Virtual College

Creating Training to Suit the Learner

Foreword

There have been many factors affecting Learning and Development over the last 12 months, with COVID-19 having an instant impact on how organisations have had to deliver learning. But what have been the long terms effects of this and how have learners' expectations have changed in terms of what they now want from their experience?

Surveying over 2,000 learners on their expectations around learning gave us the insights needed to help answer these questions, and the result is this report, which focuses on how organisations should be investing in creating training that suits the learner.

As part of our deep dive into this topic, we had the pleasure of speaking to **Cathy Hoy, Chief Learning Officer at the Learning and Performance Institute (LPI)**, who gave some great insight into the evolving expectations and behaviours of learners and how and why organisations must respond to these.

> **"Learning needs to be absolutely compelling. We need to draw people in, we need to get people to want to learn…part of creating compelling learning is the brand that Learning and Development has. What's the brand image of L&D in the organisation? Is it really attractive – has it got that magnetic pull to it?"**
>
> **Cathy Hoy**

Learners are taking more control over their experiences and no longer see learning as just a tick box or compliance exercise. They want to manage, or at least have an input into, their journey and define how and when they learn.

The importance of organisations properly understanding their learners' motivations is key as it will allow them to create an experience that feels tailored to these learners. However varied learners' wants and needs can be, our survey highlighted that there are fundamental requirements now from the perspective of a learner.

What elements do you think are needed to create a really effective learning experience?

Answer Choices	Response Percent
Being able to complete it at a time and pace that suits me	85.54%
Ways of testing knowledge	66.41%
Being able to discuss it with peers	43.87%
Learning that drives behaviour change	45.47%
Up-to-date and relevant content to my role	72.20%
Being able to ask for help if unsure	55.94%

By aligning learning and development planning to learner expectations, both learner and organisation can benefit from having a more collaborative and unified approach.

However, we know this is easier said than done. So read on to discover more about why creating training to suit the learner is a necessity, what needs to be considered and how it can be done.

Changes in learning behaviour

What do learners expect from their organisations and
what do they want from their learner journey?

Cathy Hoy
Chief Learning Officer,
Learning Performance Institute

Marketing Manager at Virtual College, Rachel Green,
met with Cathy Hoy, the new Chief Learning Officer
at the Learning and Performance Institute (LPI) to
talk about the changes that L&D professionals and
organisations are seeing from their learners.

With a passion for learning and development, and a
wealth of experience in her field, Cathy was perfectly
poised to talk through the ways in which organisations
can respond to these changes, allowing them to
continue to provide compelling learner journeys and
experiences. This interview is summarised over the next
few pages.

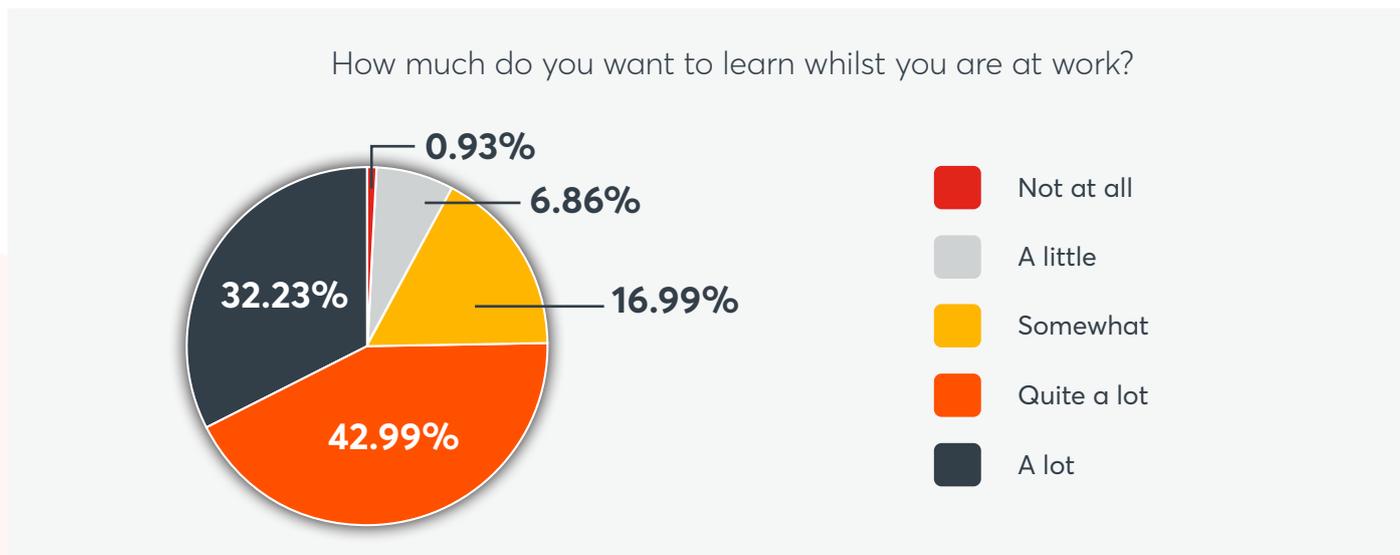## How have you seen learner expectations evolve and change and what do you think are the reasons behind this?

Learner expectations have been changing for a while. A big part of this is that people have an expectation now
to learn at work; they want to learn. As consumers we are getting smarter and want things faster, slicker, and
more immediately. However, the global pandemic has been a catalyst for many of the changes that we have
seen in learners' behaviours.

"People have an expectation now to learn at work,

they want to learn."

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Cathy quite quickly pointed out that the younger generation are learning all the time outside of work and
there has been a noticeable gap between their ability to consume learning outside of work compared to
inside, as organisations have not been able to keep up. Companies do not always have the same technology
or infrastructure and they have not invested the time in this supporting technology. In fact, unfortunately, some
organisations are still treating learning as nice to have or a treat, when it is not. Learning is a necessity.

The learner survey conducted on over 2,000 of Virtual College's learners supported this trend, with **43%** saying they wanted to learn 'quite a lot' and **32%** wanting to learn 'a lot' in their working environment.

How much do you want to learn whilst you are at work?

0.93%
6.86%
16.99%
42.99%
32.23%

Legend:
- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Quite a lot
- A lot

Learning that's personalised is a definite recent shift in expectations, Cathy explained, pointing out how learners now want the ability to access what they need, when they need it, making way for a huge opportunity around self-service learning. People don't want to be 'sheep dipped' through a learning programme but want a tailored and personalised experience that works for them.

