



# The ROI of Employee Learning: Calculating the true value of L&D

A practical guide to getting the best return from L&D programmes and investment in every business' most valuable asset – people.





# The ROI of Employee Learning: Calculating the true value of L&D

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# Introduction

From driving engagement and high performance to cutting staff turnover and safety risks, the impact of an outstanding employee learning strategy seemingly knows no bounds.

Yet there's one stumbling block facing learning and development leaders across almost every industry: return on investment.

Proving a worthy ROI has long been a thorn in the side of those responsible for employee learning – and understandably so. It's difficult to demonstrate the true impact of L&D strategies, especially when you don't have easy access to data insights and behavioural trends, or your metrics don't link with primary business goals.

Now, as businesses navigate their way through an era of radical transformation, managers have been granted the power to put learning at the heart of long-term growth and organisational resilience. Industry leaders are already shifting the concept of staff development from a vertical silo into one that goes hand in hand with core strategies and outcomes.

Far from being a tick-box exercise, their challenge is to tie managed, personalised and self-directed learning together, while also delivering core expectations around wellbeing and mental health. Meanwhile, economic uncertainty is driving the need for HR leaders to present cost savings wherever possible and uncover new ways to do more with less.

The workplace learning revolution is well underway, and more is expected of learning functions than ever before. This guide will walk you through concrete examples and practical tips to support your learning journey, looking through the lens of ROI every step of the way.





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# Unravelling ROI

Let's start with the basics.

When businesses talk about return on investment, they tend to think primarily about financial gain. Executive teams want to know how much money they will get back from their initial spend, and how long that return will take.

Sounds easy enough, right? We can even use a standardised formula to calculate return on investment in the context of an L&D programme:

**$$\text{ROI} = (\text{Total Benefits} - \text{Total Costs}) / \text{Total Costs} \times 100$$**

So, let's say your investment in employee learning is £20,000 and the value of your total benefits is £50,000:

**$$\text{ROI} = (£50,000 - £20,000) / £20,000 \times 100$$**

In this scenario, your ROI would be 150%.

The problem for HR and L&D leaders is that developing skills across their workforce leads to all kinds of benefits that are tough to quantify. It's fairly simple to estimate the total cost of an investment; but far more challenging to put a figure on the total benefits that come as a result.





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## How does L&D currently measure success?

The idea of tracking return on investment is enough to strike fear into the heart of even the bravest of L&D leaders. That's why so few teams actually do it – in fact, only 1 in 10 learning functions say they have a reliable way to measure ROI<sup>1</sup>.

So, if it's not return on investment, how do most organisations evaluate the success of their learning programmes? The latest study from CIPD<sup>2</sup> shows that the types of metrics L&D teams tend to use are limited:



The fact that a quarter of L&D teams (24%) don't measure the impact of their skills strategies at all speaks volumes.

Interestingly, the CIPD report also reveals that most organisations share the same barriers to evaluating programmes:

- ✓ Lack of management time
- ✓ Pressure of other priorities
- ✓ Poor data collection
- ✓ Limited LMS capability

Source 1: [Back to the Future Report](#), Emerald Works | Source 2: [Learning and Skills at Work Survey](#), CIPD





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## Seeing the bigger picture

The perspective of learning ROI has been limited for too long. Metrics like 'participant satisfaction' and 'number of completions' are relatively shallow compared to key performance indicators that are integral to long-term business growth, such as:



If HR and L&D leaders are going to demonstrate the tangible differences that employee learning makes, they first need to take a step back and see the bigger picture.

Although it takes time and internal resources to do so, getting a better handle on the relationship between these KPIs and employee learning is certainly possible. We'll be delving deeper into each of these links over the course of this guide.





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## Clear objectives, clear results

Every organisation is different, but the first step in determining the ROI of learning is always the same: define your objectives.

All too often businesses roll out new learning programmes without first detailing a set of clear goals for doing so. This is the reason so many learning programmes don't produce tangible gains and fall into the trap of becoming a tick-box exercise.

