

L&D's role in employee wellbeing

A 2023 survey



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Foreword

The last few years have seen many pressures face employees. From Covid-19, to the current cost-of-living crisis, workforces face pressure and stress in both their personal and working lives, and this is a huge challenge for organisations.

Certain roles bring unique challenges, such as caring for patients in the NHS. While in the corporate world financial pressures, talent shortages and high workloads are leading to rising levels of burnout, difficult decisions and widening skills gaps.

Against this backdrop, employers know that wellbeing needs to be addressed. Increasingly, programmes are being put into place to help staff with a wide spectrum of wellbeing needs including bereavement, redundancies, mental health issues, financial stress and times of crises.

However, wellbeing also needs to be addressed at a cultural level within the organisation. Positive mental health goes hand in hand with an engaged and loyal workforce. Therefore, The Open University wanted to look deeper at how

training and career development can have a proactive impact on wellbeing in the workplace.

We partnered with TrainingZone to look deeper into this through an employer survey. Our report writer, Blaire Palmer, brings together these results through her own insights from 20 years working with leaders who desperately want to bring out the best in their people. Expert commentary is added through Open University academics, The 5% Club, and British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy as we uncover the links between wellbeing and learning.

We hope this report inspires you in your plans for the future.



Phil Kenmore FICPD

Director, Corporate Development and Partnerships, The Open University



Introduction

Research abounds about the worrying growth in levels of mental illness and burnout. In response, many organisations are now offering a range of wellbeing programmes through their learning and development (L&D) departments, such as wellbeing days, resilience training and mental health awareness courses.

But are such programmes the only way L&D supports employee wellbeing? Might there be benefits from other kinds of training – vocational courses, apprenticeships, mentoring and microcredentials, for instance? And if so, what training initiatives provide the greatest return on investment across the broadest set of measures?

In this survey – conducted in partnership with The Open University, The 5% Club and Savanta – TrainingZone wanted to understand the role of L&D in addressing employee wellbeing.

This paper highlights **three major findings** from our survey and provides recommendations intended to support your organisation to get the most diverse range of benefits from your L&D investment.





Methodology

During December 2022 and January 2023, we surveyed 564 people across the UK with HR and L&D roles at either director or manager level in their organisation.

Drawn from the private, public and third sector, these respondents represented organisations ranging in size from 3-9 employees up to more than 1,000 employees, and turnovers of less than £100,000 up to £2m+.

We were interested in the differences between organisations of different sizes and from different sectors. But the most dramatic differences came when we compared **typical organisations** (no matter their size or sector) with the responses we got from **members of The 5% Club**.

About: The 5% Club

The 5% Club represents more than 820 organisations in the UK who aspire to achieve 5% of their workforce in 'earn and learn' positions within 5 years of joining.

We wanted to understand whether organisations with an overt commitment to investing in training would experience different outcomes when it came to engagement, improved skills and wellbeing than organisations who were not actively part of this community. Just under 10% of respondents were from The 5% Club organisations.