Aligned to this is the accessibility of this information. Organisations need to think about mobile-first, bite-size chunks of information. People's lives are busy and, actually, what works for some is the ability to learn when doing something else: listening to a podcast when travelling to work or cooking an evening meal, for example. The fact is that nobody wants to wait for information anymore. Information is so readily available these days that we expect this in every aspect of our lives.

"Learners have to be in the right state for learning."

Further expanding on these changes in expectations, she went on to explain how learners don't want to feel that their learning journey is separate from their everyday world of work; it has to be done in the 'flow of work' and they have to be in the right state for learning. This can be a challenge in some industries, especially those like retail and hospitality, where they are customer facing. It can cause issues with how you train staff when they have customers to deal with. Companies don't want to look like they are still training their staff while they are doing their 'everyday job', but companies can be innovative, and new technologies can really help here.

Finally, the biggest shift has been from the younger generations, including graduates and apprentices. They want their learning to be connected to something bigger, with sight of what other opportunities this can bring. Understandably, they don't just want to feel they are learning so that the only outcome is making more money for the company that they work for, but that this learning will enable personal growth and development. They want a career plan and to have clear sight of where it is going – not just be working through ad hoc pieces of learning.

Summarising all this, Cathy stated that learning needs to be three things:

Compelling
To draw people in, with the need to get them wanting to learn.

Constructive
Fulfilling a purpose for company and learner, which is crucially important. Learning is no longer just a tick box exercise.

Convenient
Touch of a button feel that fits into their flow of work.

Learners are becoming a lot more capable of self-service learning. They are aware that outside of work they need to take accountability for their learning and understanding. For example, when using tutorials on YouTube to learn how to use your new camera, there is no need to wait for someone to explain how to use it, the information and learning can be accessed immediately. This is now being reflected in the workplace. Cathy summed this up by simply stating, "Learners are taking control of their learning." They are realising that this is something they can now dictate and manage, both inside and outside of the workplace.

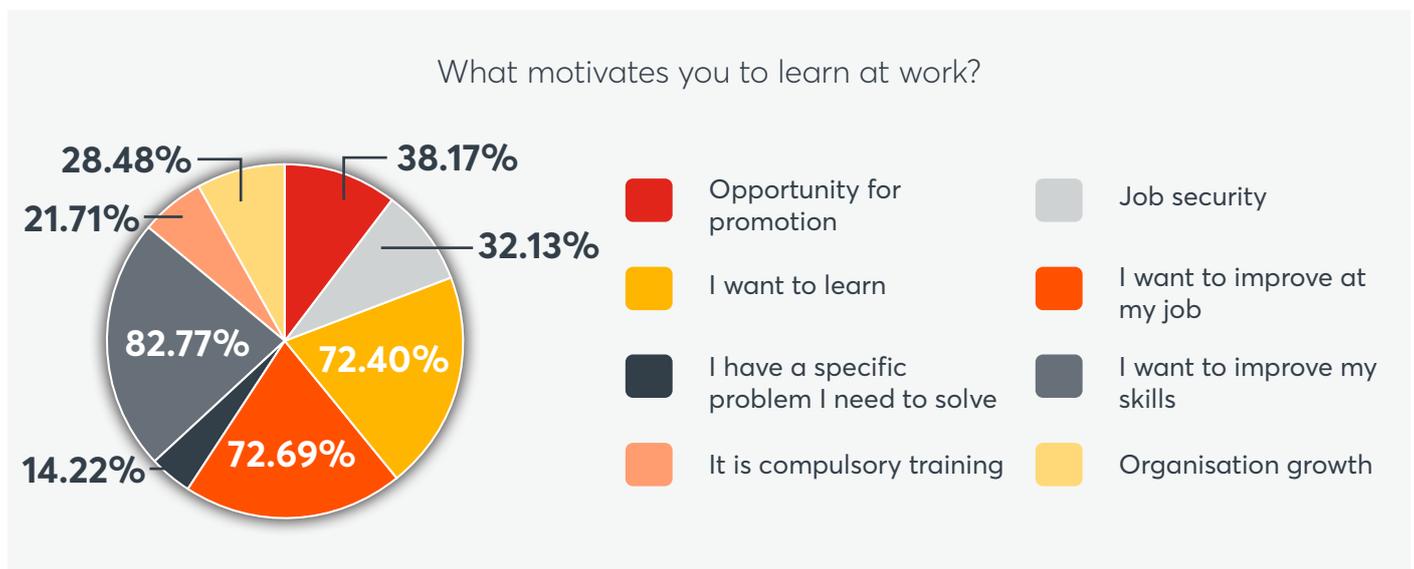## "Learners are taking control of their learning."

This however, can pose a risk, as accessibility of information is replacing knowledge retention power, so even though we are starting to use various resources to find things out, it doesn't necessarily mean that we now understand these things. This is a skill that needs to be taught – how learners can become self-reliant, so they can go and get the information needed, enabling them to be resilient and self-managed. However, L&D functions need to step in where there is the requirement for more knowledge and add that human element to allow for deeper understanding and context.

Aside of this, learners are looking for regular feedback and coaching opportunities, and this also needs to be considered when creating their learning journeys. Who is responsible for feeding back to these learners, and giving them the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them? It may seem obvious but, as Cathy was keen to explain, this is necessary at all levels of learning, from junior roles through to leaders and managers – we all need feedback to enable us to develop and improve.

"We need to focus on upskilling and reskilling."

Furthermore, there are new roles within organisations that don't even exist yet, so how do companies prepare for these? They need to start planning for this new set of required skills by focusing on upskilling and reskilling. Presenting learners with opportunities that will help them in the future and give them a sense that they are being invested in increases their confidence and, ultimately, their commitment to that organisation.

Confirming the survey results with her next comments, she explained how learners also no longer see learning as a compliance exercise. Previously, learners felt they had to learn to do better in their role or learn so they can work towards getting a promotion – all still incredibly important, but now an element of it is about looking at the bigger picture and understanding that learning is good for their own self-development.

What motivates you to learn at work?

- 28.48%
- 21.71%
- 38.17%
- 32.13%
- 82.77%
- 72.40%
- 14.22%
- 72.69%

- 🟥 Opportunity for promotion
- ⬜ Job security
- 🟨 I want to learn
- 🟧 I want to improve at my job
- ⬛ I have a specific problem I need to solve
- ⬛ I want to improve my skills
- 🟧 It is compulsory training
- 🟨 Organisation growth

"Organisations are having to adapt faster to new learner expectations."