The key is to determine what really matters to your organisation. Whether it's boosting retention, freeing up time spent on admin or reducing external costs, aligning your learning strategy with organisational goals is crucial because this is how L&D can start mapping out benefits and proving its real value.

**8%** Of L&D teams evaluate the impact of learning initiatives on the wider business<sup>3</sup>

Source 3: Learning and Skills at Work Survey, CIPD





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## Benchmarking success

As the old saying goes: you can't improve what you don't measure.

That's why forward-thinking learning managers aim to join the dots between people data, resource outputs and business outcomes. They calculate the financial impact of potential risks to their organisation, and evaluate the costs and benefits of different approaches to mitigate those risks.

**Let's take staff turnover as an example.** Every organisation should be tracking their annual attrition rate because this has a direct impact on business performance and productivity.

According to the CIPD, the total cost of replacing an employee is around £3,000<sup>4</sup> – and that's a conservative estimate. You can work this out for your own organisation by drilling down into your time-to-hire, time-to-productivity, recruitment costs and induction costs.

View that cost alongside recent surveys from McKinsey<sup>5</sup> which revealed 40% of employees are considering quitting their job, with the top reason being due to a lack of career development opportunities, it becomes easier to join the dots between L&D and a key business outcome.

## Our expert says...

“A good way to start benchmarking success within your own organisation is by running annual or quarterly surveys, exit interviews or eNPS campaigns to gauge sentiment among your staff. This gives you a baseline to track the impact of initiatives. The end goal is being able to track improvements over time across a set of defined KPIs: retention, engagement, wellbeing, performance, compliance, customer satisfaction, and so on.”

Michael Seiler, Customer Success Manager - The Access Group

Source 4: [Resource and Talent Planning Report](#), CIPD | Source 5: [McKinsey Quarterly: The Great Attrition](#), McKinsey





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## Are you covering all bases?

Not all L&D strategies are created equal. If your goal is to deliver the best possible ROI and become a learning leader in your industry then your plans must cover the full scope of managed, personalised and self-directed learning. Here's a quick breakdown:

### Managed learning

This includes all compulsory training around compliance, cybersecurity, health and safety and any other course that your employees must complete from the onboarding stage onwards.

### Personalised learning

Personalised learning is integral to staff engagement, giving people the tools and confidence they need to flourish in their individual role.

### Self-directed learning

A good L&D strategy should also help develop the wider skills and knowledge needed to lead a fulfilling life both in and outside of work.

Still with us so far? Let's go a little deeper into each of these aspects of learning to discover how much they impact ROI.





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# The rewards of managing risk

Growing businesses face a constant stream of risks and liabilities, and it only takes one mistake to cause serious damage to a company's bottom line.

The bulk of ROI from managed learning should be traced back to how well employers mitigate risks and avoid scenarios which lead to costly errors. Prevention is always better than cure, especially when it comes to health and safety, compliance and cybersecurity.

Businesses must be able to demonstrate through evidence that they've taken all necessary precautions to protect employees, suppliers and customers from various issues.

More often than not, it's down to L&D to provide a clear audit trail whenever a problem arises. Those that can't point back to effective mandatory training programmes leave themselves open to far more severe financial penalties and reputational damage in the long run.





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## Cybersecurity

The average annual cost of cybersecurity breaches for mid-to-large UK businesses currently totals £8,040<sup>6</sup> – and that figure is rising quickly year on year.

Human error accounts for a large proportion of vulnerabilities and entry points for hackers, often stemming from a lack of knowledge or caution. Remember that employees are your first line of defence against cybersecurity threats, which is why regular training is essential to embed positive behaviours, stay compliant and develop a cyber resilient workforce.

A study of 230 organisations led by Osterman Research found that effective cyber awareness training reduces the risk of breaches by 77%<sup>7</sup>. That means the average annual cost of breaches would drop from £8,000 to £2,400, which gives businesses an approximate ROI of £5,600 per year.

