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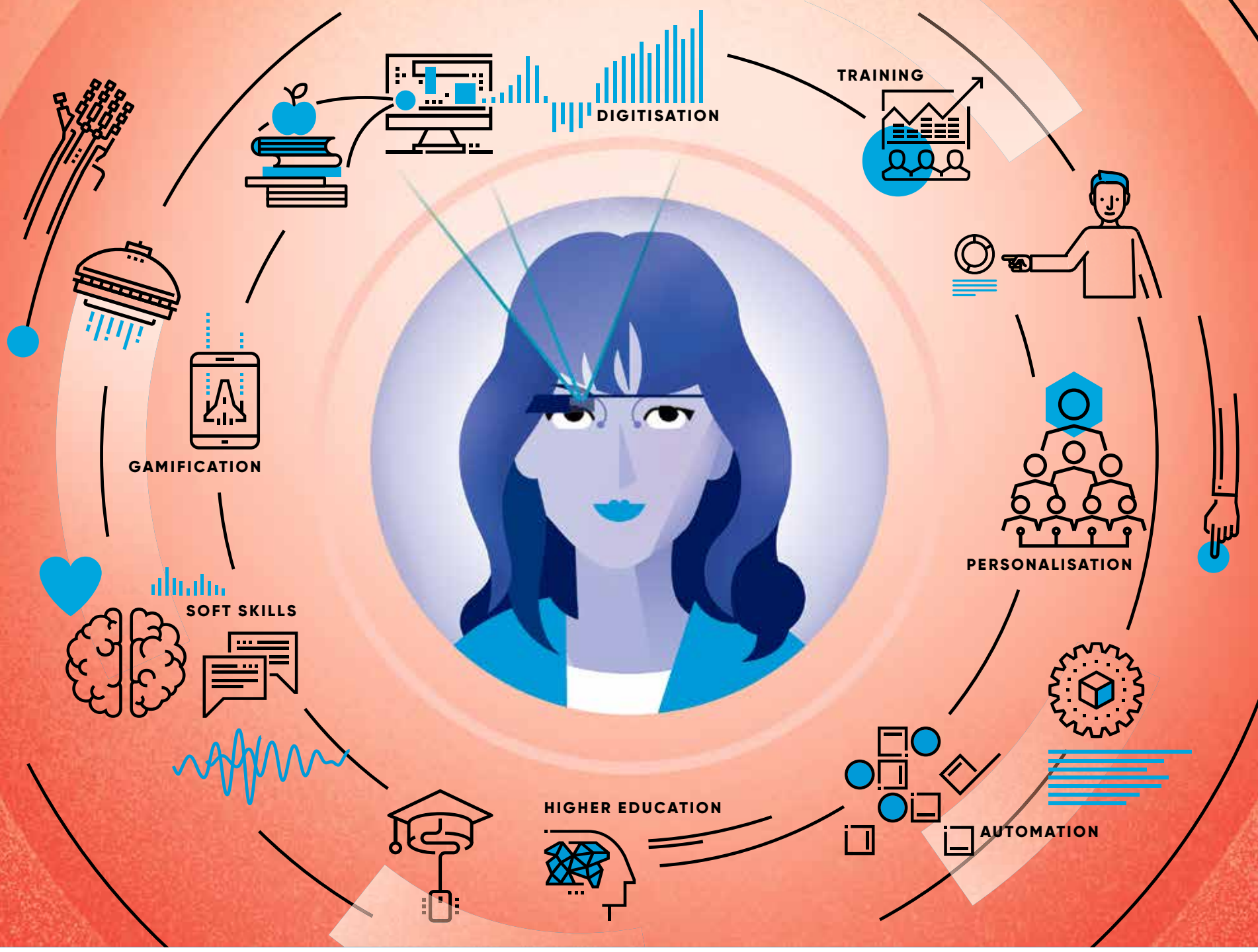

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OVERVIEW

Combat the skills crisis with lifelong learning

A shift in attitude from having a job for life to continuous learning in work can keep the UK workforce relevant and as agile as the changing marketplace

NICK MARTINDALE

The UK is in the middle of a skills crisis, with sectors ranging from engineering to hospitality and accounting to customer services, all reporting difficulty in attracting suitable staff, according to a recent survey by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

Against this backdrop, training and development has become more important than ever, both in developing the skills organisations require now or in the future, and in attracting and retaining talent. Research by recruitment firm Hays found 39 per cent of employees would be willing to sacrifice a job offer if there was no prospect of receiving further training, while 78 per cent described themselves as "ambitious".

With the skills businesses require also changing – the World Economic Forum estimates 65 per cent of children today will end up in careers that don't even exist yet – it's also clear organisations need to update their approach to learning and development.

"Individuals and companies that succeed in the future will be those who adopt the philosophy of lifelong learning," says Nigel Heap, managing director of Hays UK and Ireland. "Businesses that facilitate the resources, tools and time to support learning will not only have employees who are more engaged, but their business will be better placed to face challenges and remain innovative."

Having senior leaders and managers back the concept is essential, says John Yates, group director at ILM, a City & Guilds Group business, and director of New Ventures. "At a very basic level, leaders are instrumental to rewarding and recognising efforts made to upskill, and they also need to develop their own skills and be seen to be doing so," he says. "As a strategic priority, it must also be led from the very top and resourced accordingly."

There are organisations attempting to develop such a culture, says Dr Simon Hayward, founder of leadership consultancy Cirrus and author of *Connected Leadership*, citing LEGO, Inditex and 3M as examples. "But they are too often the exception. The norm is for learning to be seen as separate to the day job, as something that is needed to get promoted or address performance issues."

A continuous learning culture needs to be at the heart of an organisation rather than seen as an add-on, agrees Keely Woodley, partner and lead of Grant Thornton's human capital practice. "John Lewis, for example, has a role dedicated to identifying and upskilling employees whose roles are likely to become obsolete in the future," she says. Job rotations or short-term secondments can help give people exposure to new roles, she adds, while the apprenticeship levy can also help businesses extend training to all members of staff.

Klaus Vedfelt/Getty Images

Sustainable energy firm InnoEnergy is another organisation that is looking to develop a culture of ongoing learning and development, including appointing Frank Gielen as its dedicated education director last year. "The format and content of our education programmes is driven by market research and the trends our thematic field leaders are observing across Europe," he says. "Once we identify a long-term trend and understand the business needs, it's our job to plan a programme around it."

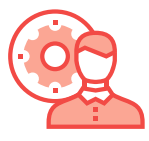
In addition to such internal initiatives, businesses are also starting to build closer links with schools and universities. "These partnerships could take many different shapes, from engaging in skills training days at local educational establishments to offering work experience opportunities to students during school holidays," says Chris Moore, president of group operations at the Adecco Group UK and Ireland. Such initiatives offer the potential to build up skills in future employees, he adds, especially softer skills which are so often found lacking by employers.

65%
of children entering primary school today will end up in careers that don't exist yet

World Economic Forum

39%
of UK employees would sacrifice a job offer if there was no prospect of receiving further training

Hays



37%
currently receive paid-for professional development

Hays

These initiatives can also ensure schools teach the topics that are required by businesses, such as digital skills and cyber security. "Policymakers, the private sector, educational institutions and parents have a big role to play in encouraging learning opportunities among the next generation," says Regina Moran, a vice president, and head of industry consulting and software solutions at Fujitsu.

"That's why the news that the government will be launching new Tech levels, highlighting just how high technology now is on the national agenda, was welcome. It is no longer a nice to have; technology is absolutely core to the future of the UK economy, particularly as we move into the age of the internet of things and smart cities."

Working with universities can also help businesses develop courses that will equip their staff with the skills they require in the future and universities themselves are beginning to see the potential of such tie-ups. Teesside University, for instance, is launching its Centre for Professional and Executive Development, designed to help firms cultivate a culture of lifelong learning.

"It will support organisational development, collectively and individually, and is there to disrupt mindsets, challenge thinking and support innovation," says Professor Jane Turner, pro vice chancellor for enterprise and business engagement. "Universities are perfectly positioned to help organisations access and develop new talent, new ways of working, leading-edge research and product development."

Using newer learning methods alongside more traditional elements can assist in developing a culture of lifelong learning, enabling employers and employees alike to access training as and when it is required.

"Through digital platforms, employers can ensure that their employees reach a certain level of knowledge and then employees might undertake face-to-face training to hone skills or ask practical questions," says Stephen Somerville, director of business development at FutureLearn. His organisation has recently teamed up with Coventry University to make 50 degrees available through its online learning platform over the next five years, which can be accessed on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Yet for any continuous-learning initiative to succeed, it's essential that employees buy into the concept, rather than seeing training as something that is done to them.

EDUCATION

Chris Quigley/MakerClub

MakerClub takes after-school sessions to teach children aged nine to fourteen to build robots, use 3D printers and learn to code

More firms must get involved with schools

Businesses should link with schools and colleges to provide work experience and ensure they get the employees industry needs

JON CARD

A huge digital skills crisis is hanging over the UK. The global economy is rapidly evolving, creating new industries and job roles while decimating others. But this transition is creating a big demand for staff with the right skills and aptitudes to succeed in the modern workplace.

Employers want more from schools and colleges. In particular, they want employees with a combination of digital skills, business acumen and creativity. However, there is concern that educators are not up to the task. A recent report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee found evidence that schools are struggling to boost digital skills and develop talent for the future.

The report found that just 35 per cent of ICT teachers have a relevant qualification and that 22 per cent of IT equipment in schools is ineffective. It also quoted comments from a 2013 Ofsted report which found that "poor teacher capability and lack of resources" were undermining the ICT curriculum.

Furthermore, only a quarter of teachers "felt confident delivering the curriculum". The report concluded that there was a need for greater involvement from industry in the training of young people and government needed to make it easier for businesses to get involved.

In 2015, the government set up the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), which aims to boost interaction between schools and businesses, and is now active in half of all secondary schools in England. It funds a wide variety of local initiatives and the Founders4Schools project, a national scheme in which entrepreneurs from fast-growth businesses deliver talks and run workshops with young people.

Claudia Harris, CEC chief executive, says such schemes are transformative. "They are high impact," she says. "It's obvious when you see how these activities work that they really motivate and inspire young people. As soon as young people had been exposed to these kinds of businesses, they wanted more information on creating apps and wanted to set up lunchtime clubs," she says.

According to Ms Harris, research shows children are far less likely to become NEETs (not in education, employment or training) if they have at least four encounters with the world of work before leaving school. This can include work experience, CV building or the workshops already mentioned. For children at risk of falling out of education, the CEC finds mentors, many of whom come from the world of work, and it has funded 15,000 placements since its inception.

Ms Harris says connections between workplaces and schools are essential. "Young people need networks and exposure because without that it's hard for them to understand the world they are about to enter," she says.

Parents are certainly keen for their kids to become tech savvy. There's been a boom in extra-curricular tech and coding clubs. Among them is MakerClub, set up in 2014 by Simon Riley and Declan Cassidy, which teaches children aged nine to fourteen to build robots, use 3D printers and learn to code. The business provides courses for 700 children a week in cities including Brighton, London and Birmingham.

Mr Cassidy says MakerClub's approach to learning and technology is in stark contrast to schools. "In order to invent things, you need a range of skills. So rather than learning art, physics and maths, they need to be brought together, so the contexts can be understood," he says.

MakerClub hires former teachers to run its sessions and Mr Cassidy says they appreciate the company's approach. "A lot are quite disgruntled by the current state of UK schooling. There are a lot of teachers who want to do something else. They still want to teach, but they want to do it in a way that doesn't have all the tests and focus on academia."

> Schools are struggling to boost digital skills and develop talent for the future

But private-sector involvement leads to issues of provision. MakerClub found its intake was increasingly youngsters from richer backgrounds. In an attempt to mitigate this, the company set up the BrightSparks programme, in which schools select children from poorer backgrounds to learn about technology for a year on a MakerClub course, along with being provided with a free laptop.

