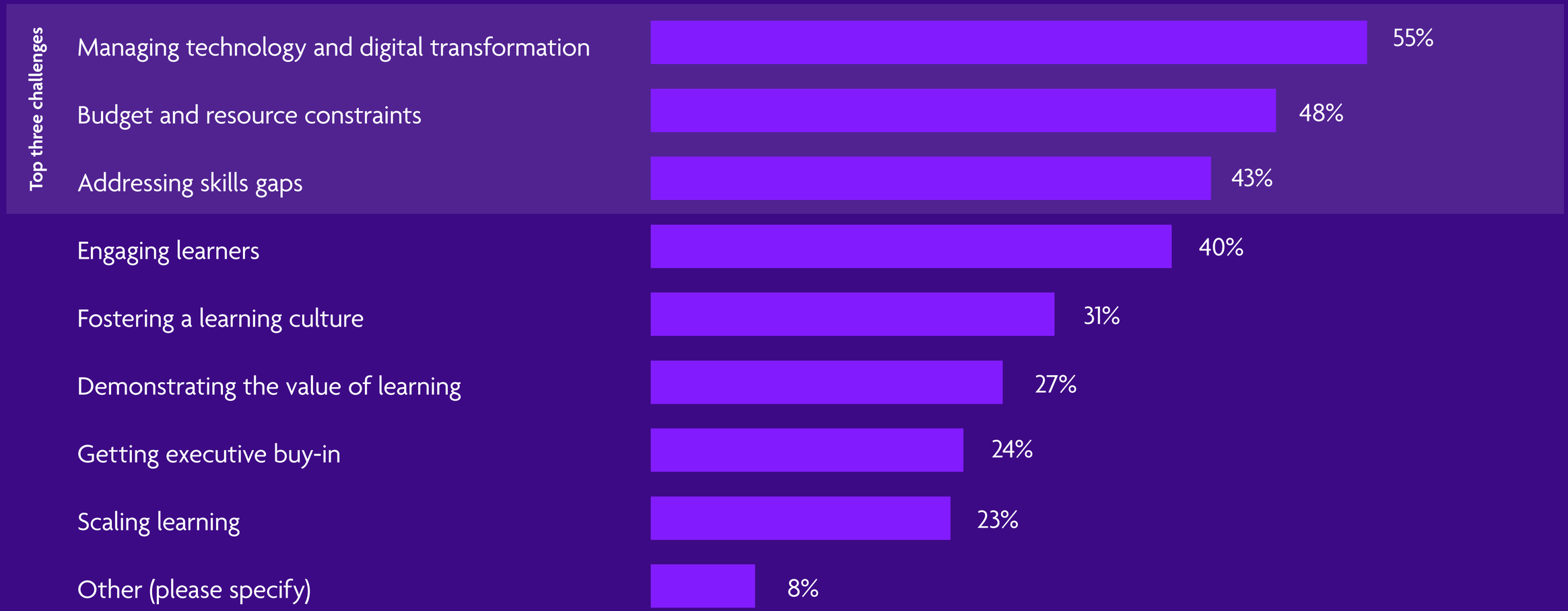


Elliott Masie

Founder of the MASIE Learning Foundation, a Patron Member of Learnovate.

Read the full Learnovate interview

In relation to your role, what are the top 3 challenges or pain points you face?



Most common L&D challenges: transformation and resources

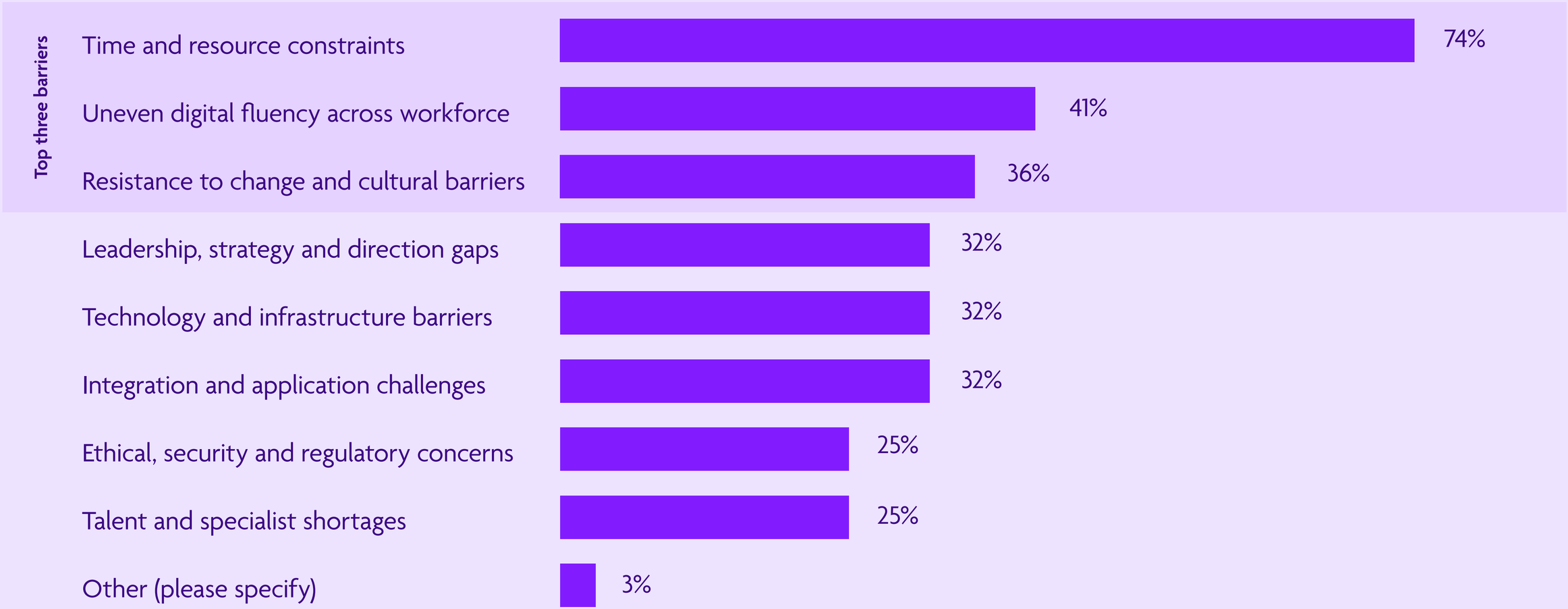
It's clear the AI boom has completely rewritten the agenda in L&D. Managing technology and digital transformation is now the top challenge facing those in L&D – it was cited by 55% of respondents. That figure is up from 48% in 2025, when the topic was second to budget and resource constraints.