That's without taking into account that the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is cracking down on cybercrime by issuing stark warnings and penalties for businesses that don't offer sufficient preventative measures and training. In fact, a new law was passed in 2022 which states that certain organisations can be fined as much as £17 million for non-compliance.<sup>8</sup>

**The cost of getting it wrong**  
In October 2022, the ICO issued a fine of £4,400,000 to Interserve Group Limited, a Berkshire-based construction company, after an employee forwarded a phishing email containing malware to a colleague.<sup>9</sup> The attacker compromised 283 systems, 16 accounts and over 113,000 instances of personal data.

Source 6: [Cybercrime and Security Survey](#), Statista | Source 7: [Security Awareness Training Research](#), Osterman  
Source 8: [Source: Cyber Laws Updated to Boost UK Resilience](#), GOV.UK | Source 9: [Biggest Cybersecurity Risk is Complacency](#), ICO





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## Regulatory compliance

Keeping up with evolving regulations and compliance training requirements is generally recognised as an important endeavour; but securing appropriate investment requires HR and L&D to prove to the C-suite that the cost of cutting corners can be disastrous.

But what solution offers the best ROI? It's unrealistic to employ a whole team of compliance experts to cover every possible scenario, even for larger organisations. It's far more cost-effective to offer targeted training to specific employees, so they effectively become a compliance expert around the risks relevant to their day-to-day responsibilities.

The ROI of compliance training will depend on the level of regulatory scrutiny your business is under. However, whether you're a large enterprise bringing your entire workforce in line with GDPR or a financial services company adhering to strict anti money laundering (AML) regulations, the risk of not covering all bases isn't worth taking.

### The cost of getting it wrong

In January 2023, the FCA issued two fines to Guaranty Trust Bank and Al Rayan Bank, which together totalled £11.5m. Their report cited 'inadequate training of staff on financial crime and AML requirements, in particular, inadequacies in terms of operational staff understanding of the AML regime and enhanced due diligence requirements.'





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## Health and safety

Staying compliant with health and safety protocol is a basic expectation for any employer aiming to protect the health and performance of its people. It's also vital from a cost perspective; UK employers pay roughly £1.4bn every year as a result of work-related injuries.<sup>10</sup>

**Workplace accidents and the costly fines that follow can only be avoided when employees are completely aware of different risk scenarios and have the knowledge to protect themselves and others – and that requires training.**

**The cost of getting it wrong**

Technology firm Dyson was recently fined £1.2m by HSE after an accident in the workplace was found to be caused by a failure to provide adequate training and instruction to employees.<sup>11</sup> The likes of Sainsbury's, Network Rail, Carlsberg and Yorkshire Water were all fined seven figure sums in 2022 for incidents related to training.

Source 10: [Health and Safety at Work 2022](#), HSE | Source 11: [Dyson fined £1.2m after worker injured](#), HSE





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## Mental health and wellbeing

Poor mental health is an epidemic sweeping across all industries, and there are serious consequences for employers that don't take proactive steps to protect their people.

Beyond the lasting damage it can cause to the wellbeing of individuals and families, poor mental health also leads to a wide range of performance-related issues at work:

- ✔ **Low engagement**
- ✔ **Poor performance**
- ✔ **Increased absence**
- ✔ **Higher employee turnover**

...to name a few.

Research from Deloitte revealed that 28% of employees who left their job between 2020-21 cited poor mental health as the main reason for handing in their notice.<sup>12</sup> That means **organisations could cut turnover by roughly one-third** by resolving this issue.

In many cases, it's only now that employers are starting to do something about it, namely through better mental health awareness training. Effective, scenario-based learning is one of the best ways to empower staff to take responsibility for their own mental wellbeing and promote a healthier, happier workforce. The initial investment is often well worth the long-term benefits.

### The value of getting it right

The Deloitte study found that for every £1 spent by employers on mental health interventions, employers received £5.30 back in cost savings related to absence, presenteeism and staff turnover.<sup>13</sup> That equates to an ROI of 530%.