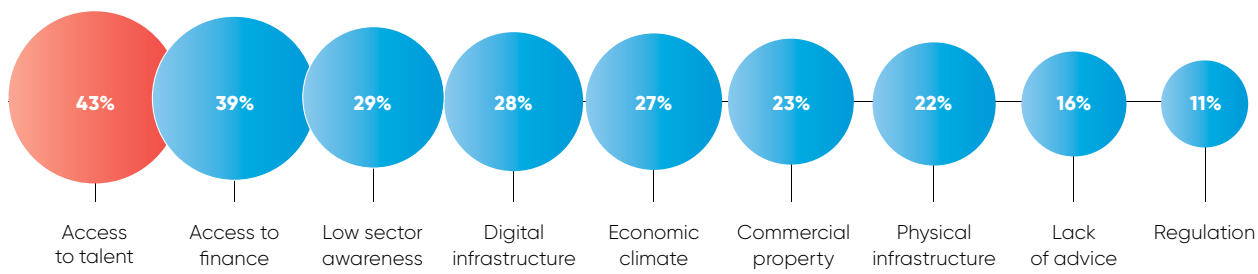
However, the funding comes from the private sector. "There are a lot of cash-rich tech businesses that want to do something good. Through BrightSparks, they can sponsor a child to learn, explore and learn more digital skills," says Mr Cassidy.

Human resources directors are also encouraging more collaboration between employers and schools. Barry Hoffman, group HR director at IT services company Computacenter, says helping pupils to develop business skills is a key challenge. "The average student is a digital native by nature," he says. "What is difficult, however, is employability – confidence, interview techniques – and improving their overall understanding of the business environment."

Mr Hoffman says the tech industry has to do far more to attract female staff, who currently represent a small minority in the industry. He says: "It is simply absurd to disregard such a large source of talent, innovation and passion that can contribute to the technology sector."

TOP GROWTH CHALLENGES FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY BUSINESSES

FINDING PROSPECTS WITH THE RIGHT DIGITAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE TOPS THE LIST



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OPINION COLUMN

'How can schools use data and artificial intelligence to broaden education and break down barriers for pupils?'

FERGAL KILROY
Head of content
Bett

To paraphrase former US secretary of education Richard Riley, we are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't yet been invented to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.

It's quite a challenge, and one that is facing governments and institutions across the globe as they try to meet the United Nations' goal of inclusive and quality education for all. It's clear that to meet this challenge there is a need to explore new approaches to education. At Bett, one of the many themes explored by leading educators is the opportunities presented by education technology or edtech.

New education approaches will be driven by innovative practice, but be supported with relevant technology. They will be required to operate at both an infrastructure and pedagogical level to ensure learners everywhere have the best opportunities. Along the way, their personal data will need to be secured, maintained and transferred safely as they move through an education system and even on into the workplace. The issues range from the basic technology requirements – all schools need fast, stable internet access to unlock their potential – to more complex questions about privacy, big data and even breaking down social and cultural stereotypes.

With widespread internet access in the UK, pupil privacy and online safety is a hot topic. Schools are aware of how exposed data can be online and it's why many of them shy away from the environment. The imminent General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will introduce a new role of data protection officer to many schools. In the short term, this is likely to come as an added responsibility to staff, many of whom will not be fully prepared. But those schools that encourage data management expertise will be able to use and interpret their data to understand learning trends better, and enable them to address social challenges.

Bett has partnered with Kidzania and Havas to explore the career roleplay options selected by 60,000 children at the attraction. The results showed girls were 2,000 per cent more likely to choose a gender stereotypical role. They typically chose an option that was below their age and skill level. Schools sit on rapidly growing data sets; correct use of them has the potential to shape government responses and school-level application of innovation to break down the invisible barriers that are holding children back.

With growing numbers of children in education, the rise of adaptive learning, powered by artificial intelligence, will become increasingly important. Having access to systems that enable teachers to compile lessons at scale, and which run at the pace of each student account for personal growth and provide detailed analytics to show not just results but the effort being input by the students, will be transformative. It will free up teachers' time to focus on one-to-one sessions with those who are struggling and accurately track progress. In time it could allow employers to see how new employees like to learn and create learning environments that meet the UN's global goal for education.

Today's eight year olds, the alpha generation, are well versed in digital content consumption and creation, drawing on tablets and mobile devices, making videos, taking pictures and gaming. Edtech is second nature to them. But, through the growth in the children's book market, we can also see they still love the physical act of turning paper pages. What's clear is they expect to see all these approaches within their learning environments and, more importantly, they expect to continue to create in those formats as they progress.

The most forward-looking schools have embraced flipped, project-based and problem-solving learning approaches as part of their teaching and have a one-device-per-person policy. They are teaching coding, robotics and other STEAM-related activities [science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics] to foster a passion in both boys and girls. They are meeting the needs of the emerging technologies and those jobs that haven't yet been invented.

COMMERCIAL FEATURE

New levy, new opportunity – but organisations need a strategy too

There is little doubt that when the apprenticeship levy was introduced earlier this year, the learning landscape underwent a major change

It's no secret that organisations have long been battling skills shortages and seeking much better standards of on-the-job learning, but have also needed greater confidence about the return on investment of the learning programmes. The apprenticeship levy is an attempt to solve all these issues.

As the apprenticeship levy is paid by every business with an annual payroll size of £3 million or more, its aim is to bring genuine universality to learning. No matter what their industry or where they are based in the UK, organisations will now be encouraged to use or lose their levy to pay for the development of talent in sectors and regions not previously used to such investment. By reviving the relevance and content of apprenticeships, the hope is that a transformation will follow in how employers view learning.

But having the levy is only one half of the equation. For most levy-paying organisations, having apprentices will be a much greater undertaking, requiring the need for businesses to have a whole new learning and development strategy. No longer will having apprentices be purely a job creation function as now organisations will need to look at how apprenticeships fit into their overall talent management strategy.

At Knowledgepool we've already noticed there has been a drop in new apprentice starts since May, arguably a reflection of the fact organisations are still working out how to broaden the conversation about how they manage a much larger training programme.

However, we're at a key moment in time to ensure organisations don't waste the opportunity that being a levy-paying company gives them. Developing a learning strategy will not be an easy task, but it's vital organisations have one in place to ensure the management of their learning is aligned to organisational goals, and to ensure it addresses current or future skills shortages which, if tackled strategically, will unlock productivity.

Managing this new learning landscape requires organisations to audit their short, mid and long-term skills needs properly. As apprenticeship content moves away from the previous frameworks system to employer-created standards, so the delivery of apprenticeship learning needs to be evermore relevant to organisations.

It's welcoming, however, to see that the levy has encouraged learning partners to up their game, to be more aligned to organisations' learning outcomes and to make sure organisations embark on a well thought out learning journey. Employers, quite rightly, demand that their providers are innovative and are able to adapt.

Knowledgepool is working hard in all these areas, precisely to ensure organisations are using their levy in the most efficient way, to ensure their learning strategy is created in true partnership. This has included reorganising our business to ensure our apprentice delivery and learning management services are now one and the same, and investing in a new apprenticeship platform that improves the learner's experience by giving apprentices the ability to talk to each other online and share their peer-to-peer experiences.

In addition, Knowledgepool is reaching out to universities and business schools, to find precisely the right people to deliver and create the level of content organisations now want and expect.

It's important this change happened. So much of learning, especially apprenticeship learning, used to be predicated on evidencing learning. Now, as in many areas of learning, the emphasis is moving much more towards the experience of learning. With the new approach we take, and by making the process of learning more enjoyable and more effective, the apprenticeship-learning path is something more employers will want to embrace.

Learning really is reaching an important crossroads. Old perceptions about apprenticeships are changing. Evidence reveals more top talent is choosing to go down the apprenticeship route, the earn and learn option where apprentices have a real job, either at the start of their career or midway through it. Employers who embrace the levy will have a new-found ability to shape and develop their workforce in a way they can control.

The one thing we know for certain is that the best strategies are those created in partnership. Employers need help, but there is a collective desire from learning providers that wants them to meet their learning challenges. The levy is a great new opportunity for both employees and their employers alike to boost learner outcomes for the benefit of all.

Visit us on stand D150 at the World of Learning Exhibition, October 17-18 2017, Birmingham NEC
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COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Q&A: The answer to Learning Made Easy

Rory Cameron, executive vice president at Litmos, shares an insight into how the US-based company is disrupting the corporate learning space

RORY CAMERON
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
LITMOS

Litmos has seemingly come out of nowhere to become a widely recognisable brand in the learning space. How?
While Litmos is only a five-year-old business, we are a division of CallidusCloud, a publicly traded technology company valued at $1.5 billion that has successfully developed an array of products which optimise businesses across sales, marketing, customer success and learning. Firstly, we have fantastically loyal customers and, equally importantly, I feel that I am surrounded by the most talented team in the learning industry. Unlike a lot of learning vendors that approached the space from an angle of theory, we came at it from an angle of practice, showing return on investment and technology first. Through this we became the first mobile learning management system (LMS) that is simple to use by anyone on any device and that can integrate with nearly any other solution.

A big theme for you is learner experience. Explain why?
Learning should be embedded into the business workflow and not an old-school, horrible portal that employees are summoned to use once a year.

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customer satisfaction

4m+
users taught

Deployed in more than
130
different countries

You acquired Learning Heroes out of Warrington here in the UK. What was your thought process behind that decision?
While we had a library of more than 700 courses before the acquisition, quite frankly the Learning Heroes content is the best I have ever seen and our joint customers absolutely raved about it. We felt we had to have it as part of our business because today's customers demand not just a powerful learning platform, but also the engaging, story-based content that helps make the learning programme successful. And who would not want to acquire the tagline Saving the World from Boring Learning?

Learning Heroes has a large following in the UK. What is its future?
It has an incredible future ahead of it and is pivotal to our strategy, although under a different name, now Litmos Heroes. We have doubled the team in the past three months and are putting our global production group into Warrington, where there is a huge amount of media and creative talent from the universities at Liverpool and Manchester. Our mission is to create the iTunes of learning with the subscription model of Netflix and continue to add value to our customers. In fact, our plan is to add another 500 courses to the current customers' subscriptions in the next 12 months.

> We are creating the iTunes of learning with the simplicity of the Netflix subscription model, earning the customer's business every month and every year

What is your perspective on the learning market in the US compared with the UK?
Having been a Londoner for more than seven years before moving to the States, I have a pretty good perspective on this. Interestingly, I believe the UK is further ahead in talent development than the US. There is more value applied per employee and a lot more focus on behavioural change from learning rather than ticking the "training box". There is massive excitement in the States for our artificial intelligence technology, but I am not sure that the whole concept of AI has reached the same fever pitch quite yet. From an operational perspective, we are seeing some of the same trends as in the States of decentralised LMS and content purchases at a business-unit level versus a central learning and development department.

Would you elaborate more on purchases made at a business-unit level?
Learning and training programmes have had to become a lot more agile. For example, they're deployed sometimes on a whim to fix a compliance gap, deployed to customers to reduce support tickets and expenses, deployed in a week to roll out to a new contracting group or deployed in a day to educate the field on a new product. In addition, fewer than 70 per cent of corporate LMS platforms have working mobile functionality.

Who are your customers and what uses does Litmos have?
We are very lucky to have such great customers using the platform across a wide variety of use-cases from employee development to IT security. We're also seeing a big surge in customer education. To name names, our customers include HP, Skyscanner, Zoopla, UFC and Mercedes.

Your new slogan is Learning Made Easy. What does this mean for you?
Based on feedback from our customer surveys, one of the common themes was that we made it easy for them and their learners. This stuck with us. The concept of easy is not just one dimensional, meaning just that it's an easy product to use. It's much more than that. It means that it's easy to deploy off-the-shelf courses in seconds; it's easy to integrate; it's easy for the learner; it's easy to get support on the phone; it's easy to do business with Litmos. This concept really encapsulates the culture of our business. Just because something is easy does not mean that it's not exceptionally powerful. For example, it was easy for me to get an Uber to pick me up today, but the network and engineering is exceptionally powerful to deliver it. Speaking of easy, here in the UK we had a FTSE 100 company that needed to deploy compliance training rapidly to more than 11,000 sites. They called us on Monday, signed the contract on Friday and were live in every location the next Wednesday. That's what I call Learning Made Easy.

