

Upskilling on hold – 70% of employers admit to underinvesting in staff

1 year ago



70% of UK employers admit that they aren't adequately investing in their staff's personal development.

This comes as over three-fifths of UK professionals reveal they feel more pressure to upskill now, compared to 12 months ago.

Skills England released its [first report](#) detailing how new skills drive growth, though new research from talent solutions expert [Robert Walters](#) highlights the increasing issue of employer underinvestment in this area.

Indeed – according to the [British Chambers of Commerce](#), over three fifths of organisations across the UK are currently facing skills shortages.

Chris Eldridge, CEO of Robert Walters UK & Ireland comments: “A combination of an aging workforce, tightening budgets as well as constantly evolving technologies and AI has catapulted the UK towards an ever-increasing skills shortage.

“The only way out is a concerted effort to upskill, train and develop professionals across industries, something which requires the cooperation of all employers.”

Most at risk of reduced skills spending

Despite over half (57%) of junior professionals stating they'd be more likely to accept a job offer if it came with a provision of personal development funding – according to [Robert Walters benefits reporting](#) only a third (35%) state they receive it at their current job.

Similarly, 48% of professionals under 30 say they 'rarely' get the chance to develop new skills in their current position.

Chris comments: "It seems that the professionals most at risk of employers tightening their training and development budgets, are those who would receive the greatest benefit.

"The skills you develop the initial years of your professional career provide the foundation for the experience you build throughout your career. Not having adequate access to upskilling opportunities now is setting these professionals up for career stagnation."

Tighter budgets = limited investment

When asked what types of personal development opportunities their current employer offers, over half (54%) of professionals stated that they weren't aware of any.

The most common development opportunities were skills-based courses, however only a fifth of professionals stated that they received these.

On the flip side, when employers were asked about the factors stopping them from allocating more resources towards training or upskilling budgets – 45% stated organisation-wide cost cuts, a fifth (22%) said they lacked the time to implement such programs, 18% referenced uncertainties over the return on investment and 15% struggled to find suitable courses or trainers.

Chris comments: "When economic conditions are trickier, things like upskilling and training programmes are often the first areas to get dialed back. Many organisations fail to see them as essential, more concerned that the staff they do invest in will leave before it makes a difference to business performance and profitability."

No longer 'nice to haves'

Job ads mentioning skills in green technology (+16%) and AI (+80%) have increased on last year, especially within industries like financial services, software development and business.

Soft skills like emotional intelligence (+29%), creative and innovative thinking (64%) and adaptability (+53%) have also appeared more in listings over the past year – especially for leadership and management positions.

Chris comments: "While it's clear to see that certain skills are becoming more common amongst professionals; the pace at which this is happening is being dwarfed by the rising demand.

"Due to that pace, skills that were seen as 'nice to haves' 1-2 years ago, have now turned into essential indicators of a professional's ability."

Mentoring sustainable growth

Further findings of the Robert Walters poll revealed a spiked demand for coaching and mentorship opportunities – with the majority (39%) of professionals stating it was the personal development initiative they'd find most useful. Despite this, only 12% stated that their current employer offered it.

Other initiatives mentioned were skills courses (28%), accredited short courses (25%) and tuition contributions (8%).

Chris comments: "Offering relevant courses is a great place to start and will directly address certain technical skills shortages. However, mentorship and coaching interventions don't only give professionals a chance to upskill, knowledge share and stimulate career growth – they also help improve team dynamics and boost employee confidence.

"Employers can consider developing internal mentorship program or planning external coaching sessions, just doing more within this space will help employers to establish a culture of learning within their organisation, something which is crucial to address skills gaps for years to come."