Source 12: [Poor Mental Health Costs UK Employers](#), Deloitte | Source 13: [Mental Health & Employers Report: UK 2022](#), Deloitte





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# Unlocking gains through engagement

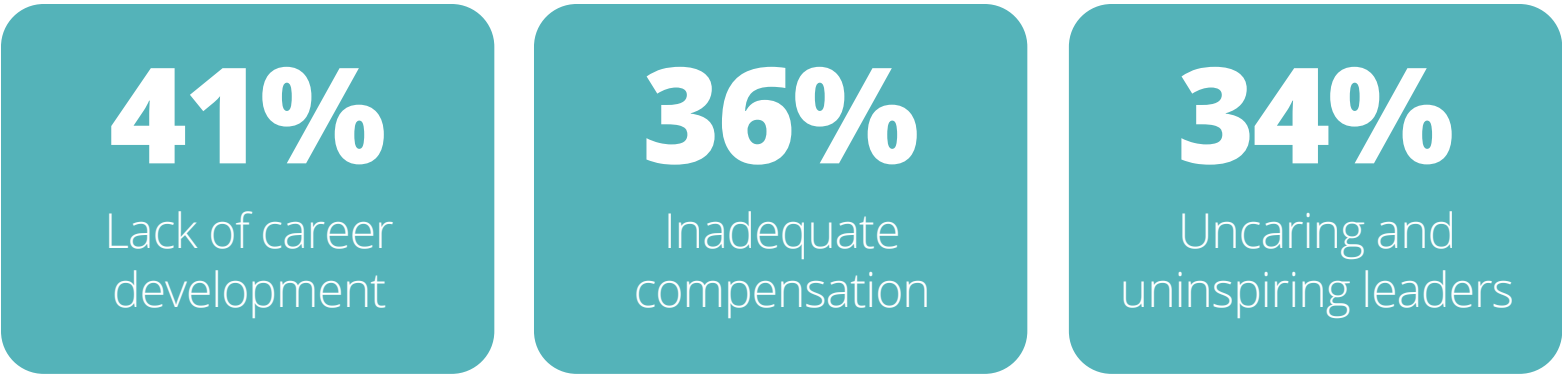
Managed learning is one thing; but it's your approach to personalised and self-directed learning that really drives gains across KPIs like employee engagement, performance and retention.

Today's best learning cultures are built on a foundation of personalised, semi-autonomous experiences that help employees upskill and reskill more efficiently. It's not just training; it's training tailored to their preferred interests and learning style.

No two employees are the same. Everyone has different skill sets, career ambitions, strengths and areas to improve. Yet so many employers fail to meet employee needs and develop a learning culture that goes beyond traditional, generic training.

The data shows that getting your approach to personalised learning and self-directed learning right is a huge factor in whether employees decide to stay or go, even more so than a salary raise. At a time when the Great Resignation is continuing to send shockwaves around the world, now is the time to make staff feel valued, engaged and like they don't need to move elsewhere to progress.

## Top reasons for quitting (Apr 2021—Apr 2022)<sup>14</sup>



Source 14: [The Great Attrition Report](#), McKinsey





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## From personalisation to profit

There are a few steps to calculating the ROI of personalised learning, so let's break it down.

The first is understanding that when you tailor learning content to an employee's career path and ambitions, it has a positive impact on engagement. LinkedIn recently reported that companies which curate courses tailored specifically to employee needs see 69% more engagement with learning content.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, it's no secret that high employee engagement drives stronger company performance. A study from Gallup found that companies with top-quartile engagement scores recorded **70% fewer safety incidents** than bottom-quartile businesses, and **21% higher profits**.<sup>16</sup>

Those gains aren't to be sniffed at. When you consider that engagement through personalised learning also amplifies the impact from managed learning initiatives like health and safety training, that's where your ROI really starts to snowball.

70%  
fewer safety incidents

Source 15: [Benefits of Online Training](#), LinkedIn | Source 16: [Engaged Workplaces are Safer](#), Gallup





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## Success with self-directed learning

The below figures from the Emerald Works 2020 report 'Back to the Future: Why tomorrow's workforce needs a learning culture' demonstrate example impact of a self-directed learning approach, looking at the rise of what they describe as the 'consumer-learner' and providing 'self-determined' learning opportunities.