For more information please visit www.calliduscloud.com

LEARNING

Masters of our own learning universe

New ways of learning, owing much to digital technology and scientific research, are empowering students and business trainees

Ariel Skelley/Getty Images

NICK EASEN

It's strange to think that the future of learning lies with Netflix or Spotify. But those educating the next generation are now taking cues from a lot more sources beyond the classroom, including the media industry. How we consume content is crucial, as is the value of user-generated content and social collaboration. The sector is increasingly trying to reinvent the way we study.

"The challenge we face is that learning is often not built to fit the learners," says Dr Itiel Dror, a cognitive neuroscientist from University College London. "There is a mismatch between the learning and the learners. Learning must be 'brain friendly', so it's engaging, motivating and effective."

The sector is being forced to step up its game. Since education operates in a world where millennials now check their phones more than 100 times a day, e-learning solutions must compete aggressively with the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Candy Crush, which are just a distracting tap away.

"The use of technology, by itself, does not enhance learning, it depends on how it's utilised. That is a great challenge and we are far from using technology to its full potential," says Dr Dror, a world expert on learning.

The problem lies with most educational systems, globally. Since Victorian times, they've been creating mostly dependent learners. Beyond the classroom, students are like fish out of water, gasping for air. They're reliant on the oxygen of teachers, discipline and schooling to acquire new skills. This isn't necessarily creating self-starters thirsty for knowledge and masters of their own learning.

"Self-directed strategies are increasingly needed because a dependent-learner strategy cannot keep pace with the latest business developments," says Vincent Belliveau, executive vice president of Cornerstone OnDemand.

"Unfortunately, most corporate learning strategies have roots in traditional learning approaches. It is critical that new learning departs from these approaches and we increase self-direction for all employees, especially those who are new to the workforce."

It helps that e-learning solutions geared towards this style of education are now readily available on any device, anytime, anywhere. This enables 24/7 access and flexibility, driving student empowerment.

Mass formats, such as MOOCs, or massive open online courses, are also assisting in this process, as is instant feedback. All these elements are compelling the young and the motivated to educate themselves.

"Learning has certainly become more democratic," explains Armin Hopp, founder and president of Speexx. "It is not limited to an elite group of society that can afford tuition. The democratic value of this development is an essential driver for learner engagement."

A host of learning tools are being used as the technology continues to mature, including personalisation, gamification and micro-learning, which allows students to absorb ideas and lessons in bite-sized information chunks.

There's also artificial intelligence (AI), which is starting to suggest modules and educational material for self-directed learners. "In a way, AI is essential to take personalisation to another level, making it available to all," says Mr Belliveau.

"Virtual-reality technology is now very exciting and is allowing both educational establishments and employers to prepare people in a far more engaging and realistic way than traditional classroom methods."

For example, rail companies are creating virtual scenarios to allow students to undertake engineering activities in a safe environment and help them prepare for the real world.

> Learning must be 'brain friendly', so it's engaging, motivating and effective

A similar approach could eventually find its way into careers advice to assist young people experience different working environments without having to rely on a one-week placement at a single company.

Advancements in cognitive neuroscience – how the brain works – are also critical for learning tools in this field. Using MRI brain-scan technology, we now know that the part of the brain called the hippocampus is where information is first loaded in the learning cycle.

However, it can only hold 20 minutes' worth of knowledge before it begins to overwrite previously assimilated information. This means long continuous learning programmes become ineffective. Therefore, a micro-learning strategy can sometimes offer a quicker way to absorb details.

Yet, often it's not easy to translate neuroscience into practical ways of enhancing learning. "In contrast to popular belief, virtual reality can actually be more effective if it does not mimic the real world perfectly, 100 per cent," says Dr Dror. "It can enhance learning by correctly distorting reality; it makes the learning more brain friendly."

There's now a dizzying number of platforms, methods and ways to self-learn on the market whether it involves mastering a new language or a fresh set of work skills. The sector is incredibly cluttered with exponential growth in some emerging markets.

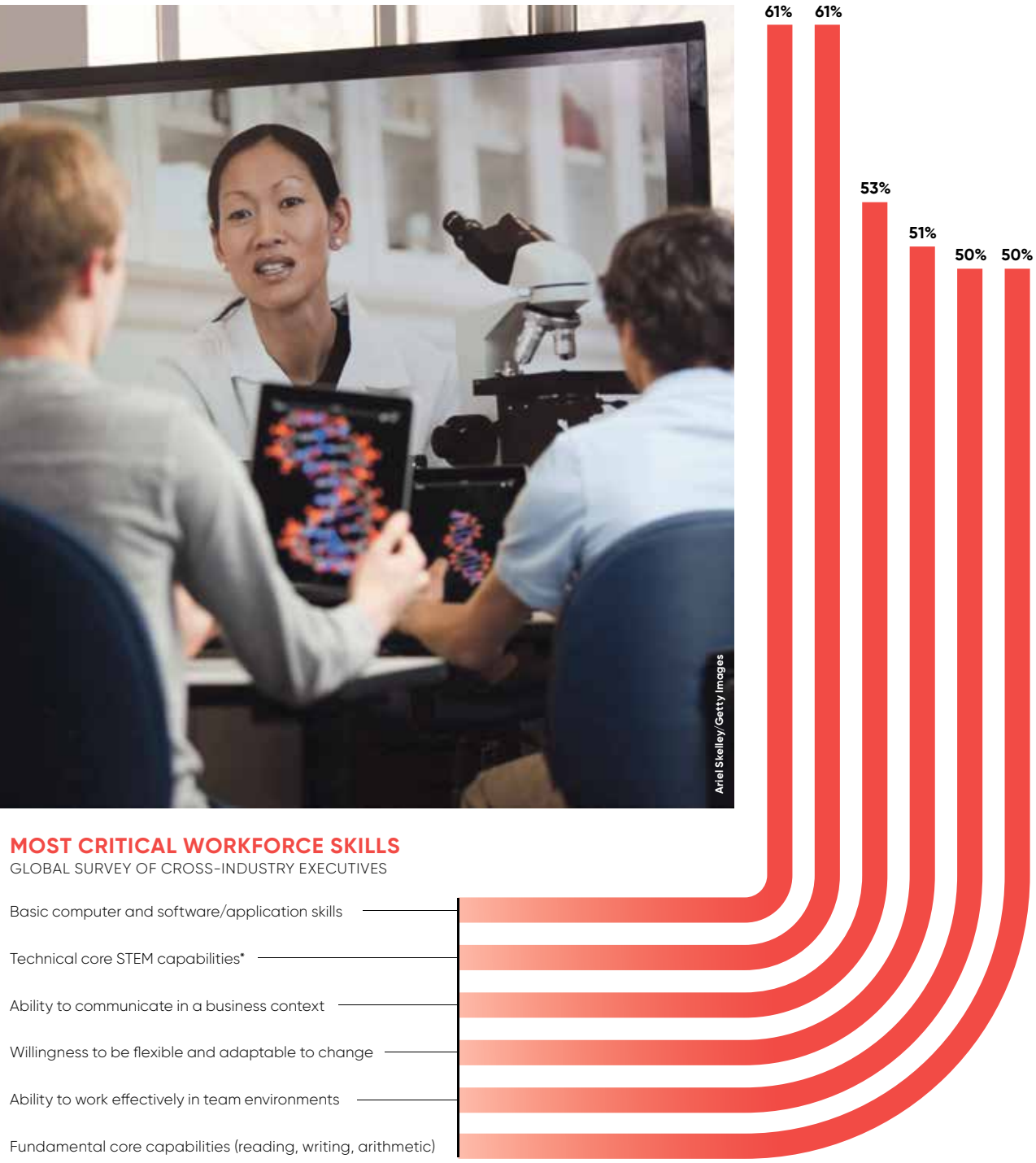
For instance, Chinese edtech startups raised more money than their US peers in 2016, which were already far ahead of Europe. "We expect the digital learning market to consolidate, with a few leaders to emerge in each industry," says Bernhard Niesner, co-founder of busuu. "The end-users will eventually opt for solutions that adapt to their learning needs, are easy to use and result in significant, measurable improvements to learning."

Certainly, companies and academic institutions are welcoming a more individual approach for their students and employees. The industry is also seeing a shift from schools or universities, once the traditional holders of knowledge and power, to the consumer, the worker, the employee.

The true democratisation of education is now in full swing. "If we want to reach a level of greater learning empowerment, we must provide learners with the authority to be able to curate their own content and the resources to facilitate this. It's only then that we will truly find learning empowerment," Mr Belliveau concludes. The tools are all in place. It's only a matter of time.

MOST CRITICAL WORKFORCE SKILLS

GLOBAL SURVEY OF CROSS-INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES



*STEM: science, technology, engineering and mathematics

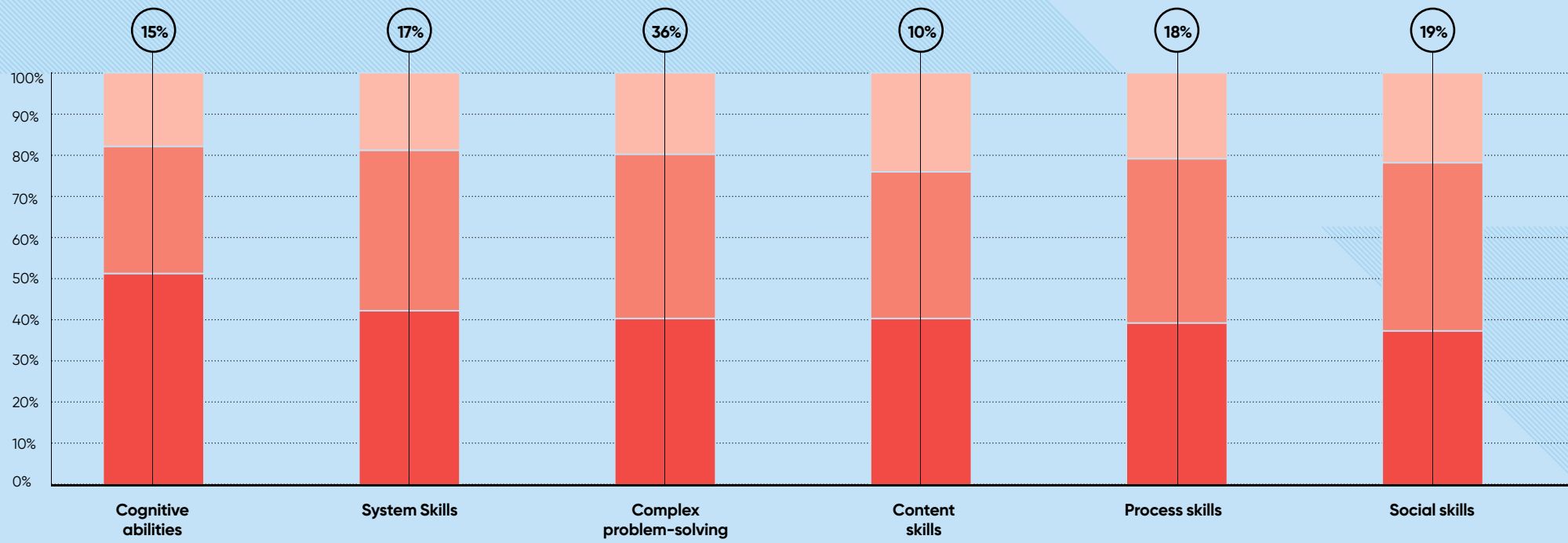
IBM Institute for Business Value//Oxford Economics 2017

SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Debate of the relative benefits of university education and work-based courses, particularly apprenticeships, rages on. But without doubt the UK faces a serious skills gap which must be filled by providing the training and qualifications the economy needs