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Organisations are having to adapt faster to new learner expectations, and COVID-19 has been a great catalyst for this acceleration, especially in terms of digital and technological advances. It has even helped the business case for L&D to have the investment in digital that they require, which has been needed for such a long period of time.

Organisations have looked to L&D departments in the last year and asked for help. So really, they have had no choice but to react. Cathy went on to explain that a number of organisations have had to take a short-term approach, and now heads of L&D are taking a step back and reviewing. It may be that this approach isn't suitable and sustainable moving forward. What is needed is an approach that fully incorporates digital into the learning strategy rather than treating it as a standalone element.

"Organisations are realising the importance of supporting a learner's want to develop."

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One pivotal change, which Cathy has been wanting to see for a long time now, is that organisations are now valuing people development so much more. They are realising the importance of supporting a learner's want to develop. Traditionally (and understandably), learning has been implemented to support business growth and profits for the company. However, a huge part of achieving this is the growth and development of the people in these businesses, which is now being recognised so much more. A company is only ever as good as its people.

This creates an opportunity for L&D professionals to explore learners' willingness to invest in themselves. Businesses need to think of learners as consumers and recognise that, if they don't get the information that they want and need to consume then, ultimately, they will go elsewhere. This is a definite new consideration when looking at L&D solutions and strategies.

Putting the learner at the centre of learning really requires a significant shift in a company's approach to learning. Explaining how an L&D perspective requires a completely different attitude when looking at learning design, she stated that, instead of considering the company to be at the centre of this, it should now be the learner who is central to these plans.

This does mean that there needs to be changes in processes and a requirement to invest in systems to meet these new demands from learners but, ultimately, both the organisation and learner will benefit from this new level of support.

What impact has new technology had on the learner journey?

Now is a really exciting time for technology and learning because COVID-19 has allowed L&D teams to experiment and fast track advancements. L&D teams have been waiting for the technology revolution. Digital opportunities have been talked about for years but have not progressed quickly enough to allow for new ways in which companies can deliver learning experiences.

"L&D teams have been waiting for the technology revolution."

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Virtual classrooms, for example, have been incredibly popular and utilised so much more in the last twelve months, and people are now reaping the benefits of this technology. Cathy pointed out how the LPI have been leading the way with virtual classroom training for several years now and have experienced an increase in demand over the last 12 months. Moving forward, organisations will be open to trying new things, such as VR, particularly for learners that can't be together, as it allows them to experience something in a virtual space with others.
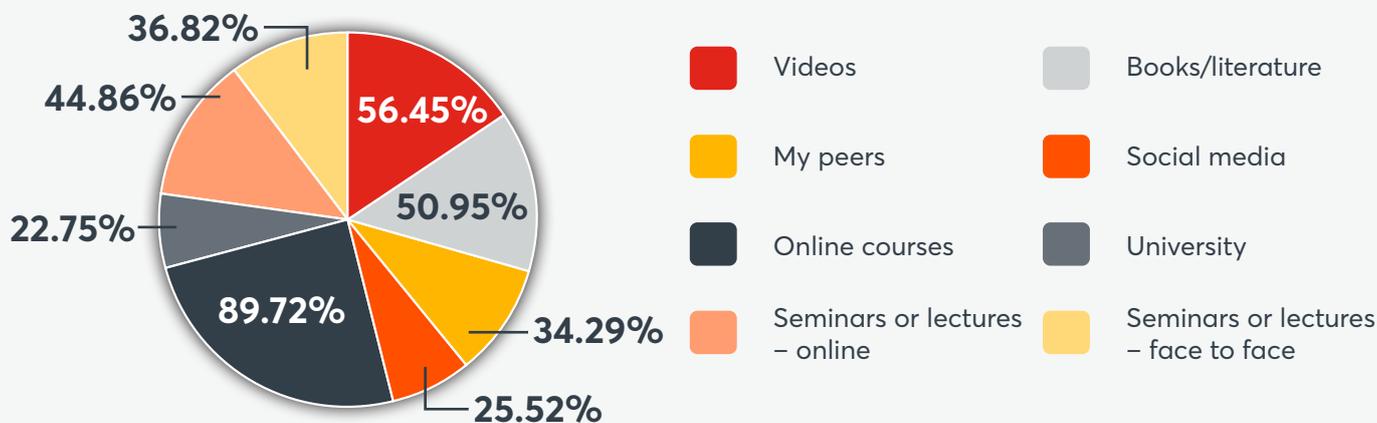
There is a feeling that we have been waiting for VR to show something practical in the corporate world, i.e. the ability to run manager training, or for a member of the team to practise coaching skills, and this is now possible. New technologies allow for learners to stop, practise and make mistakes in a safe environment before moving on.

"New technologies allow for learners to stop, practice and learn from mistakes."

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Having these new technologies means that there is little or no negative impact in the real world. Customer-facing staff, for example, can really benefit from this, as they no longer have to go through awkward role play situations when practising their customer service skills. This new style of learning can be done in a safe environment, giving people a level of confidence in their learning experience.

This is also just the start of it; there will be some big shifts in the next couple of years, with even further digital advances in learning. However, there is a call to consider blended learning approaches, as the survey still shows that people do like to consume learning face to face, or in a classroom, as well as embracing new technologies and utilising digital.

When looking to develop a new skill, in or out of work, how would you choose to learn?

■ Videos — 56.45%	■ Books/literature — 50.95%
■ My peers — 34.29%	■ Social media — 25.52%
■ Online courses — 89.72%	■ University — 22.75%
■ Seminars or lectures – online — 44.86%	■ Seminars or lectures – face to face — 36.82%

Concluding the interview, Cathy commented on how the landscape of L&D is certainly changing, with the evolving expectations of learners and with companies investing further in their learners and the journey they want to offer them. It certainly is a 'watch this space' moment in L&D!

Learner expectations

It has become clear that in the last few years there has been a huge shift in what learners expect from their learner journey. They want to take more control of their experience, define what it looks like and have an input into how they learn.

Expanding on our research through a second survey, just one question was posed to those same learners, **'What's your ideal learning experience?'** Using a word cloud to represent these results, the size of each word indicates its importance and best represents learner expectations.

Learn at own Pace

Interactive   **Blended Learning**

Bite-size   Quick   Being Hands On

Self-Directed   **Complete in own Time**

Relatable   # Digital Learning

Offers Personal Development

Interactive   Affordable   Practical   Focused

Face-to-Face   Engaging

Balance with Home Life

Motivational   Flexibility

Informative

Complete in own time

"I love courses that are online and ones that I can fit around my day and decide to do as and when, allowing me to break off and then go back and finish when it suits me, as I am self-employed."