“When we empower people to 'own' their learning journey and see how it adds value to them and their organization, we see increased levels of motivation, resilience and performance.”

Report: Back to the Future: Why tomorrow's workforce needs a learning culture

## Back to the future: Why tomorrow's workforce needs a learning culture - Emerald Works 2020





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## Soft skills make business sense

Beyond role-oriented training, more and more employers are realising that developing soft skills across their workforce can lead to a range of fantastic outcomes.

The modern world of work demands that employees are agile, resilient and adaptable to change. Interpersonal skills are crucial to personal growth and empower staff to feel more assured in their job role and life outside of work. For organisations, it also makes sound business sense due to the impact on productivity and collaboration within teams.

The MIT Sloan School of Management found that a 12-month training programme focused on soft skills like communication, problem solving and decision-making delivered a 250% return on investment (ROI) within eight months of completion.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the MIT study is that the researchers expected to see little impact from developing soft skills in repetitive labour environments like manufacturing. However, their results showed the opposite and led to a spike in productivity related to:

- ✓ **Communication**
- ✓ **Meeting deadlines**
- ✓ **Adhering to instructions**
- ✓ **Sharing efficiencies.**

Source 17: [Soft Skills Training Report](#), MIT SoM





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# Why your choice of Learning Management System matters

By this point, you should be starting to see how employee learning can drive your business to hit key goals and high performance across various KPIs. Now the question is: how are you going to manage the delivery?

The days of relying on manual process, classroom training and paper-based assessments are getting further behind us – and for good reason. Manual admin is one of the biggest drains of time and resources for HR and L&D, and also makes departments far more prone to mistakes and blind spots.

Companies leave themselves in a vulnerable position if they can't rely on automated processes and systemised approvals. With the right LMS, training plans can be tailored to specific roles and preferred styles of learning, increasing the average time to competency whilst streamlining inductions and development journeys.

At the same time, managers can get real-time notifications on course completions, recurring issues and instances of non-compliance. This saves a lot of time and worry, and absorbs a large part of the cost associated with traditional forms of training.

Learning management systems reduce training costs by an average of 25% to 40%<sup>18</sup>

Source 18: [Recession: A golden opportunity for L&D](#), HR Director





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## Delivering more with less

How can you make your learning processes quicker, more efficient and more cost-effective? A good LMS will help you achieve the following efficiencies:

- 

**Reduce time-to-competency**  
Getting your staff up to speed is tough when various aspects of their training are spread far and wide.
- 

**Avoid risk of repeat training**  
Diagnostic assessments make it possible for L&D managers to get an understanding of what individuals and teams already know, so they can focus on developing key skills instead of going over old ground.
- 

**Remote inductions**  
Now that hybrid work is becoming more commonplace, being able to complete entire or partial inductions from any location, on any device, saves a lot of time and hassle.
- 

**Engaged Learners**  
The best learning management systems allow your employees to learn anywhere, anytime - whenever suits them. Mobile apps and the right tools can help you engage your learners, whether at their desk or remotely.





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## Save time and money with eLearning

Traditional learning programmes and training days tend to involve hiring professional coaches, travel to external sites, food and drink costs and other expenses – all of which quickly adds up to a significant amount when multiplied across your workforce.

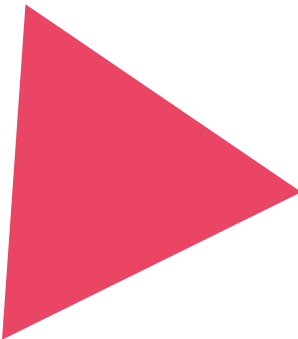
With eLearning, your business can reduce these costs by taking a more agile, tech-first approach that doesn't require staff to travel or take full days off for external training. This allows employee learning to sit neatly alongside normal work, rather than in opposition to it.