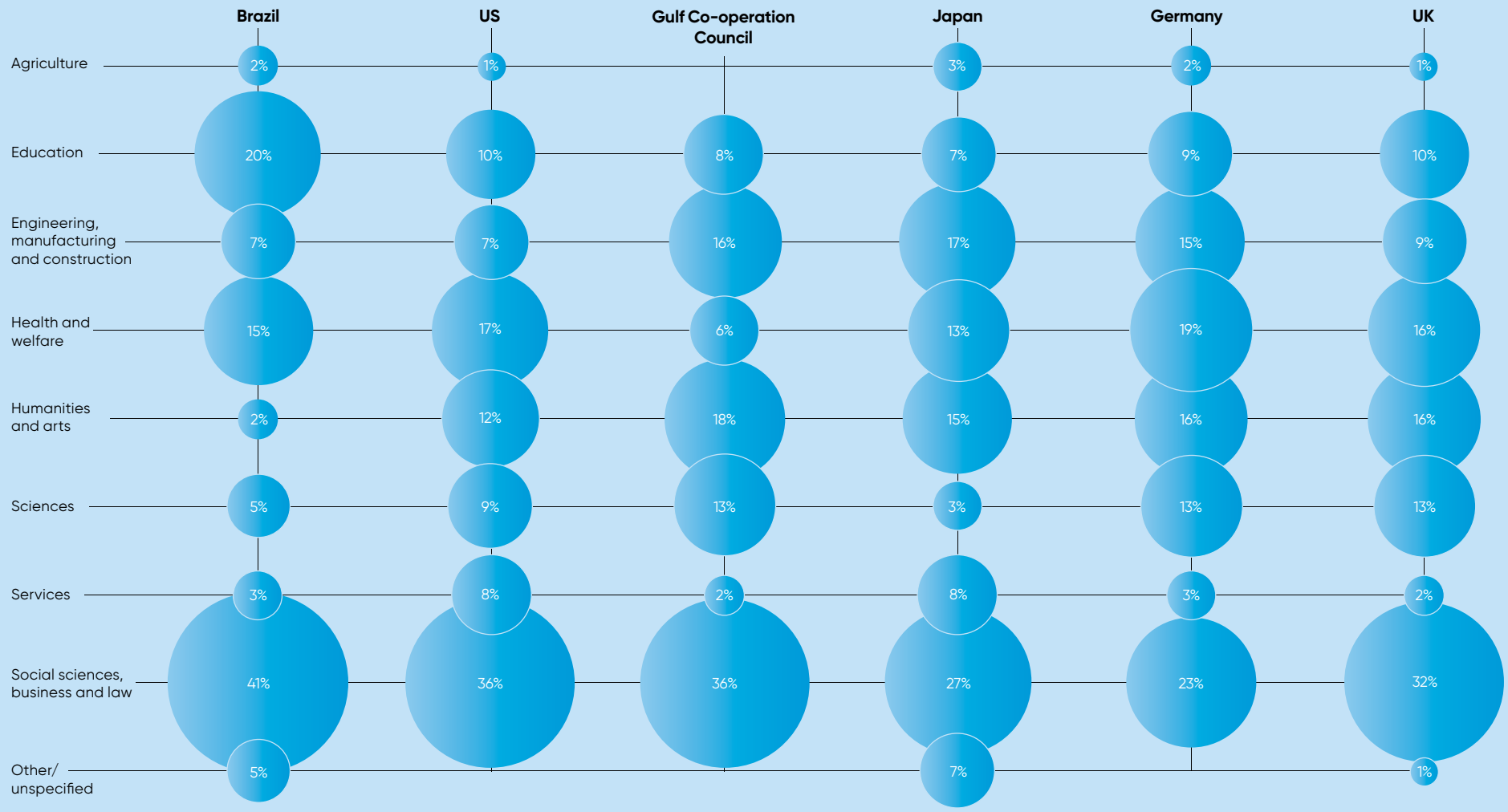
CHANGING DEMAND FOR CORE WORK-RELATED SKILLS, 2015-2020

Share of all jobs requiring the following skills as part of their core skillset



WHAT STUDENTS ARE STUDYING BY SELECTED COUNTRY/REGION

Distribution of recent university graduates by subject



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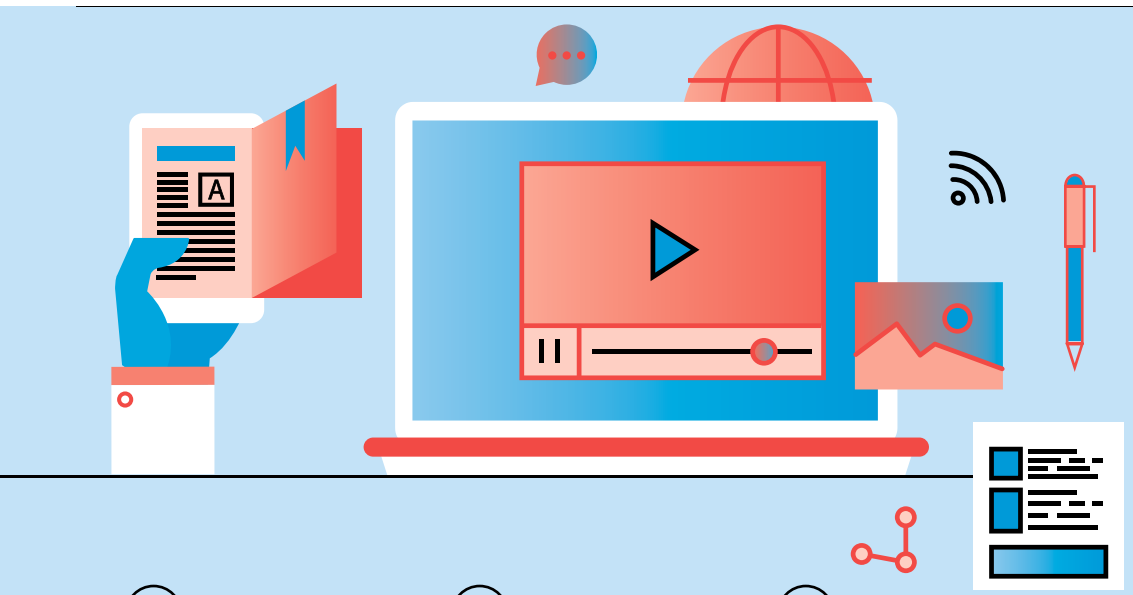

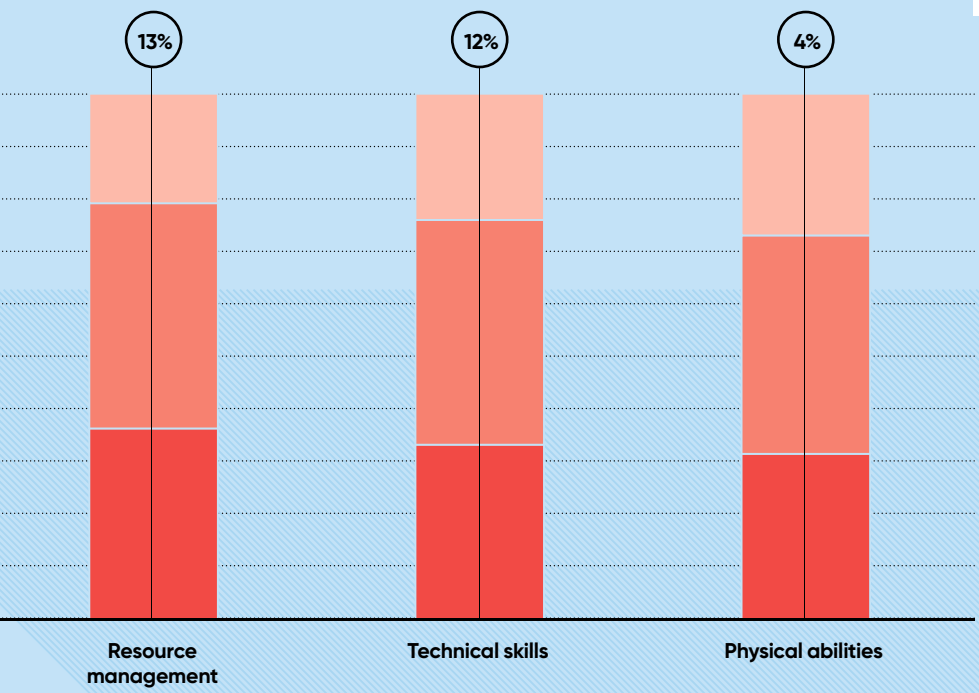

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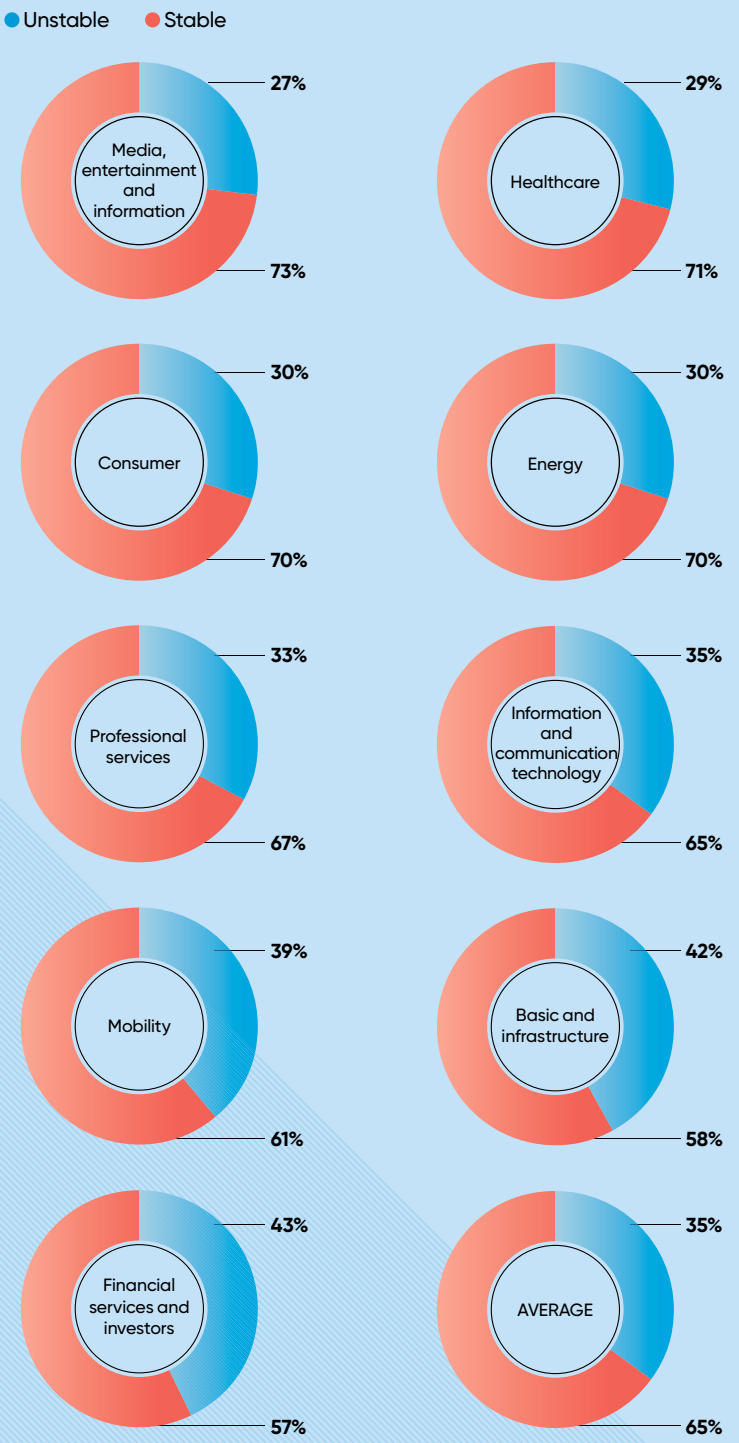
AVAILABILITY OF SKILLS BY INDUSTRY