Bite-size

"Delivering information in smaller chunks that can allow a learner to step away for breaks to give their mind a break to process/recover genuinely helps. People struggle to focus effectively for longer than 20 minutes straight...information gets lost."

Face-to-face

"My ideal learning experience would be face-to-face because that motivates me to learn more and I would happily commit more time to learning."

Balance with home life

"A flexible learning opportunity that allows me to learn in the time I have available whilst also dealing with work and home priorities."

Interactive

"Virtual, interactive learning, that is intriguing and encourages me to ask questions."

Offers personal development

"I enjoy learning new things that can help me develop as a person and as a business."

Digital learning

"Digital learning is an ideal learning experience for me. It gives much more flexibility to fit in the learning around your lifestyle and schedule."

Blended learning

"I enjoy blended learning. I find that a mixture of formats help keeps it interesting."

How to create digital training that will engage your learners

What do learners want from their experience with digital training?

This is a question that many L&D professionals are faced with, and one we aimed to find the answer to through our learner survey by asking our learners what aspects of digital training they enjoy, and what elements they think enhance their learning.

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to 'e-learning', with 77% of respondents saying that it enhanced their learning.

But e-learning is complex and can include a large range of different components, from videos, practice questions and downloadable resources to VR, 3D elements and games. How do we know which to use and when?

This is the question we aim to answer here as, though it is a great first step to know what learners will engage with, it is also vital to know how to use these components to

create the best possible training. Yes, learners may like digital training and love a video, but if they aren't used in a suitable way, the learners won't gain the real benefits.

Let's take a deep dive and see what these different components can offer, when they should be used and how they can help the learner.

What did the survey reveal?

To begin with, let's have a look at the two questions which were particularly insightful into what learners want from their digital learning.

What elements or aspects of digital learning do you enjoy?

85%

**I can access it
at any time**

85%

**I can complete it
at my own pace**

As may be expected, the two highest-rated answers are 'lifestyle gains'. The learners value the flexibility that digital learning provides, suggesting that this may be a driving force that is encouraging learners to make the shift to digital learning. And it makes sense, as they can easily fit it into their schedule, accessing it at any time or place that suits them.

What else did they value?

56%

**Downloadable
resources**

55%
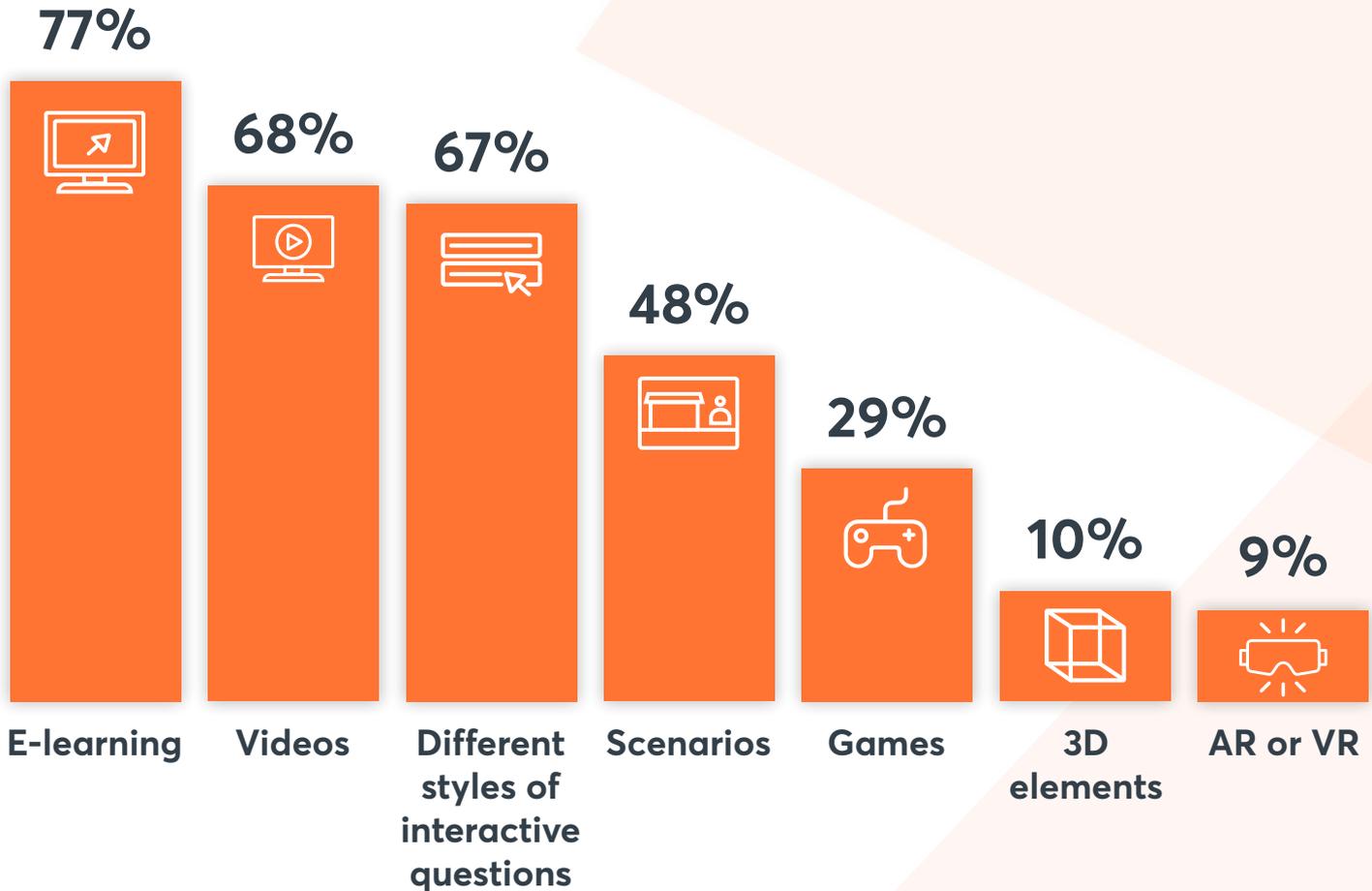
**Interactive
elements**

48%

**Practice
questions**

We are not surprised to see these aspects so highly regarded. There is a lot of value to these, whether that is increasing the engagement of the training (interactive elements), helping learners embed the learning and practise in a safe space (practice questions), or giving them the opportunity to easily refer to learning at a later date (downloadable resources).