The speed of change is evident when we look back to our 2023 survey, when only 26% of participants pointed to digital transformation as one of their main challenges.

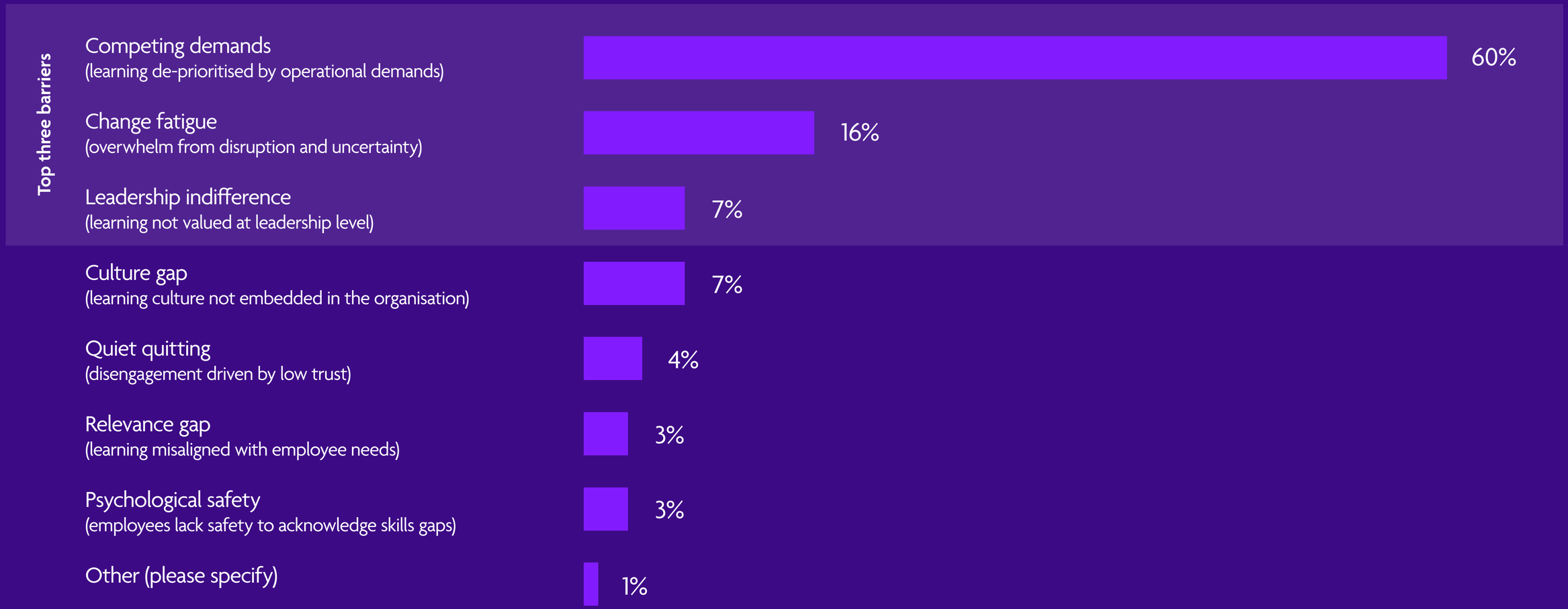
The perennial issue of budget and resources is of course still high on the list of concerns. It was the second most common challenge noted in this year's survey, being chosen by 48% of those taking part (down slightly from 52% in 2025).



What are the top 3 barriers your organisation faces in developing digital skills?



What is the single biggest human or cultural barrier to learning in your organisation?



Proving the value of L&D

Proving the value of learning to leadership and positioning it as a strategic investment rather than an operational cost has long been a challenge for L&D professionals. Shifting the needle may need a new approach to ensure senior executives recognise learning as a critical pillar for long-term competitiveness.

Learnovate research[2] on demonstrating the business value of learning showed it's important to treat business value measurement as a parallel activity to learning evaluation.

This means defining expected business impact before learning interventions, then returning to measure their impact. This approach helps reposition L&D from a cost centre to a strategic partner in the eyes of senior leadership.

[2] Business Value of L&D (Pulse), Learnovate, 2021

Voices from our survey



"I'm excited to see all the wonderful things that lie ahead but also overwhelmed by the speed of everything. It is hard to keep up!"

"Concerns: Rate and volume of change and lack of solid platforms with/on which to build. Resource constraints for learners and leaders."

"We have more choice and options for learning than ever before but are faced with internal clients with less and less time to engage with these."