Percentage of industry reporting stable/unstable workforce



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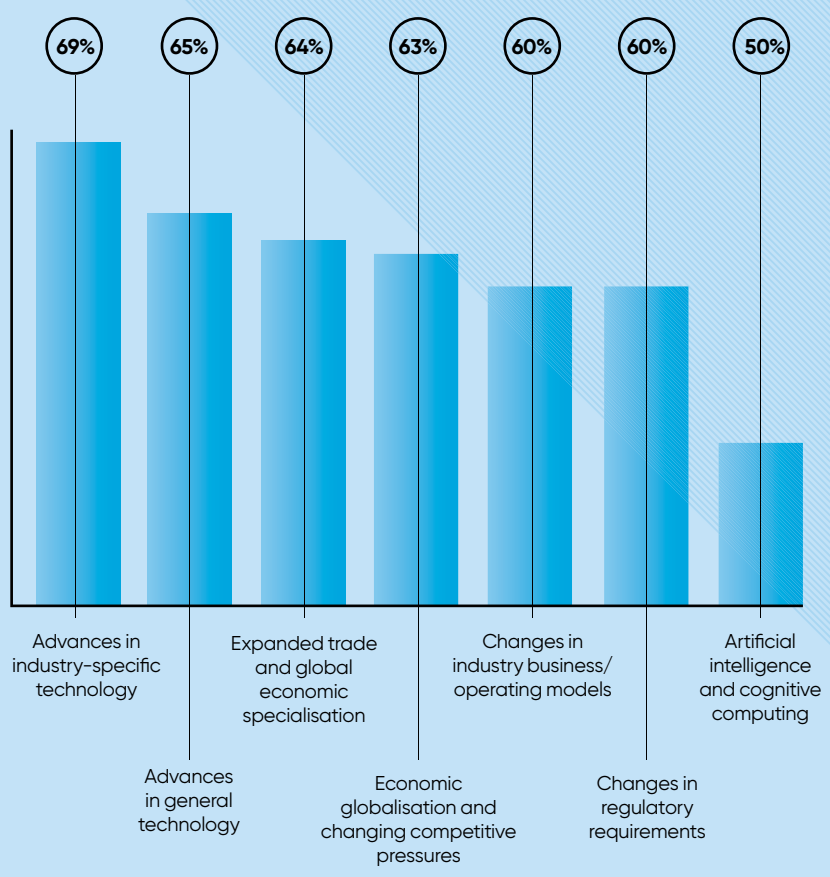
FACTORS IMPACTING SKILLS DEMAND IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Global survey of cross-industry executives



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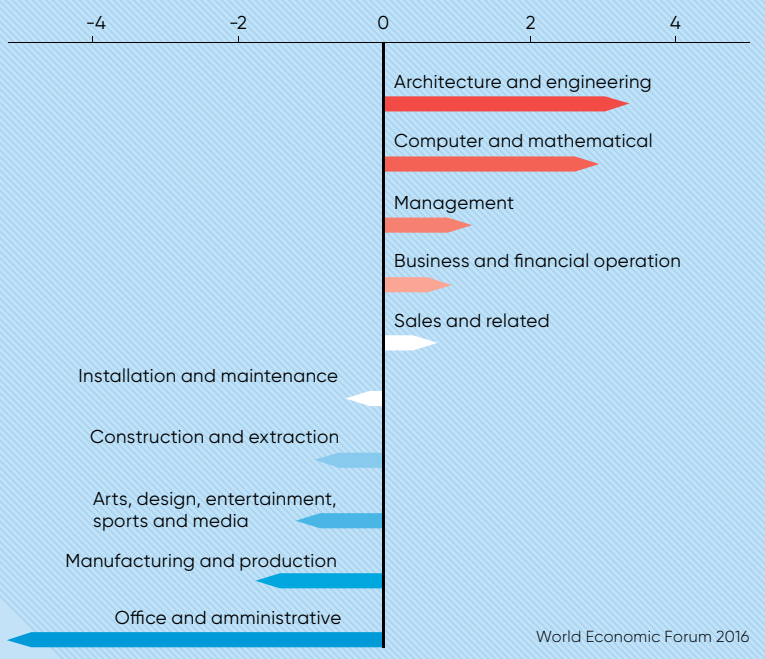
CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT BY JOB SECTOR, 2015-2020

Estimated compound annual growth rate



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E-LEARNING

Internet learning brings

E-learning is building equality and helping economic advancement in developing nations

OLIVER GRIFFIN

Gamified learning apps may be the face of e-learning for smartphone users in rich countries, but that is far from the extent of this powerful new trend. Countries all over the world are making the most of easy-access educational content to bolster the school experience for children who are eager to learn.

Uganda in East Africa is known for its love of tea, national parks and wildlife conservation. It is also a poor country where, according to the World Bank, the average person takes home just $170 a year. The poorest of its citizens live in vast rural areas, where obtaining an education means contending with overflowing classrooms and embattled teachers who cannot rely on the training or equipment that helps their colleagues in more developed nations.

Yet increasingly, whether sponsored by the Ugandan government, NGOs or provided by private businesses, e-learning is starting to break down these barriers.

One startup providing a successful e-learning solution in Uganda is the Walking School Bus, led by founder and chief executive Aaron Friedland. With his team, Mr Friedland has built a literacy app called SiMBi, which helps children in Uganda learn to read by providing them with recordings of students in developed countries reading out loud.

"SiMBi works like this," he explains. "A student [in a developed country] will log on to the app and see a piece of content that they can read. They choose what they want to read, press record and start reading out loud. Later, when a student in Uganda presses play, they hear the voice and read the content simultaneously."

The inspiration for SiMBi, Mr Friedland says, came from a family trip to Uganda during his first year of university. Initially focusing on just getting children to school via his Walking School Bus project, he was dumbfounded at the way distance served as a barrier to chil-

CASE STUDY

AFGHANISTAN

Danita Delimont/Getty Images

It's not just Uganda using e-learning to extend and democratise education for its children. Afghanistan, long troubled by conflict, is also making strides in this field. The Asia Foundation has been using online learning to help level the playing field for students, particularly girls, taking the Kankor, Afghanistan's standardised university entrance exam.

Partnering with UStronics, the Asia Foundation has provided a new online mock examination series that enables students to answer practice exam questions. The programme has more than 7,000 mock exam questions, accompanied by videos that explain complicated problems in maths and science. The application was stored on almost 1,200 tablets and sent to 300 girls' schools across Afghanistan. Now 10,000 girls have access to online preparation for their Kankor exams.

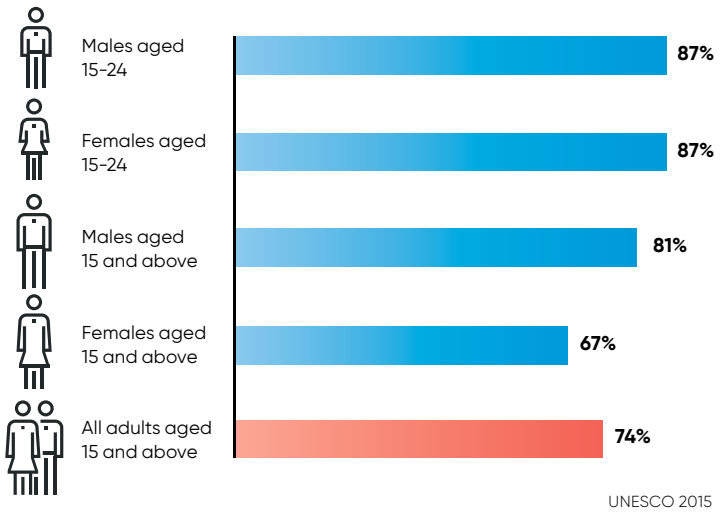
For younger students, the Asia Foundation has also developed an Android mobile app to help improve primary-level reading in Pashto and Dari, Afghanistan's national languages. Currently being trialled by some 3,440 students, this literacy app is taking advantage of the high penetration of smartphones in Afghanistan.

In a country where economic advancement is dependent on a good education, these e-learning projects are an invaluable resource for learning, especially when coaching for exams often takes place after school in private classes. While Afghanistan remains a conservative country where cultural barriers prevent girls and women from attaining a decent education, online coaching for university entrance exams can provide an easier way of practising for exams.

power to the people

Overflowing classrooms are a common problem in some of the most rural areas, where access to education remains a challenge

LITERACY RATES IN UGANDA



UNESCO 2015

dren's education. It wasn't until he got to the schools and sat through a few lessons that he realised where the real challenge lay.

"The classrooms are just not set up in a way to teach properly," he says. "Teachers aren't qualified to teach English, even though it's their national language curriculum. Teachers will clap out sentences for children to repeat; you start to see huge issues in teachers' abilities."

Literacy rates in Uganda are improving, but the country is not close to having a fully literate population. As of 2010, the most recent figures published by children's rights and development agency Unicef, Uganda had a literacy rate of 73 per cent. For young Ugandans, aged between 15 and 24, this increased to 87 per cent. However, in both instances, the literacy rate for girls and women was lower than that of men and boys.

For Fabrice Musoni, an e-learning and international development specialist who has worked with Unicef in Uganda, e-learning is about diminishing the gap between rich and poor by democratising the education experience. Ms Musoni, who is based in Kampala, Uganda's capital, says that the strides made by e-learning are beginning to challenge the way people think about education in African countries.

She says: "If you look at e-learning as democratising education, as providing access to high-quality educational content that children in the UK or in the United States have, especially in science and technology, to a child in a remote area in northern Uganda, or who lives near a refugee centre, e-learning has a massive potential to diminish the gap [between rich and poor] so students in Uganda can have access to quality educational content."

Recently, the government of Uganda provided computers, with dedicated computer labs, to more than 1,000 state schools. Ms Musoni says that previously, without e-learning applications, these computers might have been left to gather dust. Now the trend is becoming more popular throughout the country, it is providing impetus to teachers and students to get to grips with the technology, helping build not just literacy, but also digital skills at the same time.

One challenge facing e-learning, however, is overcoming conservative views and convincing parents that the internet can be a tool for good. "One impact of e-learning," Ms Musoni says, "has been to make people aware that technology is a tool that can be used for good. There is a lot of technophobia. Uganda is a very conservative and very religious country, so there are some subjects which are off limits."

While Ms Musoni acknowledges that connectivity is problematic in parts of the country, the Walking School Bus overcame these problems by using Raspberry Pi micro-computers to build SiMBi classrooms.

Mr Friedland says: "With SiMBi classrooms, we use these micro-computers that have been pre-loaded with 64 gigabytes of educational content. The computers create their own internet servers and broadcast all of this content to all the computers in the classroom. So you've got students in Uganda learning from Khan Academy and all these other amazing resources."

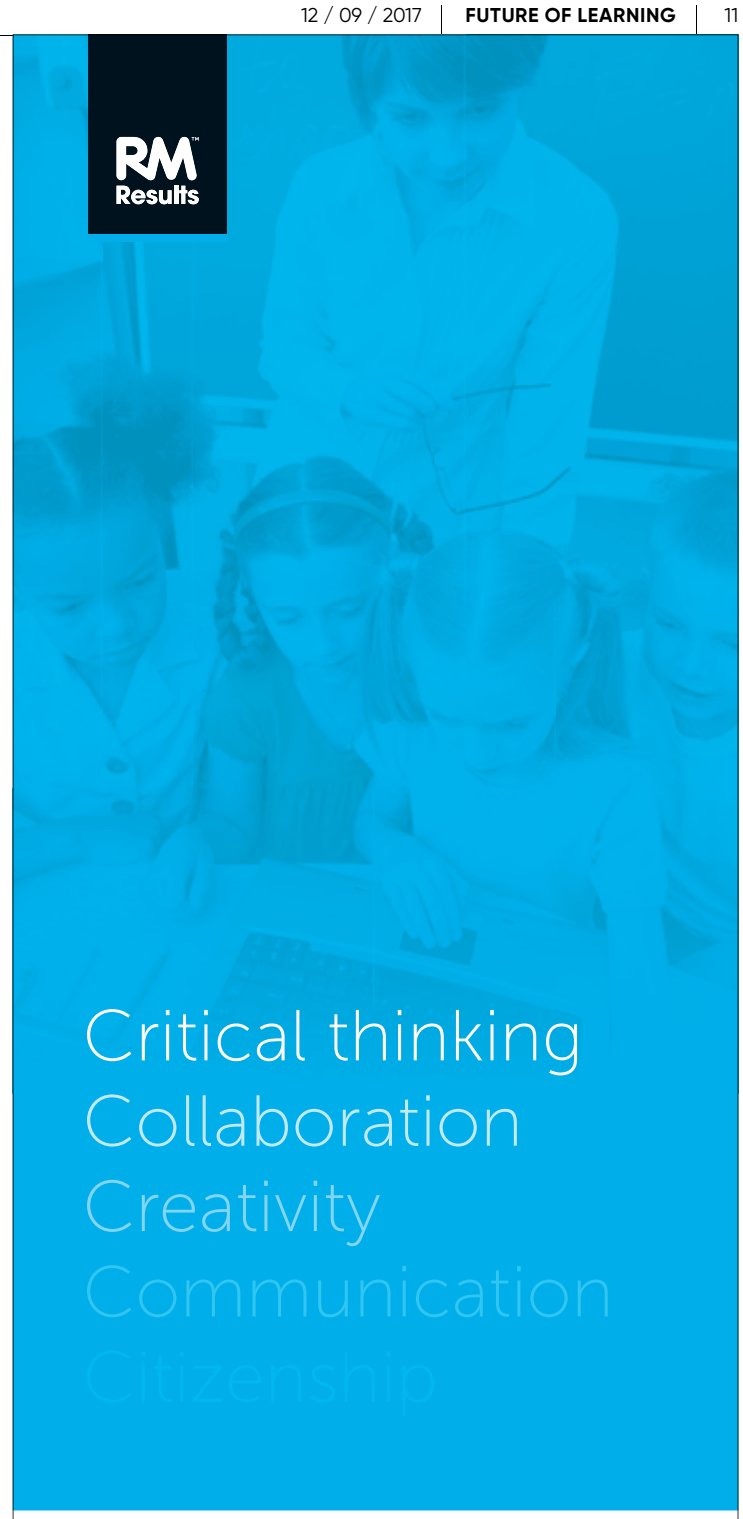
> What we understand is that literacy is the number one for academic success