What digital formats do you think enhance learning?

In order of popularity, the answers were:

77% E-learning

68% Videos

67% Different styles of interactive questions

48% Scenarios

29% Games

10% 3D elements

9% AR or VR

We believe the high-ranking for e-learning is a result of the pandemic, with more people having had to access to it and enjoying the flexibility it provides.

The high results for videos, interactive questions and scenarios suggest that learners want more of an interactive, rather than a passive, experience, and the lower answers for games, 3D elements and AR/VR could suggest that either learners still need convincing about the newer, more modern digital formats, or they may simply not have had experience of these yet. We are curious to see if this changes as more people have exposure to them.

But, overall, it shows that a variety of different methods are desired. This makes sense, as not everyone learns in the same way – something L&D professionals must keep in mind when designing their own training.

Let's explore the different formats

To give you a deeper understanding of these digital formats and how they can best be used, we turned to some of our in-house team for their insights.

Sabine de Kamps
Learning Experience
Designer Team Leader

Alex Bradley
Learning Design
Manager

Emma Liles
Graphic Design
Manager

1. Downloadable resources

After the 'lifestyle gains', downloadable resources were the highest-ranked aspect of digital training. There are three things that make them so popular: they provide an easy way of accessing the learning; they allow the learner to take away summaries of the learning and keep them for reference, which is great for learners who struggle to memorise things, and they are a great way of providing additional information or context that may not be included in the course.

Sabine's Top Tip:
They are useful as reminders of the key learning points, or as job aids, such as checklists. But when writing them, it is important not to regurgitate the course, instead make sure they are written and designed so they are easy to digest and clearly summarise the key points.

2. Practice questions

Another of the highest-ranked elements, and with good reason – practice questions can play an important part in training. They allow the learner to be tested in a safe setting, and to try without fear of failure, both of which can help improve confidence before attempting the 'real' test. Not just that, they also help reinforce knowledge, support the memory and allow the learner to identify any knowledge gaps or areas that they may need to focus on.

Sabine's Top Tip:
There are many types of questions and it is important to realise that not all questions are fit for all purposes. To get the most out of them, the goal of the learning must be thought about carefully. For example, if you want to teach facts, then the questions should be simple knowledge checks which focus on the facts – these are a great way to support understanding and memory. For learning which needs to drive behaviour change, the questions should make the learners think, such as requiring them to make decisions, and then provide useful and detailed feedback.

3. Interactive elements

An interactive element is anything with which a learner interacts and can range from a simple 'click and reveal' to a complex scenario – in fact, a lot of our list here can be classed as interactive.

Why did 55% of our learners say they enjoyed the interactivity? Training can be dry and dull, and interactive elements are a great way to keep engagement high, cutting through the monotony and helping to 'mix things up'. They also help keep the learner motivated, as it is something to look forward to.

When used appropriately, they are also wonderful tools to help reinforce the learning. For example, a 'click and reveal' is a great way to help learners digest and remember complex information. By breaking down the information into manageable chunks, they allow the learner to focus on it a bit at a time, making it much less overwhelming than a solid piece of text.

> **Alex's Top Tip:**
> Beware: 'click and reveal' can be overused and leave the learner with too many 'clicks', which can be frustrating. It's easy to fall into this trap, but it's important to try and find a balance between overwhelming the learner with too much information at once and requiring them to click through too many smaller chunks, but using a variety of interactive styles should help here.

4. Videos

Videos can be used in a number of ways and are a great way to take into account different learning styles. They can help break down and describe a complicated subject or concept in a way that words alone could not; condense large amounts of learning and make it easier for the learners to understand, and help put learning into context and bring it into real life, such as 'talking head' style videos, which tell stories and can have a bigger impact than a written account.

But there are considerations that must be made. To ensure that they are suitable for all learners, closed captions and/or transcripts should be provided, and the length should be considered – they shouldn't be too long, as this can lead to learners switching off. If there is a lot of information that needs to be conveyed, several shorter snippets are best, with some questions in between. This will help make sure the learner understands the main points of each snippet before moving on to the next one.

> **Alex's Top Tip:**
> Try to avoid using video for the sake of it. If you want to provide some simple facts or basic information, a piece of text can be better, especially as text is much easier to scan or skim read.

5. Different styles of interactive questions

Interactive questions are engaging – it is one of the reasons they are so popular – but they are also much more than that. Learning by thinking and doing is usually much more effective than passive methods, and interactive questions help learners tap into this style of learning.

The questions should reinforce what they have learnt so far, helping the learner build their understanding and memory of the learning, and achieve a deeper understanding. When choosing which question style to use, you should first consider what you want to teach. A text entry is a great tool for reflection and will work well in a module focusing on awareness or behaviour change. Multiple or single choice activities and drag and drops can be great to check knowledge, though you could also use a multiple or single choice to create a simple scenario. Questions can also be used to encourage learners to think more deeply about problems and questions themselves, with the feedback confirming if they were right or wrong.

Sabine's Top Tip:
It is possible to use too many questions. I recommend spacing them throughout the learning: start with some informational slides and follow them by a question or two to help the learner reflect or test their memory.

6. Scenarios

Scenarios are a great method for driving behaviour change or raising awareness and can be used in a wide range of types of training, from safeguarding to health and safety.

What makes them so useful is that they help put the learning into context, such as a real-life setting that the learner can relate to. This provides them with an opportunity to put what they've learnt into practice and, importantly, allows them to learn from any mistakes in a safe space.

A popular use is to help learners make decisions and then learn from the consequences. For example, a learner might have been taught a process on how to deal with a customer complaint and they are then introduced to a scenario where a customer makes a complaint. This puts the process into context and allows the learner to work through what must be done.