"The speed of change excites and concerns me. What's hard is trying to figure out the best ways to leverage AI to address knowledge and skills gaps within tight budgets and timelines."

"Learning has the potential to be truly inclusive with digital transformation. However, those in the organisation who need to, do not even understand what AI literacy is, never mind its value."

Global industry perspective

This year's Learning Signals survey found those in L&D are under pressure from leaders who want to drive AI adoption while trying to engage a workforce showing the stress of change fatigue and competing demands.

As with most things, the solution may be found in the middle ground. In 2025, Deloitte introduced the concept of "stagility"[3] – the tension between the stability and solid ground workers crave and the agility organisations need.

Leaders are under pressure to adapt and evolve, and so are racing ahead – 85% surveyed by Deloitte said organisations need to create more agile ways of working to respond to market changes. Meanwhile, 75% of workers are looking for greater stability at work.

[3] "Stagility: Creating stability for workers for organizations to move at speed", Deloitte, 2025

Leading voices in learning

"AI is happening fast, and it's bringing rapid changes to education, which are impossible to predict clearly in the longer term. Even with AI being a daily headline for the last two years, organisations and national entities are still trying to establish a solid footing around long-term prospects and opportunities.

"Normally you can get a sense of how technologies or new innovations are going to affect your industry, but because this cycle of change is so rapid and AI innovations and risks are so significant, it's hard to foresee what's coming next in education."



Myles Thies

Co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer of learning tech firm 186 Digital, a Patron Member of Learnovate

Read the full Learnovate interview (members only)

How to take a measured approach

Many in L&D struggle to communicate the true business value of learning while also being under pressure to adopt emerging technology.

Our research into the business value of L&D[4] found the most effective teams approach both challenges by starting with the business problem rather than the solution. They engage finance and IT early to validate L&D's business case, then communicate results in the language of the senior leadership team rather than the language of learning.

The challenge in 2026 is to make smart decisions on technology adoption while also being strategic about how to communicate upwards effectively.



[4] Business Value of L&D (Pulse), Learnovate, 2021

1 Avoid change for change's sake

Make deliberate, strategic choices about which technologies to adopt and when, rather than trying to keep pace with every new development, even if the pressure is on to capture AI's full value. Frequent process, platform or tool changes can be disruptive and overwhelming. In fact, the second greatest human or cultural barrier identified in our survey was change fatigue.

2 Run risk assessments

These can help those in L&D to understand which risk is greater: spending time and money on unproven AI tools or other new technology or missing out by failing to optimise. Sticking with less efficient existing systems, such as a legacy LMS, could put them at a competitive disadvantage.

3 Take the "no-regret" route

The World Economic Forum suggests businesses should "Start small, build fast, scale what works".[5] Invest time in building genuine capability with a smaller set of tools rather than trying to ensure shallow familiarity with many. Work to bridge any internal digital divides by making sure everyone who could benefit can use existing tools. Treat failure as data rather than a setback. If a tool or approach isn't working, view it as a learning opportunity that helps with decisions on where to invest next.

4 Build a bank of proof points

Business and organisation leaders need succinct, data-led proposals to approve investment in new technology or projects. Identify the data and use cases that could help shift the organisation's perspective on the value of learning and work to gather it.

[5] Four Futures for Jobs in the New Economy: AI and Talent in 2030, WEF, 2026

02
Striking the balance on AI

L&D leaders are moving on AI but the sector is not surging forward in unison.

When looking at AI in learning, only a fraction of organisations are standing still while active deployments are up 5 percentage points from last year. Respondents had much to say on AI this year. Many are optimistic about being able to harness AI in multiple ways, such as to:

- **work more efficiently on everything from admin to procurement**
- **automate content creation**
- **develop streamlined learning solutions at scale**
- **introduce more engaging, flexible and personalised learning approaches.**

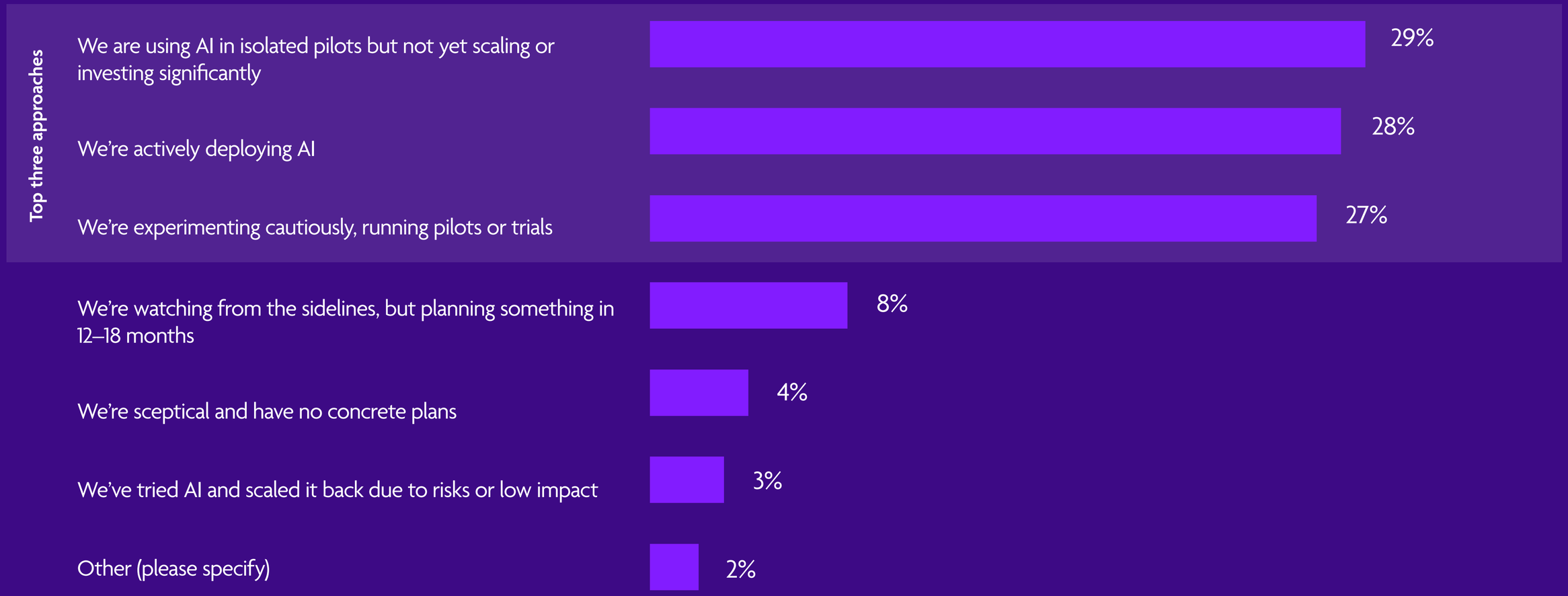
At the same time, many of those polled also have real worries around AI. One respondent was concerned AI would take over, “reducing a perceived requirement for learning”, while others were worried about workers’ growing indifference to the value of and investment in learning over the long term.