> E-learning is about diminishing the gap between rich and poor by democratising the education experience

E-learning isn't just helping students, either. A $2-million grant awarded by the Google Foundation to US charity RTI International is helping to provide schools and teachers with training and help in schools across the country. Sarah Pouzevara, a senior education research analyst at RTI International, explains that the tablets give teachers prompts to use lesson plans and boost the effectiveness of class activity.

However, Ms Pouzevara believes that e-learning and education still have quite some way to go before they reach levels seen in other countries. "I think for Uganda it's still pretty far off," she says. "They're lucky to have chairs to sit on, desks to use. If every child gets a book, that's already pretty good. There are huge classes and it starts to become daycare instead of a classroom."

Still, for Mr Friedland, boosting literacy with e-learning represents the greatest possible return on investment. "I don't like to see people doing projects with good intentions, but that aren't particularly well thought out," he says. "With SiMBi, we found that students using our app were becoming significantly better readers. My hope is that we can deploy holistic economic development projects that yield a very high return on investment. What we understand is that literacy is the number one for academic success."



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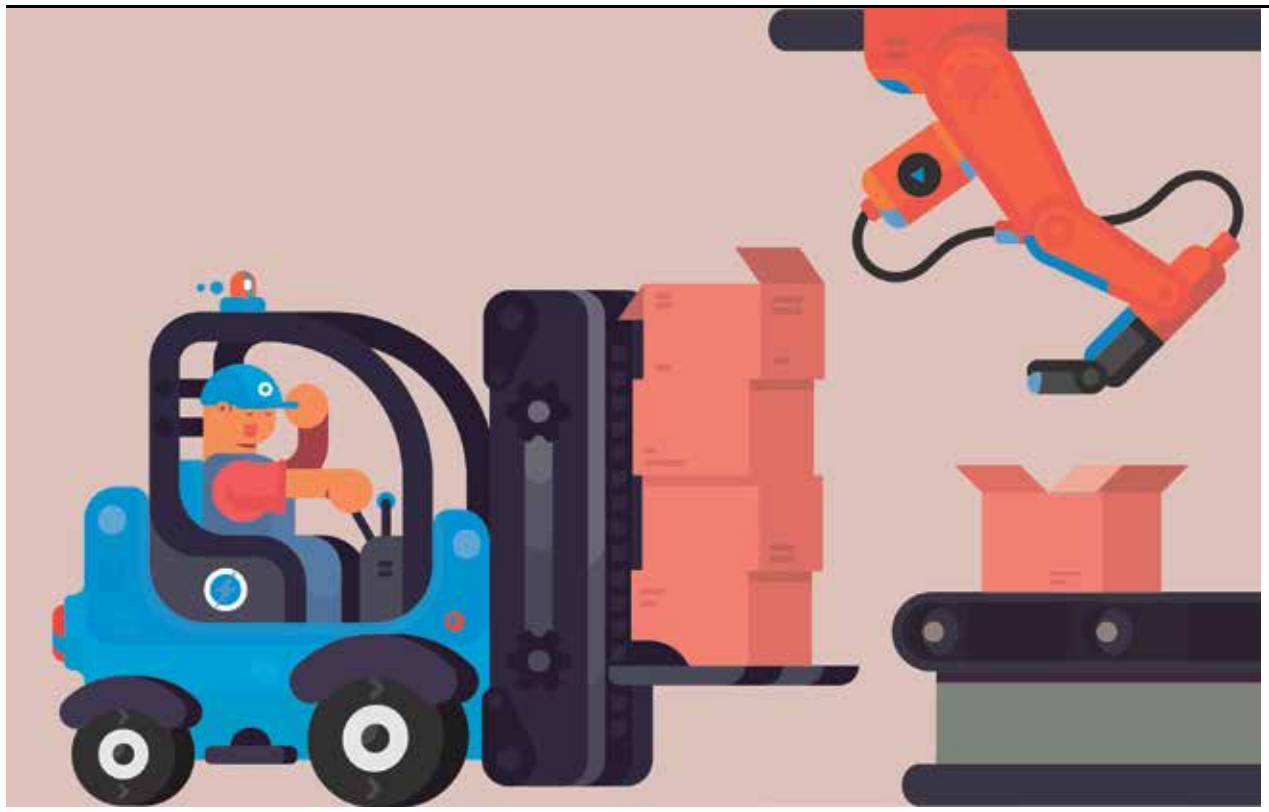


Learning new skills to work with robots

Changes at work involving automation will usher in a transformational period when employees must learn and be supported in how to adapt

CATH EVERETT

Despite widespread concern over potentially heavy job losses, as the adoption of artificial intelligence or AI software continues to advance, it seems there will be winners as well as losers.

For instance, a report by management consultancy Deloitte, entitled *Talent for survival: Essential skills for humans working in the machine age*, reveals that although demand for manual skills may be in decline in an increasingly digital economy, interest in specialist science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) expertise is on the up, and it is in fact 40 per cent more important than physical prowess.

According to the report, so-called cognitive and "soft" or social skills, such as complex problem-solving, interpersonal and communication abilities, are taking on an even more significant role. They are currently more than twice as important as manual skills, not least because they enable individuals to absorb knowledge more quickly, which is vital in today's fast-changing world.

These trends are set to continue. By 2030, the report estimates that STEM expertise will be 8 per cent more important than it is now and will add some 4.5 million new jobs, including teachers and statisticians, to the workforce. Significantly, demand for soft skills will also jump by 5 per cent, creating 8.9 million new positions.

Angus Knowles-Cutler, a senior partner at Deloitte and author of the report, points out that requirements for "structured soft skills" in areas such as psychology, counselling and healthcare are likely to grow most as productivity rises, leading to an overall increase in earnings.

"Simply put, it's about the things that machines can't do and that includes various tasks within jobs, which is where the idea of augmented workers comes in," he says. "So the things that machines do best will be done by machines and they'll help to make humans more productive by freeing up their time to do higher-value work."

But as the world of work begins to transition and jobs start to change over the next five years or so, there will be a significant need for leaders to manage employees through the process and prepare them for the changes that AI will bring to the workplace.

An example of one organisation that has gone through this shift already is GE Aviation. After automating its plant in Bromont, Canada, it became the robotics research centre for 85 of GE Aviation's other plants, replacing many of the lost manual jobs with knowledge-worker positions.

Sir Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology and health at Alliance Manchester Business School, says: "To make the transition successfully, it will be very important for managers to have effective social and interpersonal skills, so things like being aware of people's fears and concerns, listening and engaging them in decision-making, and supporting them in developing new skills."

But, he adds, as all too few managers demonstrate appropriate people skills: "We need to start developing them now, not when AI is rampant."

Managers are not the only ones who need to brush up on their soft skills though. As robots automate more and more routine administration tasks, humans will increasingly need to display not just literacy, numeracy and digital skills, but also what Mr Knowles-Cutler calls the "3Cs" of creativity in problem-solving, collaboration and critical thinking when filtering huge amounts of information, to differentiate themselves from machines.

Euan Davis, European lead at Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work, agrees. In his view, as AI-based automation really starts to take hold and people's roles increasingly become based on interpreting and acting on data, they will need the "space to work with their heads up, not down, so it will be all about being more cognitive and displaying emotional intelligence".

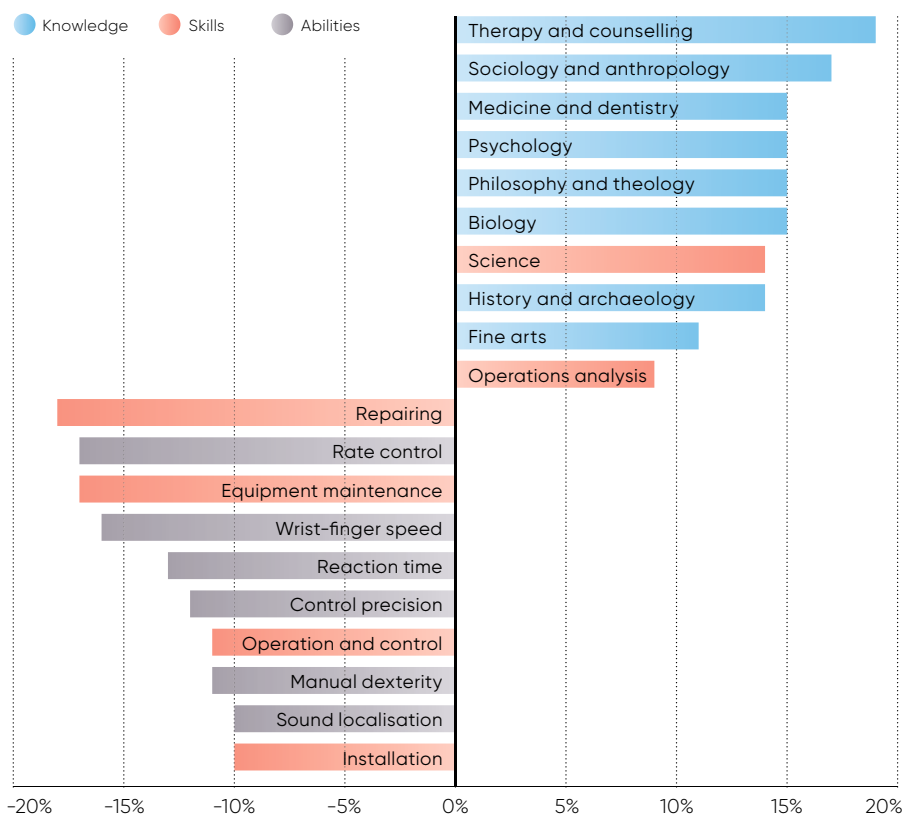
But Mr Knowles-Cutler also believes that a new cadre of so-called "purple people" will start to emerge. While "red people" understand technology and "blue people" are creative, "purple people" understand both areas and will operate in the gap where technology meets humans in the form of customers and suppliers.

For employers to start preparing for this future, the first step will be to understand the company's strategy over the next five to ten years and what is likely to be automated. Then it is about understanding which human skills will be required and whether they can be developed internally or have to be brought in from outside.

"People issues are no longer just a matter for the HR director. They have to be on the agenda of the CEO and the board as the change required is going to be so transformational," Mr Knowles-Cutler concludes.