Alex's Top Tip:
There are lots of different styles of scenarios, including text-based scenarios, graphical scenarios and videos. As with all these elements, it is important to think about the aim of the learning and choose the appropriate style.
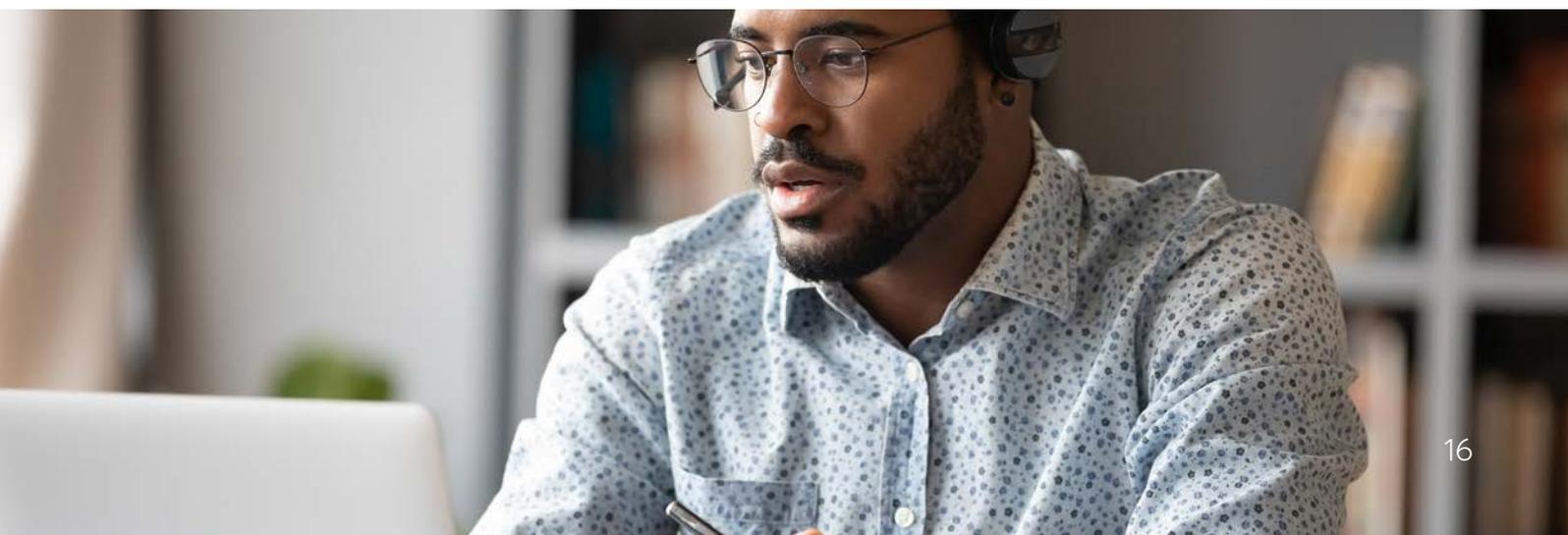
7. Games

Games can often be seen as frivolous, but they are a fun way for the learner to engage with the training and test themselves.

They play on human psychology – motivating the learners to get their best score – which is a fantastic way of reinforcing the knowledge. In addition, they can be used in a similar way to scenarios, as they can help learners develop knowledge by making decisions, learning from the consequences and retrying until they get it right.

There are success stories of businesses using games to help engage their workforces. One business used it in their health and safety training. They set departments against each other to drive them to get the best score, something they could only do by engaging with the learning. But it's important to know your learners, as not all learner groups may have this competitive drive.

On the downside, they can be time consuming and expensive to create, depending on their complexity, so it is important that you pay attention to why and how you're creating them.

Sabine's Top Tip:

The most important thing is to start with who your learners are and what you want to teach them and make all your decisions based on this. You need to make sure that your game focuses on what you want to teach and not on the many 'cool things you can do'.

8. 3D elements

3D elements, such as 3D modelling or virtual 3D games, are useful for recreating large-scale, technical, accurate life-like objects or locations. This makes them the perfect introduction to a piece of equipment or an environment, allowing the learner to interact with it without being physically there.

As you can imagine, there is a cost attached to them and they take time to create, but organisations choose them for the long-term benefits they offer. This is especially the case for complex pieces of training, where learners will need to know a piece of equipment inside out.

Alex's Top Tip:

They are a great way to allow learners to practise as many times as they need, giving them the time to focus on amending any mistakes or uncertainties they have, which helps them build their confidence. They are also durable – no wear and tear that would happen to an actual piece of equipment!

9. AR/VR

VR and AR (virtual reality and augmented reality) provide different ways to interact with environments. VR is similar to a 3D game, as it creates a virtual environment. Learners can interact with it through a headset, and are immersed physically and mentally. AR enables learners to look at their environment through a device, such as a smart phone or tablet, and things are placed in that environment with which they can interact.

Like 3D elements, they are great for complex training needs. They are incredibly beneficial and provide a safe way of using and exploring dangerous pieces of equipment, allowing the learner to practise in a safe place without the dangers or the fear of real-life consequences. They can be used for a range of different needs, from teaching how to fix or maintain complex pieces of equipment to medical training.

Alex's Top Tip:
Yes, they are costly but they have so many benefits that they are worth the consideration. They decrease health and safety risks, provide unique learning opportunities, allow for multiple learners to train at the same time, and are available 24/7.

10. The graphical appearance

Graphic design encompasses all aspects of training, from the videos to the downloadable resources. If you think about it, the design of any training will be the first thing a learner sees, and it can be a reason why learners disengage before they've even started. To avoid this, it is best to get to know your audience's likes, values and preferred graphical styles, and treat them with intelligence – don't dumb down the graphics, rely on assumptions and stereotypes or underestimate what they can gain from the graphics. You don't want your message undermined by thoughtless graphics.

They can be used in a very practical way, such as to add branding or ensure consistency with other training or organisational resources. They are also a great way to convey data, or enhance the text, which can be especially helpful to those who are dyslexic or have English as a second language.

They can also be used to emotionally connect with the audience; for example, by conveying different emotional messages, such as using softer colours for sensitive topics, or bold, bright colours to convey confidence.

Emma's Top Tip:
When designing on a budget, consistency should be your key consideration. The graphics shouldn't be an afterthought, but be well planned, well thought out and well executed. If you don't think about them, or use a mixture of different styles, then it can result in an incohesive and jarring design.

# How much time do we need to commit to learning and development?

How much time people want to commit to learning and development in the workplace and how much time they are able to commit can be very different. How do individuals and organisations strike a balance to create the most engaging learning experience?