These concerns included cognitive offloading and the risk to critical thinking (mentioned by 15%), the effect on learning service providers, job security, ethical risks and deflated morale.

Cognitive offloading covers everything from reduced focus and less persistence to weaker memories and diminished critical thinking and judgement.

It also encompasses a broader concern: losing divergent thinking because AI involves less productive struggle. Progress happens during the deep work of considered thinking and writing. That means much gets lost when a task is outsourced to AI.

Which of the following best describes your organisation's current approach to AI in learning?



AI in Learning

Our survey asked respondents to assess their organisation's current approach to AI in learning. The responses fell almost entirely into three more or less equal buckets.

Of those polled, 29% said their organisation is using AI in isolated pilots but not yet scaling. That figure was effectively unchanged from 28% in 2025. Similarly, the figure of 27% who said they're experimenting cautiously by running pilots or trials also hadn't shifted much from 2025, when that figure was 29%.

Where a shift was evident was in the third bucket – those who are actively deploying AI. That's at 28% in 2026, up from 23% last year. Correspondingly, only 12% are either watching from the sidelines or sceptical, down from 18% in 2025. The direction is clear: fewer organisations on the sidelines and more organisations actively deploying. That trend, even if modest, points to increasing AI adoption in L&D.

Amid wider reporting in Q2 2026 about some high-profile companies such as Uber running into AI challenges due to high token use, it's worth noting our survey saw a tiny shift in the percentage of organisations trying AI and scaling it back due to risks or low impact. It rose to 3% from 1% in 2025. That could be a statistical blip or a canary in the coal mine.

Voices from our survey

"We are excited about the impact of AI on workforce roles and tasks, and how formal and structured learning will develop in line with these evolving learning needs."

"While AI represents a great opportunity if deployed and utilised effectively, the effect of AI usage on staff and students' criticality and cognitive function is a concern."

"I'm excited by the opportunity AI brings to finally develop meaningful education experiences for learners."

"I'm concerned about the lack of critical thinking or understanding of the need to apply critical thinking. People becoming 'experts' in things they do not really know about and can't discern 'good' information or the correct way forward."

"There's a risk that cognitive offloading will lead to a decline in essential skills, and then there's the knock-on effect that the future skills gap will have more generally."

Global industry perspective

AI use is rising fast in the workplace, although there is no definitive information on the speed of the trend. While PwC Ireland's Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey[6] (released in December 2025) found only 43% of Irish workers had used AI in the past 12 months, Indeed's Workforce Insights Survey[7] (released in February 2026) found 70% of Irish employees use AI regularly.

Either way, it's clear the workforce skills landscape is evolving at speed. PwC predicts skill-based models will start to squeeze degree-based hiring, with increasing use of skill passports, AI-enabled learning pathways, and competency-first career frameworks.

With this year's Learnovate survey results seeming to show more firms actively deploying AI at this point and fewer holding back, it stands to reason that organisational L&D and recruitment strategies need to evolve too.

Leading voices in learning

"When we look at the role of agentic AI in learning, one of the big questions is whether the AI should be a repository of knowledge or should take a more Socratic dialogic approach.

"In other words, do you want your students just to have a fancy version of Wikipedia at their fingertips, or do you want to use the technology to genuinely improve the way that they reflect and think and reach their own conclusions?"



Daniel Mccrea

Head of Partner Services at Adaptemy, an adaptive learning solutions provider and Patron Member of Learnovate.

Read the full Learnovate interview (members only)

[6] Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey, PwC Ireland, 2025
[7] What Workers Expect When They're Expecting Better Work, Indeed, 2026

How to balance AI challenges

When it comes to using AI to support learning, the key is to strike a balance.

On the one hand, it can be extraordinarily useful in supporting content development, adaptive learning, assessments, analytics and more. On the other hand, its use must be managed to avoid taking away the cognitive work of learning that keeps learners' memory, creativity and problem-solving skills sharp.

1 Don't do AI for the sake of it

One of our survey respondents cited what they saw as a rise in AI-generated learning that does not meet any specific needs, but exists as quantity over quality.