FASTEST GROWING/DECLINING ATTRIBUTES OF THE UK WORKFORCE

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN EXPECTED ATTRIBUTE IMPORTANCE, 2001-2030



Deloitte/Office for National Statistics/US Occupational Information Network 2016

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OPINION COLUMN

'Learning and development must treat change like wearing new shoes – uncomfortable but worth it'

ANDY LANCASTER
Head of learning and development
CIPD

Lewis Carroll was not regarded as a futurologist. However, in writing the Red Queen's race in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in 1871, he seems to have glimpsed a vision of our increasingly fast-paced world.

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else – if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing." "A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

The world of work is changing fast. We live more transient work lives and the march of technology means we are able to conduct business with people continents away, across time zones and outside the traditional formal constructs of working life.

But just as the workplace changes, so must our approach to learning and development (L&D), not least because the workforces of the future will be more tech savvy. Give a toddler an iPad and you'll see what I mean.

Change, especially one of magnitude conducted at speed, can be uncomfortable, and like the first time you wear a new pair of shoes, it can take some getting used to. But it's important that we commit to the discomfort as that is what forces us to look at new approaches that can deliver greater results.

So the future of learning will look different to what we have become used to, but what shifts do L&D professionals have to make to ensure we move with the times?

First, we have to ensure that L&D is driven by business need, as opposed to generic learning themes that are so prevalent in organisations. By working collaboratively across the business and understanding the day-to-day challenges the business is looking to solve, we are better placed to grasp the requirements that will drive performance and productivity.

This also means changing the style of learning. We have all sat through a full day's learning and death by PowerPoint. The developments in neuroscience have taught us that cognitive overload is a huge barrier to learning and therefore we need to deliver learning in smaller chunks of content that are more readily available.

Put another way, if I am going to negotiate a contract next Friday, the ability for me to refresh my memory a few days before is much greater value than a training session in three weeks' time. The demand for content now is based on anytime, anyplace learning and that demands digital solutions that may need to be available beyond the company firewall. Options for self-directed learning are crucial to meet learning needs.

L&D now has a role that is far more that of a curator than a creator. Alongside the explosion in technology, we have seen an equally large growth in freely available content. So, like a museum curator who has the choice of the best pieces from thousands of artefacts, L&D professionals should act as content curators, signposting a variety of quality sources to build the best possible solution for the needs of the business.

Finally, we have to focus on learning effectiveness, what we measure and how we measure it. L&D has long focused on measuring impact after the event; you'd run a workshop and then ask for feedback. Now, with the availability of data and analytics, we have to be far more prescriptive. We should go into a learning scenario knowing exactly the problem we are attempting to solve or performance we are seeking to support, with pre and post-measurement.

In the same way as workplaces are becoming less obsessed about the time employees spend at their desk and more on what they do when they are there, L&D professionals must focus on the outputs and impact of their work, not how many training sessions they provide.

Take a fresh look at apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are the way forward for work-based learning, says **Kate Stock**, managing director of Smart Training

If there's one message I would like every boss, manager and human resources executive to hear it's this: apprenticeships are for everyone, not just teenagers. You can be 60 years old and enrol, nor is there a cap on the level of expertise. Advanced apprenticeships go way beyond basic training and right up to post-graduate degree-level training. Apprenticeships really are that versatile and designed to meet employers' upskilling and reskilling needs.

Sadly this is news to many. There's a belief that apprenticeships are just for school-leavers as an alternative to university or subsidised training for entry-level jobs. And while these basic courses – level 2 apprenticeships are equivalent to GCSEs and advanced apprenticeships or level 3 are equivalent to A levels – are great, they are only a tiny part of the picture.

What I'm talking about are the level 4, 5, 6, and 7 apprenticeships, which run all the way from foundation degrees to a Master's. The message is important because apprenticeships are becoming a mainstream way for businesses to train their staff. Instead of sporadic CPD (continuing professional development) courses or taking a year off for an MBA, an apprenticeship provides on-the-job learning. There's a clear goal to work for over the long term, and it means the courses are uniquely convenient and practical.

While my job is managing director, I am currently undertaking a level 4 apprenticeship in information systems business analysis. It is supporting me to analyse our business processes in a systematic way, focusing on how to improve quality and manage risk, while introducing new technologies and ways of working to maximise impact on the business.

These are profoundly useful commercial skills and more than a third of my staff are enrolled in higher-level apprenticeships, including nearly all our senior management team. Our projects are having a huge impact on how we run our business, delivering significant cost-savings and productivity gains.

£150k
more on average could be earned by those completing a higher apprenticeship over their lifetime

7%
more females have been helped to train for STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) roles through apprenticeships

36%
of higher apprentices report getting a promotion after completing their apprenticeship

WHERE TO NEXT?

The variety of apprenticeships is exploding. Over the next couple of years, people will be able to qualify as an accountant, nurse or teacher through work-based learning. For business, this means the need to develop short, medium and long-term strategies to take advantage of these opportunities as school-leavers choose the work-based route.

To get started, think about job roles where it is hard to recruit staff with the ready-made skills levels you are looking for or investigate areas where you need to expand the skills and knowledge of staff to meet the changing needs of your business, such as data analysis, project management or tax technician. Also think about how you are finding your raw talent at entry level and how many great young people would rather train at work than go to university.

There are two extra reasons to be excited by apprenticeships. The first is the ease of offering the training to staff. A provider like my own company, Smart Training, makes it incredibly easy to get your staff started. We run courses across England with small groups providing face-to-face teaching combined with distance learning and practical activities to complete at work alongside theoretical assignments.

The second reason is cost. The prices of MBAs and other professional tuition can be eyewatering; not so with an apprenticeship. For larger companies the cost should be covered by the new apprenticeship levy, which mandates that 0.5 per cent of the annual wage bill be used to fund apprenticeship training. The government adds an extra 10 per cent to sweeten the deal. Small companies benefit too with 90 per cent of the training costs paid by the government.

I frame apprenticeships by asking what type of enterprise you want to be. High performers are the ones with an "always learning" culture, everyone from the chief executive to the junior assistant is engaged in qualifications. Self-improvement is standard across the organisation and apprenticeships are a great way to achieve this. The courses are there. The funding is in place. All we need is for companies to shake off their dated conception of apprenticeships and start making the most of this incredible way to learn.

To find out more please visit our website at www.smart-training.com

COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Reaping the rewards of apprenticeship learning

A learning revolution is underway with apprenticeships at its heart, says **Debbie Gardiner**, chief executive at Qube Learning

DEBBIE GARDINER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
QUBE LEARNING

Earlier this year the most radical shift in adult learning for a generation was introduced – one that will forever reposition the way employer-led learning in England is funded. The change – the so-called apprenticeship levy – is a fee paid by any employer with a payroll greater than £3 million a year. It aims to reignite demand for "earn while you learn" development, by involving employers as content trailblazers, to repackage, refresh and reposition the previously out-of-fashion apprenticeship, and make it fit for the 21st century.

But for many employers, including those not involved in developing apprenticeship content or those who are simply new to the changes, this new learning landscape is both exciting, yet can also appear daunting. All organisations, even small and medium-sized enterprises that receive a minimum of 90 per cent funding from government, face having to review how their learning will change moving forward. Levy payers need to consider how to spend their levy and the most efficient use of the funds in their digital apprenticeship account.

The training provider community however, Qube Learning included, is here to help. With a long history seeing the benefits of a joined-up learning approach, training providers are now truly able to become the partners organisations need.

Long before the apprenticeship reforms came into force, Qube Learning was already hard at work, joining forces with employers, across many different sectors, to understand exactly what their future learning needs would be. Many needed advice about whether existing training could be integrated into an apprenticeship scheme, about what new learning they would need and whether training could be national or with regional partners.

> Training providers are now truly able to become the partners organisations need

Key concerns for employers were that their learning needed to be measurable, flexible, add value to their business and create new pathways for employees' career development.

Meeting these demands hasn't always been easy. But while we could have created a single solution that everyone follows in the same way, we knew this wouldn't have suited all employers. That's why we feel we've gone further than most. We now have teams of dedicated employer account managers, experts who can advise clients about our national coverage. These teams not only take employers thorough a full organisational needs analysis, but they can help them align their long-term training needs with what we can offer.

But we've gone further still. We've developed what we affectionately call our ANAP or apprenticeship needs analysis profiler. Crucial for the success of the apprenticeship levy is for it not to be seen as just another employer tax, and that with strategic thinking and planning, apprenticeships can actaully unlock missing potential within people and organisations. With our ANAP, we actively enable organisations to forecast their spend across the academic year reliably, to see all fees associated with learning delivery. In essence, we believe it takes the guesswork out of planning, preparing and paying for apprenticeships.

To accompany this we have also developed our unique Seven Steps to Success methodology. It's in recognition that apprentices need to be part of a more holistic learning strategy. The programme allows individuals to move from pre-employment schemes such as traineeships, through levels 2 and 3, and ultimately progress to degree-level apprenticeships. Seven Steps to Success is the output of consultation with employers and Job Centre Plus to determine which sectors most needed targeting, before finally partnering with the Business School at the University of Surrey to collaborate on the creation and delivery of degree-level apprenticeships.

All these innovations are specifically designed to take the hard work out of learning and ensure employers' experience of apprenticeships is such that they will want to do more of them.

Everything we do is designed to make learning easier. For instance, it's because we know the apprenticeship levy will place even greater responsibility on learning and development professionals, we've also recently introduced a learning and development division. This new strand of the business is responsible for driving apprenticeship programme design, as well as implementing any supporting e-products. It incorporates a bespoke learning management system, which can be customised to an employer's own intranet, and contains resources and learning activities apprentices can take at a time that suits them and their employer.

Organisations might well be only five months into the start of this new learning revolution and many may still need help to plan how their future learning requirements will now be met, with apprenticeships for all age groups at its heart. But it's clear they also have the opportunity they've been waiting for to really super-charge their skills. The learning loop is coming full circle as firms can succession plan, develop skills and, most importantly, feel they are the stakeholders in the process. It's an exciting time ahead for the whole learning industry.

If you would welcome a discussion around how Qube Learning can support your business please contact their teams on thefutureoflearning@qube-learning.co.uk or telephone 01235 833838

> **Qube live and breathe its company values, and my expectations have been surpassed since we began this journey together. Qube just seem to get it**
>
> **JASON BELL**
> **Hitachi Capital Finance Learning and development partner**

> **We have been working with Qube as a preferred national provider for six years and they have really stepped up to the challenge of meeting our ongoing training requirements. They have strived to accommodate our training needs beyond the options other training providers have offered**
> **Avery Healthcare**
>
> **SHELLEY PARKER-WAIN**
> **Avery Healthcare Group National training and staff development manager**

CASE STUDY

PEACOCKS

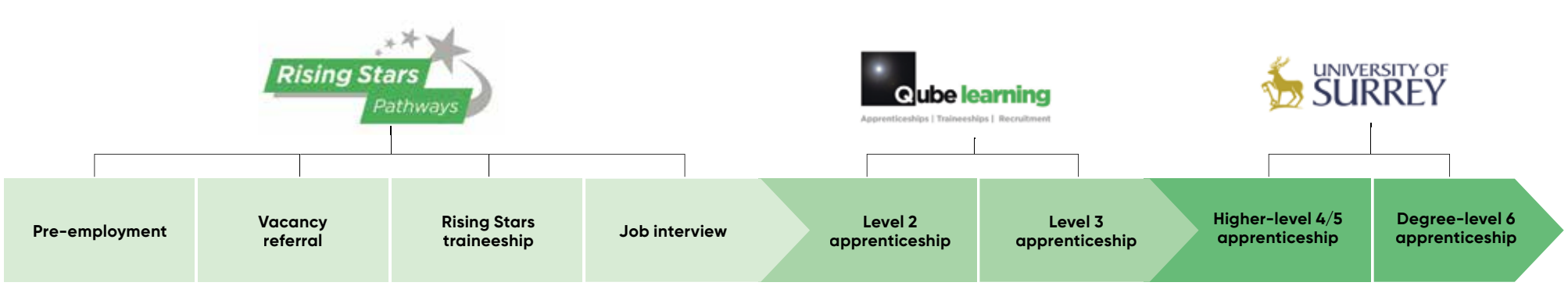
Retail chain Peacocks, part of the Edinburgh Woolen Mill Group, has more than 400 stores in the UK and has been working with Qube Learning to deliver its apprenticeship programme nationally. This has also included developing pre-employment traineeships, where trainees progress to taking on full apprenticeship courses.