It's also why many organisations are now investing in eLearning as a way to cater to the needs of hybrid and remote workers. Being able to access aspects of induction, compliance and development training from any location is a great way to optimise training processes and get staff up to speed much faster than before.

## Our expert says...

“Beyond the clear cost and time savings, eLearning makes it far easier for staff to refresh specific areas of knowledge as and when needed. Different formats and styles of content such as virtual classrooms, video walkthroughs, and bitesize courses are available to suit a wide range of learning needs. An intuitive eLearning system with diagnostic assessments also ensures that employees don't keep repeating the same training again and again – so they can instead focus on developing other, more valuable skills.”

Jess Gillett, Product Manager The Access Group





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## Getting buy-in from senior leaders


Return on investment is one of the biggest hurdles for learning managers looking to deliver efficiencies in their business. Data insights that have a clear route back to core objectives are a great asset to have on your side when justifying ideas to senior executives, particularly when budgets are tight and clear value is needed.

Here's a summary of key takeaways to share:




### Reduce staff turnover

Lack of personal development opportunities is the biggest reason why staff quit their jobs in 2022. The average cost of replacing an employee is £3,000, and that's a very conservative estimate.



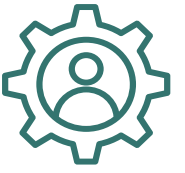
### Manage compliance and risks

Effective risk-based training is the number one factor in preventing regulator fines and reputational damage. Cybersecurity training alone reduces the risk of breaches by 77%, saving businesses an average of £5,600 per year.



### Reap the benefits of eLearning

The right LMS can save internal time and resources, and reduce training costs between 25-40% compared to traditional forms of training. You can also ensure employees avoid re-learning skills and information they already know.



### Cut down L&D admin

L&D teams can save a large portion of their time and resources by replacing manual admin processes with slick automated systems that do all the heavy lifting for them. This frees them up to focus on the bigger picture of learning and development.





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### Boost engagement and staff satisfaction

Learning journeys tailored to employee needs and interests lead to stronger engagement among staff – and companies in the top percentile of engagement see an average of 21% higher profits.



### Safeguard mental health

For every £1 spent by employers on mental health interventions, employers receive £5.30 back in cost savings related to absence, presenteeism and staff turnover.



### Optimise onboarding

By investing in a system that facilitates quick, efficient inductions and initial training from any location, businesses can increase their time-to-competence and achieve much greater agility in their onboarding process.



### Develop soft skills

Developing soft skills across your workforce can deliver as much as 250% ROI over an 8-12 month period.





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# Time to maximise your learning ROI?

The role of L&D is evolving quickly, and the state of the labour market means businesses are becoming more reliant on the development of their current staff.

Now more than ever, your L&D team has a huge opportunity to create value and cement a central role in the future of your business. Doing more with less is at the forefront of almost every growth strategy right now; but that's only possible when you have the right tools at your fingertips.

Ultimately, it's the decisions made now that will determine whether organisations can navigate the uncertainty ahead and continue thriving, even in adverse conditions. Is your business up to the challenge?

## We're here to help!

Our industry leading learning environment can underpin your learning culture and ensure you deliver maximum ROI across all aspects of managed, personalised and self-directed learning.

Feel free to get in touch with our friendly team to discuss your situation, book a live demo and start putting plans together to take your L&D strategy to the next level.

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“ Understanding and measuring the ROI of learning and development initiatives is crucial for businesses to drive real results, increase revenue, and improve profitability. To achieve this, it is essential to tie L&D strategies to clear business objectives and execute them strategically with measurable outcomes. ”

Christian Foerg, The Access Group





## About the Access Group

The Access Group is one of the largest UK-headquartered providers of business management software to small and mid-sized organisations in the UK, Ireland and Asia Pacific.

It helps more than 75,000 customers across commercial and non-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud solutions transform the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more of what's important to them. Founded in 1991, The Access Group employs approximately 6,300 people.

[www.theaccessgroup.com](http://www.theaccessgroup.com)

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