What we found

Time people have
available to commit to professional development per week
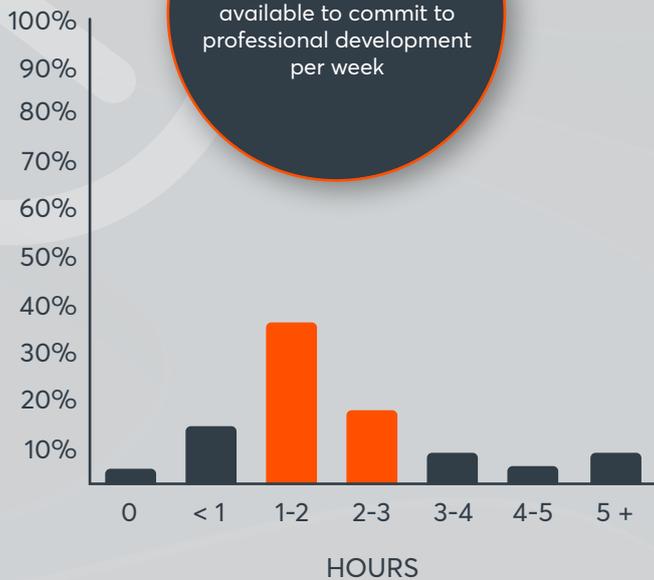
Time people would like to have
available to commit to professional development per week
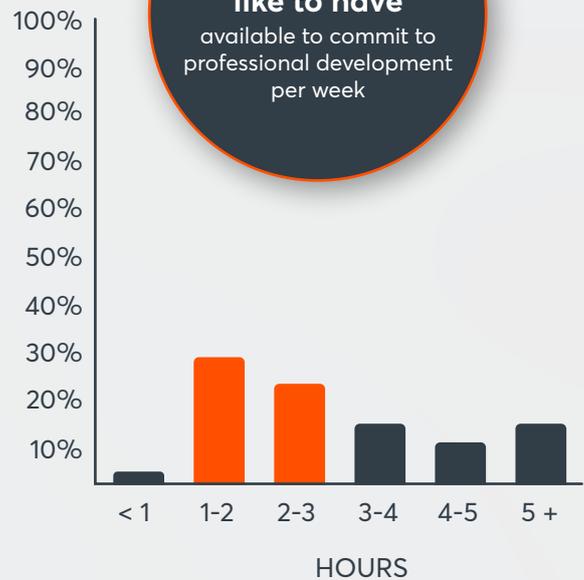
What the experts say

Research shows our ability to retain information dramatically drops after a certain length of time, therefore it is important to ensure your training is concise and bite-size.

Average attention span for an adult is

20 mins

Most experts confirm the "sweet spot" is

15-30 mins

Courses should be as long as needed, but **need to be short and bite-size**

Workplace learning programs **positively affect job satisfaction**

"

What the learners say

Our research highlights that not only is shorter and bite-size training preferred by the experts but also our learners. See what they had to say when asked about their ideal learning experience.

"Delivering information in smaller chunks that can allow a learner to step away for breaks to activate their body and give their mind a break to process/recover genuinely helps too."

"Online, at own pace and at a time to suit me."

"Learning at my own pace, in a conducive mood to take in the new ideas or concepts, and with the ability to pause/rewind/replay whenever I didn't quite catch the meaning or need to review a piece of data."

How can organisations create a compelling learner journey?

Following on from our earlier interview, Cathy Hoy joined us once more for our roundtable event, discussing what makes a compelling learner journey and advising on how organisations can create one. It was an extremely insightful discussion, and here we share her thoughts and ideas.

Onboarding: where it should begin

Cathy stated the learner journey should start at onboarding. She believed it was important because during the first three to six months of a new employee's time in a business, they are consciously, or unconsciously, assessing whether they like it there and if they want to stay, and L&D can play a big part in retaining them. It can even help get them excited and eager to begin by starting the learner journey before they join! But, it is essential to think carefully about the overall journey – a theme that was important throughout her talk.

Considerations for the learner journey

She explained that when thinking about the learner journey, L&D professionals need to take into account the considerations of both the learners and the business. For each, they can be broken down into three categories: current needs, future needs, and expectations and it is for the L&D department to understand these and plan their approach with these in mind.

For example, for the future needs of a business, it may be predicting the skills and knowledge that will be needed in the future, but are not essential now. With things evolving and changing quite rapidly, there will be jobs in the future that don't even exist yet. But L&D teams have to try and forecast for these changes and prepare ahead of time.

For the learners, L&D professionals may be thinking of their career paths, and thinking how they can map the learner journeys to support that. They should also be aware of the learners' expectations and the questions they may be asking such as: Am I going to be able to develop? What training will be available? Is there coaching or mentoring?
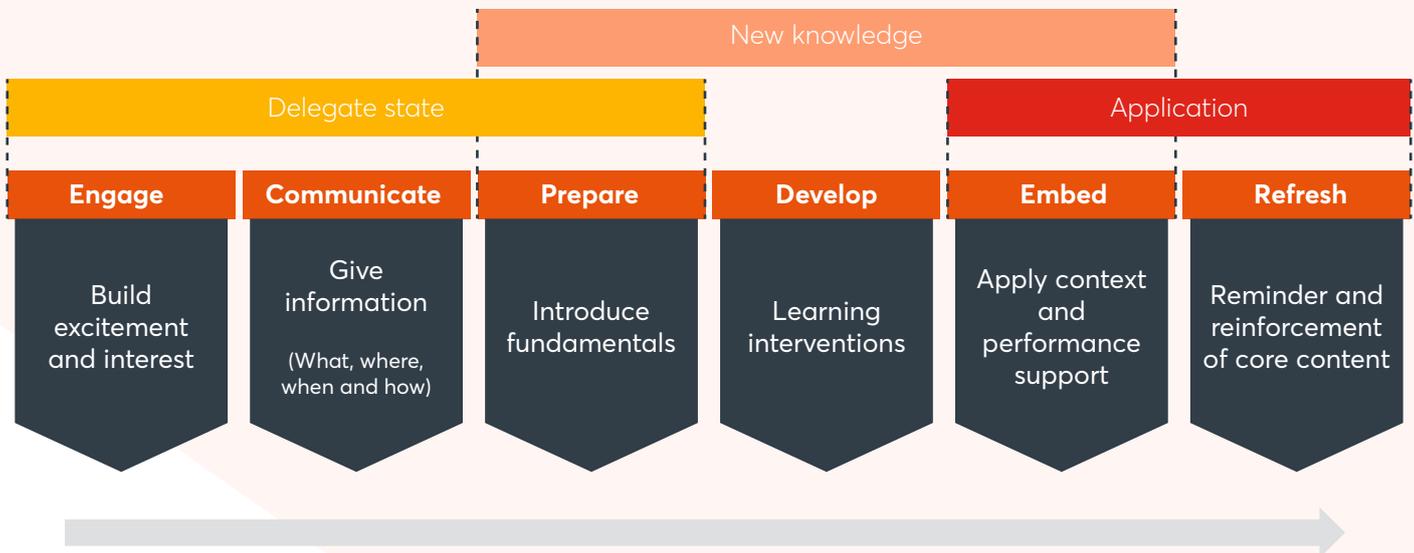
But, overall, an important part of planning the learner journey is seeing it as just that – a journey. There are different stages to it, and L&D professionals need to consider how people are going to think or feel at different stages of it, as this varies throughout.