2 Take an intentional approach



As one of our recent Learnovate podcast guests, edtech leader Rahim Hirji, pointed out, it's crucial to intentionally design your relationship with AI rather than drifting into it.

Try to focus AI use on alleviating busywork and creating more space for learning and ideation rather than having it dampen creativity and critical thinking.

3 Plan to mitigate cognitive offloading



How an AI application is designed influences whether learners hand over their thinking or stay engaged, so favour workflows that prompt learners to attempt, reflect or decide before using AI to find an answer.

Develop learners' judgement about when AI use helps them and when it undermines their own learning.

4 Highlight the challenge



Learning new information, building new skills and changing how you work isn't inherently easy, and it's helpful to acknowledge that. How humans learn isn't changing inherently, but AI can help enhance the learning experience.

Another of our recent Learnovate podcast guests, instructional design expert Julie Dirksen[8], discussed the discomfort learning can bring: "When we throw experts into a situation where they go back to feeling like a novice, they want to return to the old way," she said. "In the learning experience – we don't say explicitly: 'Yes, this is going to feel uncomfortable, and we recognise that.'"

[8] Design for How People Learn with Julie Dirksen, Inside Learning podcast, 2025

03
The digital skills strategy gap

Considering L&D's widely cited resource constraints, it follows that half of organisations have no skills strategy or only react to short-term needs.

When L&D is underprioritised and under-resourced, there's no scope to be proactive and thorough. But to keep up with the speed of skills turnover in the age of AI, proactivity and thoroughness are vital.

In identifying skills gaps, L&D professionals can feel they're trying to hit a moving target. One respondent spoke of "the pace of skills change and their diminishing half-life".

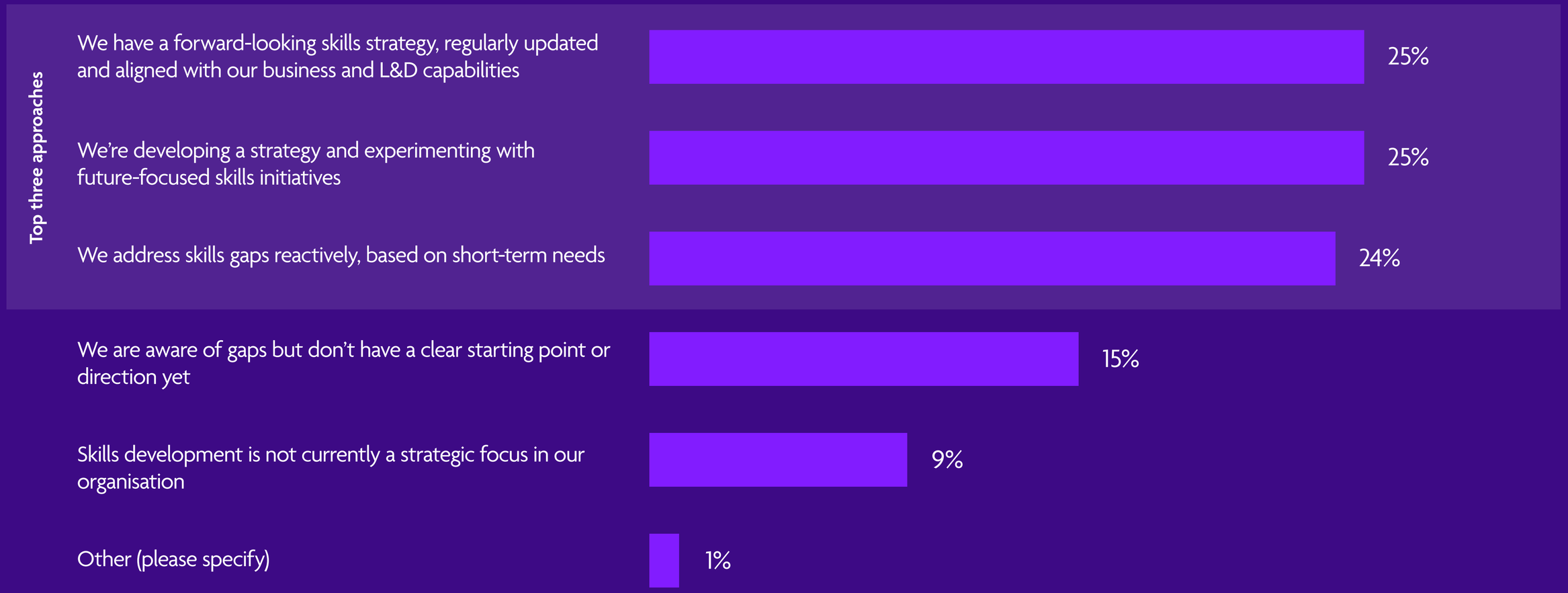
The skills gap presents interwoven challenges, as L&D must identify:

- **which AI tools workers need to learn about**
- **which AI tools should be used to support learning**
- **which skills will remain separate from the AI revolution.**

Compounding the challenge, L&D teams also feel pressure to advocate for responsible and informed approaches to a technology that brings its own new risks and ethical questions.

These challenges notwithstanding, inaction will lead to further difficulties over time. Close to a quarter of those polled said skills development either isn't a strategic priority for their organisation or hasn't gone beyond a gap analysis. That's a recipe for disaster in the AI age.

How well equipped is your organisation to identify and address skills gaps?



Identifying skills gaps

Asked how well equipped they are to identify skills gaps, only 25% of organisations report having a forward-looking skills strategy that's regularly updated and aligned with their business and L&D capabilities. This has risen from 20% in 2025, as organisations moved from "developing a strategy" to having one.