"It was crucial our provider was able to deliver the range of programmes we needed on a national scale," says a Peacocks spokesperson. Qube worked with the company to develop a full learning framework that would provide its staff with a pathway to progression. This included mapping out learning routes that would move employees from intermediate-level apprenticeships in customer service and team-leading roles, to advanced apprenticeships in management. Peacocks also worked with Qube to enable it to blend its own internal training processes into Qube's lesson plans.

The Peacocks spokesperson adds: "When the apprenticeship levy was introduced, we saw a further opportunity to maximise the use of our levy by bringing part of our apprenticeship delivery in-house and to become an employer provider.

"Although this gave us full accountability, we decided very early on to continue working with Qube, choosing a co-delivery model, whereby we deliver vocational elements of our apprenticeships while Qube continues to deliver functional skills.

"Qube has also assisted us with enrolments and conducting initial assessments of our apprentices. From using technology-based solutions, to group training and one-to-one coaching, the only limit employees now have to their progression is their ambition. It's now their choice if or when they stop learning. This flexibility has allowed us to maintain our excellent partnership with Qube."



APPRENTICESHIP LEVY

Caiaimage/Tom Merton/Getty Images

Can businesses make the new levy work?

Employers are still evaluating the full impact of the apprenticeship levy, seen by some as a tax and by others as a new training opportunity

PETER CRUSH

It's the government's big idea. All firms with an annual wage bill greater than £3 million must now pay 0.5 per cent of this in the form of a levy. The only way they can get it back, plus a 10 per cent sweetener, is to use the money for apprenticeships which, by the way, have been brought bang up to date by having trailblazer employers set the curriculums they want.

With skills shortages, employability and productivity all seemingly being tackled at once, government is hailing this as what employers have been crying out for. But is this the true story of the apprenticeship levy, five months in?

"The levy's obviously here and firms are now making their payments, but what we've definitely seen is a fall in apprenticeship starts since May," says Professor Helen Higson, deputy vice chancellor at Aston University, provider of higher-level apprenticeships. "The levy is definitely on finance directors' plates now, but my sense is organisations are still grappling with how apprenticeships actually fit into their overall learning strategy."

Critics of the levy argue that because an apprentice actually has to have a real job too, the limiting factor is that employers can't actually find enough new roles fast enough.

Anouska Ramsay, talent director at Capgemini UK, says: "Overall we're a big supporter of apprenticeships, because we need to create the skills of the future. But, due to our payroll, we're paying more into the levy than we can actually spend back on ourselves. We can only use around a third of our levy; we're in a similar boat to many employers, which is that it's difficult to get our full money's worth."

According to research, the appeal of a learn-while-you-earn option is filtering down to students wary of being saddled with £40,000 of university debt. Half of 16 to 18 year olds now say they'll consider an apprenticeship, according to the Association of Accounting Technicians.

But Professor Higson argues this isn't yet filtering through to large enough numbers of employers, who are paying the levy now and need to use it or lose it within two years.

"Companies we talk to simply can't get the students they need," she says. "They're paying the levy, but can't simply get anyone to train."

> Organisations are still grappling with how apprenticeships actually fit into their overall learning strategy

Coupled with employers' frustrations that many new apprenticeship standards are not being approved quickly enough, a second fear is that in the panic to feel they're getting value from their levy, firms will simply shoe-horn their existing training under an apprenticeship banner.

"This is a concern," says Debbie Gardiner, chief executive at accredited apprentice training company Qube Learning. "This will mean employers are only delivering the same learning they already were. The only way they'll see business improvement is with brand new learning."

One firm that has been considering all these issues is laminate manufacturer Formica. "We'll be paying more into our levy than we can claim back, but we'd rather do things properly, and plan our actual skills needs rather than do anything rash and spend it for the sake of it," says Victoria Scott, its European talent and reward manager. "As such we've decided to take on apprentices in two phases, recruiting first into our manufacturing, engineering and also customer services sides of the business, but then we'll see how this goes in terms of rolling out more apprenticeships next year."

Considering EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, finds 75 per cent of manufacturers are worried about value for money from their apprenticeship schemes, this is a sage approach. "We just have to accept they'll be levy money we won't use," Ms Scott says. "That said, what we will be doing is creating new courses, in addition to existing learning, that will enable staff to take team leader and senior leader apprenticeships."

Just how well things pan out nationally depends on whether more organisations buy into the scheme equally enthusiastically. Many though still regard the levy as a tax, while some think it needs scrapping altogether.

"We think an alternative skills and productivity levy is needed," says Clare McNeil, associate director for work and families at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). "Our concern is most of the UK's largest, that is levy-paying, companies are in the South East, so the levy will do little to redistribute investment in learning across the country. We don't feel firms are being forced to think more holistically about their skills strategies, because they don't see the bottom-line benefits."

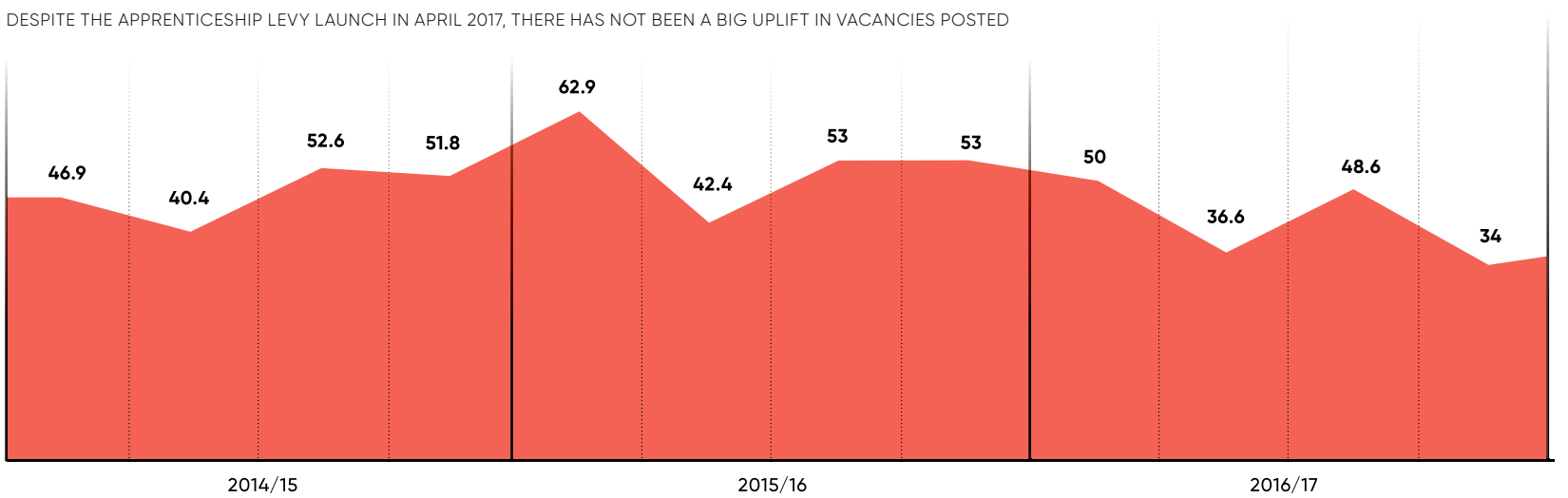
As the levy only affects 2 per cent of employers, the IPPR proposes starting it at firms with just 50 staff. Lowering the threshold would ensure learning reaches the majority of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, which is home to most employment, says Ms McNeil.

But, it isn't all doom and gloom. "Our apprenticeships are outstanding," says Ms Ramsay, "and they play a valuable role in addressing social mobility. People are working with us, doing degree-level apprenticeships, who would have ordinarily bypassed the normal university route because of cost."

Susan Bland, chair of the Hotel Employers Group and chief human resources officer at RedefineBDL Hotels, says: "The new standards are more straightforward, stipulate a 12-month minimum learning term and have a rigorous assessment process. I believe they should result in better trained, more confident, work-ready staff."

NUMBER OF APPRENTICESHIP VACANCIES POSTED (000s)

DESPITE THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY LAUNCH IN APRIL 2017, THERE HAS NOT BEEN A BIG UPLIFT IN VACANCIES POSTED



Department for Education 2017

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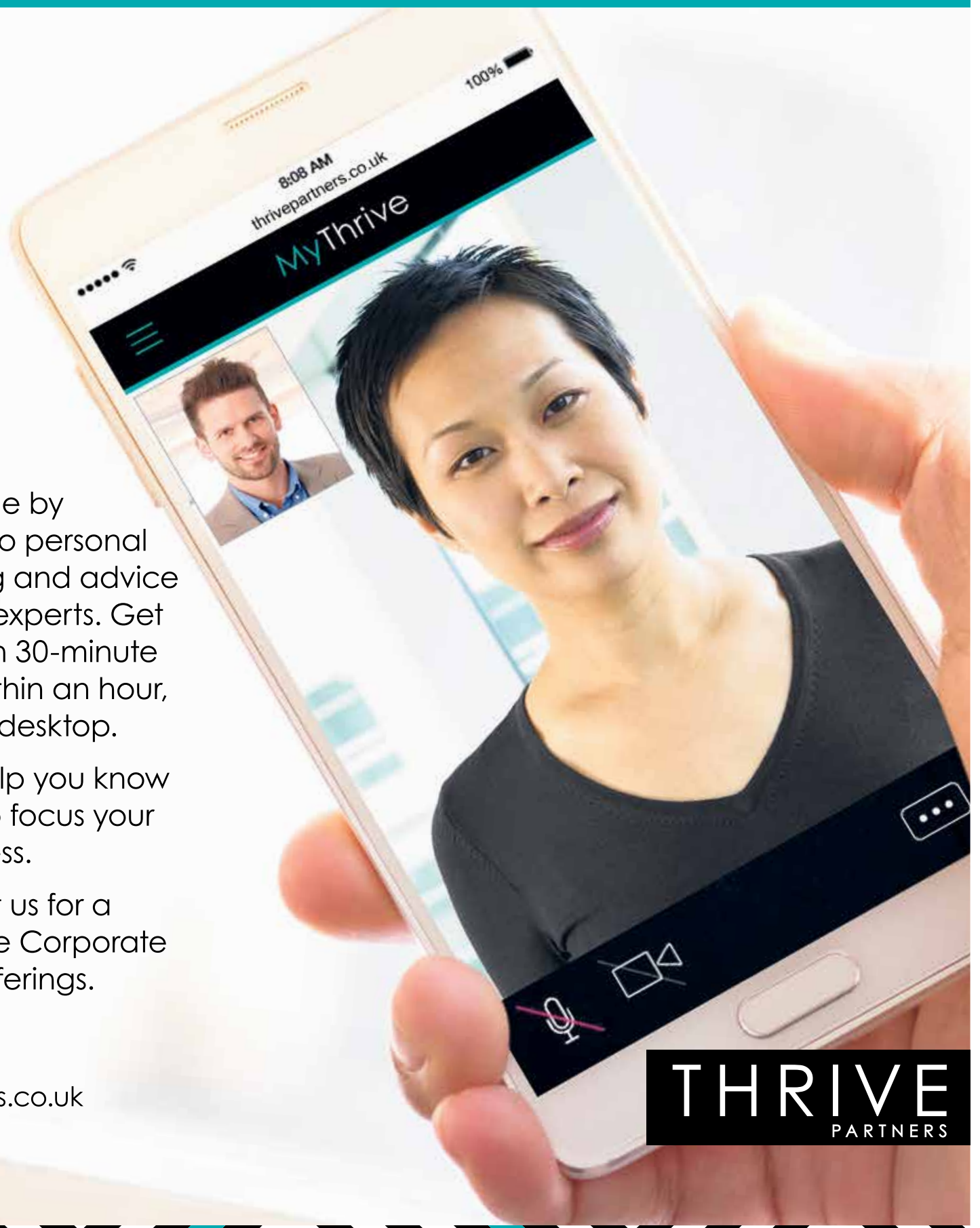

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