The learner journey: what does it look like?

Cathy explained how the learner journey can be broken down into three parts. It isn't just about the training, that is just one part of the journey; there are in fact three parts altogether, each covering certain steps along the way.

Learner journey approach

		New knowledge			
Delegate state				Application	
Engage	**Communicate**	**Prepare**	**Develop**	**Embed**	**Refresh**
Build excitement and interest	Give information (What, where, when and how)	Introduce fundamentals	Learning interventions	Apply context and performance support	Reminder and reinforcement of core content

The delegate state

During this stage, the learner is set up and prepared for the learning. The aim is to have them invested before they even begin, and to get there, they need to understand why they're doing it, and what they're going to get out of it. It can include anything from teaser campaigns to preparation and activities they need to do prior to the training, and overall, the L&D professionals should want their learners curious and eager to find out more.

This part of the learner journey is especially useful and important in these remote, virtual times, as it can be used to get to know the learners before the training begins. It is where the connection and building of relationships can begin, which will help the learners feel more comfortable once they begin the virtual training.

New knowledge

This is simply the learning intervention – the training they are completing. The most obvious part of the learner journey, but which is nothing without the two surrounding parts.

Application

Cathy explained that this stage is often overlooked. Yet once the training is completed, it is important that work is done to embed and reinforce it, otherwise the training can be wasted. She provided examples of ways to achieve this – quizzes and micro learning pieces, 1-2-1s with the manager where they can look at the training in the context of their role and make sure it is applied effectively and appropriately, or even a follow-up call from the trainer to see if it was successful and to find out if there is anything they need further support or help with.

Learning journey example

BEGIN → 'What's in it for me?' launch video → Course Registration details → Pre-course skills test → Trainer intro video/call → Pre-course prep

ESN group → Course follow-up → Manager 1-2-1 → Quiz → Formal training → Manager 1-2-1

Coaching with manager → Success stories → Refresher micro-learning → Review with trainer → END

Overall, the learner journey could span three to six months, and this breakdown will help L&D professionals decide what needs to be done at each stage, and where the learner is at on their journey. It can't be done by the L&D professionals' will alone though, they need the support of the business, especially the line managers. Cathy stressed their important supporting role by explaining that it is their investment in their team's success along this journey which will make it a lot smoother – without the buy-in of their managers, the learners are going to struggle to be invested themselves. Following Cathy's talk we had three breakout sessions. Here we summarise the discussions.

What cultural aspects need to be considered?

- Culture issues and barriers lie with senior management/high level stakeholders' attitudes. Learners are keen to engage and embrace new ways of learning, whereas SLTs are still focussed on completion and compliance metrics
- SLTs need to shift their value perception of L&D to a more strategic approach – tying in L&D with business objectives and work across the business in a partnership way, instead of keeping L&D siloed
- L&D still need to be able to balance the business impact against the learner experience
- Emphasis has to be on connectivity with staff, helping them to connect and build relationships with colleagues
- If managed, remote ways of working and training staff can result in much closer relationships with colleagues across the business

What technology or new technologies can they utilise to aid with this journey?

- Technology, such as video, allows the trainer to introduce themselves prior to the course, set expectations and put learners at ease
- It is beneficial to the learner if they can access the information on their own devises such as mobile phone or tablet or even through an app
- Organisations should look to utilise existing and familiar software and tools where possible, such as Teams, so learners aren't daunted by new unfamiliar technology
- Through developing social collaboration, technology can help build a culture of learning; for example, peer-to-peer group discussions, sharing best practice and knowledge, and setting up communities
- Importantly, technology should aid the journey, making it easily accessible and flexible from the learners' perspective

How have new learner expectations and behaviours impacted planning for this journey?

- Learners now expect easier availability, any time, any place, any where
- Organisations should allow a more self-guided approach to learning
- Learning should be bite-size, easy to digest and available on demand
- Organisations need to consider how to plan for interactivity with learning
- Allow learners to try new ways of learning, particularly creating a blended approach and mixing old with new
- Learners want to be rewarded after learning and feel that it forms part of a bigger picture in their development

Final Word

Hannah Brindle, Managing Director at Virtual College, shares her thoughts on this report and gives some practical advice on taking these learnings forward, allowing organisations to place their learners at the centre of their L&D planning.

Hannah Brindle
Managing Director,
Virtual College

There are some fascinating insights from this learner survey – but ultimately what is this telling us about the future of learning and what needs to change in how we think about learning for work?

The last year has accelerated "learner autonomy". As employees have experienced much more freedom and flexibility in how they work, they are increasingly expecting this in how they learn for work.

The survey suggests that learners expect more autonomy and more control over their learning than ever before including how they learn, when they learn and what learning resources they use.

Greater learning autonomy and the ability to make personal decisions over learning will inevitably bring greater employee engagement – and ultimately drive better organisation performance and improvement.

So, what does all of this mean in practice?

1. Choice

Learners wanting to choose the types and formats of learning resources that work for them. Learners wanting a mix or blend of learning resources, particularly e-learning, video content and more traditional learning options.

2. Convenience

Learners wanting immediate access to learning in the flow of work, learning that is highly accessible and fits in with their busy working day and learning that can be consumed at a time and place that suits them.

3. Compressed

Learning that is bite-size, delivered in small convenient chunks rather than long courses. A move away from courses to resources!

4. Context

Learning that is highly relevant to the learner and their role and can be easily applied and related back to their specific work environment and experiences.

5. Constructive

Learning that fulfils an organisation and individual learning need – learning that adds value to everyone.

6. Compelling

Learning that is engaging and evokes immediate interest and attention.

7. Consultancy

A shift in the role of the Learning Professional. A move to acting as learning advisers and consultants to support learners to access high quality curated learning resources that meet both organisation and personal learner need.

8. Continuous

A continuous approach to learning rather than a focus on annual one-off training interventions.

9. Collaboration

Learning that maximises technology and tools to support learners to collaborate, share ideas and experience and explore practical solutions.