As of 2026, another 25% are developing a strategy and experimenting with future-focused skills initiatives.

A further 24% say they only address skills gaps reactively, based on short-term needs. Meanwhile 15% have no clear starting point or direction.

That leaves half of organisations without a proactive strategy to address skills gaps. This, despite L&D professionals reporting that skills gaps are becoming ever more pressing: 43% cited them as a challenge in 2026, having climbed from 25% in 2023.

L&D professionals are tackling the challenge, but they need support. Asked about the barriers their organisations face in developing digital skills, almost a third (32%) point to leadership, strategy and direction gaps.

Voices from our survey



"My concern is the lack of engagement/understanding by key stakeholders on the issues arising from, and the impact of, the use of AI in education."

"While it's encouraging to see people learning independently and taking initiative, it's also creating inconsistency across the organisation, as individuals progress at different speeds and develop different areas of expertise."

"I'm concerned there is insufficient focus in my organisation for learning and development. I'm concerned my own skills will fail to develop in line with industry standards as a result."

"The benefit [of modular learning] is clear: finish quicker and do one module at a time which is easier to focus and prepare for exams. It requires far more regular self-study work, however."

"How do we access, evaluate and engage with micro-units of learning to address immediate skills gaps and to grow employees' abilities and competencies?"

Global industry perspective

The World Economic Forum reports nearly 40% of skills required for today's jobs are expected to change by 2030[9].

This is driving the pivot toward micro-credentials and modular learning, as universities along with businesses recognise educational paradigms rooted in the past won't be sufficient to help workers keep up with a 40% skills turnover rate.

What's needed now? More focus on core human capabilities – such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving, emotional intelligence and technological adaptability.

The WEF describes this as a "no-regret" strategy. In other words, it's a clear path for L&D leaders keen to support and help direct the shift to agile workforce planning.

Leading voices in learning

"What's key about prompting AI is that you articulate the success conditions of what you're trying to achieve...and you're being very clear and explicit and communicative...and that is an incredible skill...you would be doing the exact same thing if you were delegating that to a human being...To think about future readiness, think about how do we instil these kinds of skills that are broadly applicable across emerging technologies?"



Kate O'Neill

The 'Tech Humanist', founder and CEO of KO Insights and guest on Learnovate's Inside Learning Podcast

Listen to the full podcast episode

[9] Four Futures for Jobs in the New Economy: AI and Talent in 2030, WEF, 2026

How to bridge the gap

To get leadership backing for a skills strategy, it's vital to make the case that learning is essential to drive business growth – this comes back to banking proof points.

And for your skills strategy to be successful, it needs to be underpinned by a culture that recognises learning as an essential element of work and productivity – not separate from it.

Talent has been Ireland's key economic differentiator, according to a recent Ibec/Accenture report[10] that calls for a national shift to lifelong learning and reskilling for competitiveness.

What does that mean for boards and C-level stakeholders? AI urgency demands immediate, strategic investment, it says. L&D must be seen as crucial business infrastructure that needs sustained, long-term funding rather than insufficient support or crisis-driven responses down the line.



[10] Skills for all, skills for life, Ibec/Accenture, 2026

1 Point to the trendsetters



With no obvious right path forward for AI use, leaders want reassurance. That can be found, together with evidence of the value of learning, in research reports such as the recent Amazon Web Services and Coursera report[11] on the shift from cloud to AI.

It found 88% of tech leaders across six countries believe their planned AI investments will fail without a parallel, aggressive investment in training.

2 Go small



To keep pace with change, get into a cadence of creating micro-units of learning. They can be relatively quickly prepared and shared to address skills gaps on an ongoing basis.

3 Learn from the learners



Digital natives and other early adopters among employees and students are already experimenting with AI in their work. Survey them regularly to discover which tools they're using, and how. This can inform learning opportunities that bring everyone to the same level.

4 Bring internal comms along



Get support from your communications team in setting the right cultural tone. As instructional design expert Julie Dirksen[12] recently explained on our Inside Learning podcast, "We can't just have people say we want you to be more innovative. We also need to culturally support innovative behaviours."

[11] From Cloud to AI: How Tech Leaders Are Investing in Skills Development to Drive Transformation, AWS and Coursera, 2025
[12] Design for How People Learn with Julie Dirksen, Inside Learning podcast, 2025

04
Why resonance matters

Connecting with learners and holding their attention is getting harder.

As technology presents new ways of teaching as well as new skills to be learned, centring the human element becomes more important, and more of a challenge. Resonance is critical – learning must mean something to the person, connect with their values and goals, and keep them present through interactive, engaging delivery.

L&D is certainly recognising learners need to see the personal value in what they're being asked to learn. Back in 2023, only 15% of those we polled said they motivated people to learn by connecting learning to promotion and career progression. That figure has risen steadily since to hit 28% in 2026.

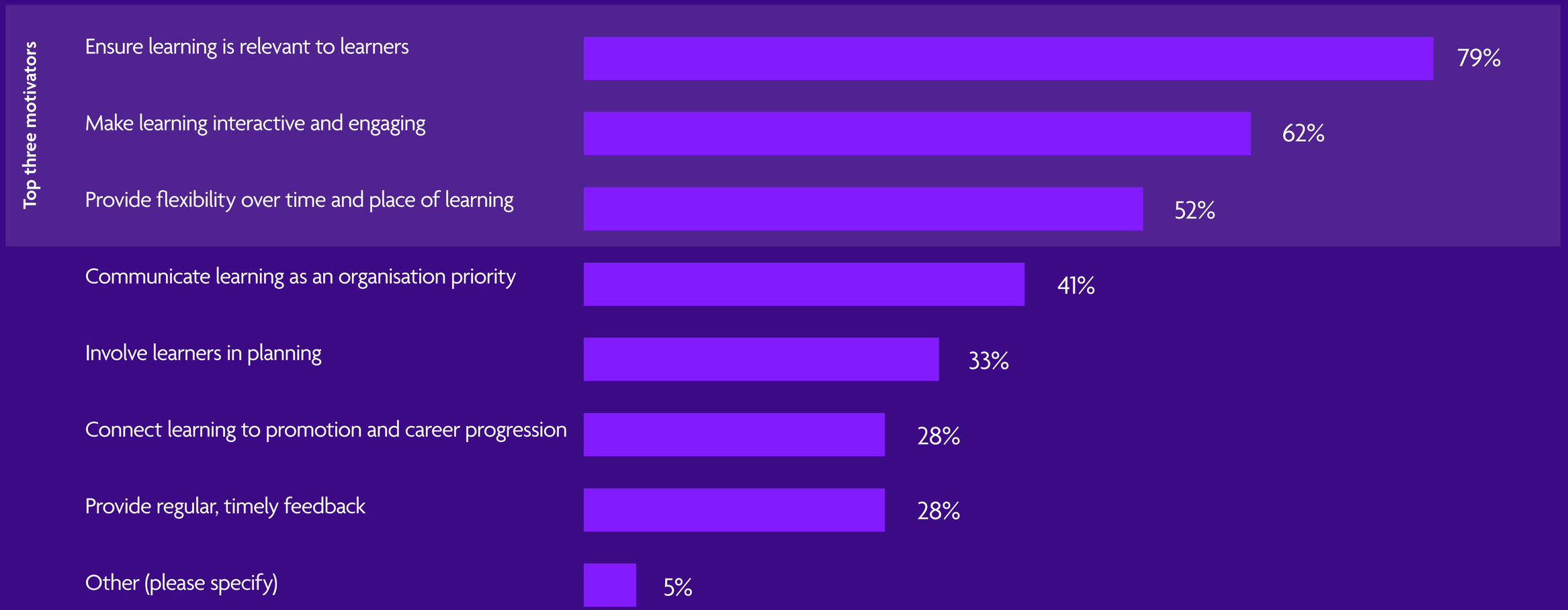
More learners want the human touch

While modular pathways, flexibility and micro-credentials can all be incredibly valuable in L&D practice, some respondents said their teams were jaded from online learning and inclined to disengage after brief stints learning on-screen. Others told us of increasing interest in in-person training as people crave more shared human experiences.

Once again, finding the balance is paramount. That can mean incorporating online, hybrid and in-person delivery.

It also means striving for well-designed online learning that includes collaborative components, interactivity, personalisation, chunking and feedback. While L&D professionals must often operate with constrained budgets, it's vital for organisations to understand that cutting corners on online learning design can end up costing more than it saves.

In your organisation, how do you motivate people to learn?



Motivating people to learn

Regardless, engagement remains a key priority across the world of L&D. We asked our survey respondents how they motivate people to learn. “Ensure learning is relevant to learners” was the most chosen response in our 2026 survey (picked by 79% of respondents), having risen continually from 51% in 2023.

This trend underscores how it’s not enough to mandate broad-based, general lessons for anyone and everyone. Those learning need to see why they should gain the knowledge or skills involved – a foundational principle of adult learning theory.

Interactivity and flexibility are high priority

With learners deluged by information and attention spans ever more strained, it’s no surprise to see the second most chosen motivational tactic this year is to “make learning interactive and engaging” at 62%, up from 46% in 2025.

Holding steady in the post-pandemic era was the need to provide flexibility over the time and place of learning – chosen by 52% this year and last year, 45% in 2024 and 48% in 2023.

Voices from our survey

“In-person experiences are more enjoyable. People feel they learn better and retain more. As Head of Learning, I am increasingly agreeing with them!”

“I’m excited by the shift back towards transversal skills development in response to AI as I feel that these skills have been neglected in favour of technical skills.”

“I’m quite scared of how AI is changing learning and that learning is seen as a task to tick off, which AI can speed up and make more efficient instead of something that can be joyful.”

“We do not motivate people to learn – we bury them in work.”

“Digitisation is dehumanising many aspects of life, breeding resistance to ‘digital learning’. Many people now want more in-person experiences.”

Global industry perspective

When Coursera reviewed a year's worth of learning by 6 million of its users around the world for a 2026 report[13], it discovered a 185% year-on-year growth in critical thinking enrolments across every cohort. Turns out it's not just people in L&D who worry about cognitive offloading.

Globally, learners are responding to the rising use of AI by doubling down on the skills many Learnovate respondents are worried will be lost.

This increased organic focus on critical thinking directly aligns with the WEF report's key finding: while AI can zip through routine tasks, long-term workforce resilience hinges on human-centric capabilities.

Leading voices in learning

"A few years ago the issue was paying attention. More recently it has become just showing up at all. We need solutions that not only help drive learning outcomes, but at the most basic level, just help them really show up to learn."



Sean D'Arcy

Chief Solutions Officer at Kahoot! and guest on Learnovate's Inside Learning Podcast

Listen to the full podcast episode

[13] Job Skills Report 2026, Coursera, 2026

How to make learning resonant

It’s vital to recentre the importance of engagement, as many L&D leaders already recognise. In an ever-noisier work environment, learning needs to feel both lively and meaningful.

Learners are more motivated when the material seems personally valuable. Of course, that also means organisations must dedicate sufficient resources – developing engaging learning comes at a cost.

1 Consult your learners as well as your leaders

Many in L&D regularly canvass opinions from learning cohorts, but if it’s been a while, make sure to ask existing and potential learners what they need to learn about, what knowledge and skills they’d like to gain, and how they want to learn.



2 Protect the learning environment

L&D professionals need to actively protect the conditions that make learning engaging and meaningful, not just efficient. That means building in feedback loops, human interaction, and moments of genuine challenge.

As Julie Dirksen commented on our Inside Learning podcast[14], “The key question to always ask is: are people capable of doing this thing? And if they aren’t, training is a great answer. But then – do they also have the opportunity? Is the environment set up to support it? And are they motivated?”

3 Keep learning content fresh

Unfortunately, there’s no such thing as done and dusted any more. With learning demands evolving quickly, the content game has changed. It makes more sense to offer less, but make what’s on offer as up-to-date and relevant as possible.

As learning guru Elliott Masie told us[15]: “We shouldn’t be just trying to do the same lesson, the same textbook, the same idea, the same presentation over and over again, but rather continually ask: ‘How can I make it more engaging? How can I stimulate the learner?’”

4 Make it applied

When people can see why they should complete a lesson or module and how they will derive value from the results, motivation levels rise.

[14] Design for How People Learn with Julie Dirksen, Inside Learning podcast, 2025
[15] Live at Learnovation 2024 with Elliott Masie, Inside Learning podcast, 2025

Conclusion

Taking the considered, human path

Our 2026 survey results make it clear that L&D professionals and leaders face more challenges and more opportunities than ever.

With competing priorities and limited resources, it's crucial to step back before acting and take a strategic perspective.

Anchor your AI strategy in medium- and long-term objectives rather than reacting to immediate pressure from leadership to adopt and scale quickly. In L&D, as in learning itself, results rarely come about in the short term. As one of our respondents commented: "The priority for speed and scaling takes over the reality that learning – the acquisition of new skills and, ultimately, behaviour change – is a slow, effortful process that takes time."

Communicating the value of learning has also become crucial, whether it's upward to organisation leaders or outward to all learners. People act when they understand the benefits to them of acting and when the material and approach align with their values, whether it means completing one micro-credential or agreeing to fund a new AI tool.

As we face into another fast-moving year of AI-related change and wider volatility, it's worth remembering that fostering human skills needs to take precedence.

Edtech leader Rahim Hirji says the essential skills for the future of work are curiosity, change readiness, big-picture thinking, principled innovation, empathy, global adaptability and the augmented mindset.

As he said on our Inside Learning podcast[16], "Empathy is the one super skill I think AI will never have, because it will never have lived through the situations that humans have."

While the pace of change may be accelerating, the fundamentals of human development and connection are constant. Perhaps that's exactly the anchor L&D needs in 2026.

[16] Super Skills: The 7 Human Skills for the Age of AI with Rahim Hirji, Inside Learning podcast, 2026



How we help our members

Exclusive member content

Global network of contacts

Regular expert events

When you become a member of Learnovate, you join a global community of organisations with a passion for the future of work and learning.

Our members have a unique chance to connect, network and collaborate, as well as benefit from access to Learnovate's multi-million euro, industry-led research.

Find out more at LearnovateCentre.org/membership

About this research

For the *Learning Signals* survey 2026, Learnovate surveyed 225 respondents online during May 2026.

Throughout the report, percentages are rounded to whole numbers and so may not sum to 100%.

Industry sectors

Education	46%*
Learning technology	13%
Business, consultancy or management	10%
Public services or administration	8%
Computing or IT	5%
Engineering or manufacturing	3%
Accountancy, banking or finance	2%
Charity and voluntary work	2%
Agriculture	1%
HR, learning development	1%
Science or pharmaceuticals	1%
Creative arts or design	1%
Healthcare	1%
Law	1%
Marketing, advertising or PR	1%
Media or digital	1%
Sales	1%
All other sectors**	2%

Organisation size

Micro (fewer than 10 employees)	19%
Small (10–49 employees)	16%
Medium (50–249 employees)	21%
Large (250+ employees)	26%
Multinational SME (fewer than 250 employees, operating across multiple countries)	1%
Multinational Enterprise (250+ employees, operating across multiple countries)	11%
Other (please specify)	5%

Role

Employee in Learning & Development	34%
Employee in HR	2%
Startup founder / co-founder	12%
Work in a company that creates learning software or content	15%
Corporate trainer	2%
Consultant/self-employed	7%
Other	28%

* Just under half of respondents identified as working in Education, reflecting Learnovate's home within Trinity College Dublin and the breadth of our network. Notably, four in ten of these respondents describe their role as working in L&D, with others in learning technology companies and startups.

** Energy and utilities; environment; leisure, sport or tourism; recruitment; retail — each selected by fewer than 1% of respondents.

About Learnovate

Learnovate is an industry-led research centre in Trinity College Dublin funded by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland.

We empower organisations to transform learning experiences for employees, students and customers. As a bridge between industry and academia, we help companies turn cutting-edge research into practical solutions that shape the future of work and learning.

Work with us

We help organisations transform learning through funding support, expert guidance, advisory services and strategic partnerships.

Find out how we support organisations to unlock the power of learning at LearnovateCentre.org/how-we-help.



Thank you

To everyone who took part in our survey, thank you. This report exists because of your time and insight. Thank you also to our members, whose engagement shapes everything we do. And many thanks to Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, whose support makes our work possible.

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