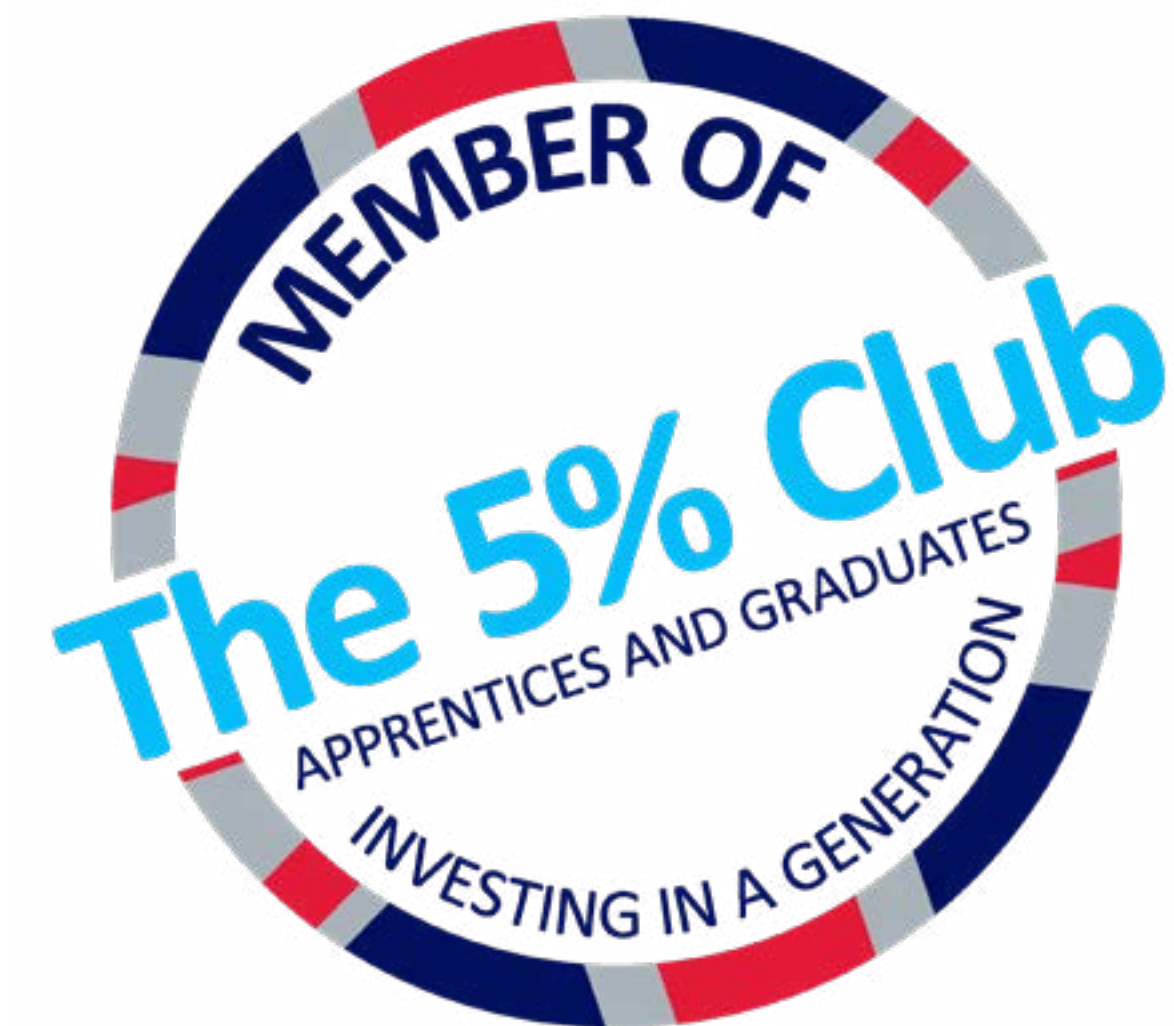
www.5percentclub.org.uk

What is 'earn and learn'?

'Earn and learn' programmes combine study with practical experience, enabling individuals to gain the knowledge and skills required to pursue their chosen occupation.

For **The 5% Club**, earn and learn includes:

- Apprenticeships at all levels
- Formalised graduate training programmes
- Sponsored students



Benefits of differing L&D interventions

We wanted to understand the relative benefits of different types of training intervention. Were the benefits of long-term training (such as university degrees, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications) any different to the benefits of short-term training (such as short-term internally delivered courses, lunch and learn sessions and microcredentials)?

We also wanted to compare these benefits to the benefits of L&D programmes specifically focused on wellbeing.



Other explorative questions

In addition, we asked about future plans to invest in L&D over the coming 12 months, what factors had the greatest negative impact on employee wellbeing and the extent to which L&D perceived wellbeing was part of their remit.

In our current climate, budgets are under pressure and every department in an organisation is expected to justify how it spends money and demonstrates ROI. At this time it is ever more important to understand which L&D investments achieve the greatest return and whether there are learning initiatives that deliver not just primary but secondary benefits and even tertiary benefits.

Are there ways to improve technical and professional skills, create healthier organisational cultures AND reduce levels of employee stress?

In other words, is there a silver bullet?

Key findings

From the survey, we uncovered three core findings for L&D teams and employers to factor into their decision making on training investment.

1. Learning boosts mental health

Our survey shows that it's not just wellbeing-focused interventions and training that help improve employee wellbeing. All kinds of training on topics beyond wellbeing – whether that be long-term skills training (eg apprenticeships and university degrees) or short/bite-size courses – produce a wide range of benefits, including enhanced mental health and stress management.

STATISTICS:

Better stress and mental health management reported by:

36.2%
respondents
as a result of
**long-term skills
development**

38.5%
respondents
as a result of
**short-term skills
development**

Immediate improvement in wellbeing reported by:

27.8%
respondents
as a result of
**long-term skills
development**

35.8%
respondents
as a result of
**short-term skills
development**

[Follow this link to find out more about how training boosts mental health](#)

Key findings

2. The more you commit to L&D the more you get back

Organisations that overtly prioritise training and learning get the broadest range of benefits.

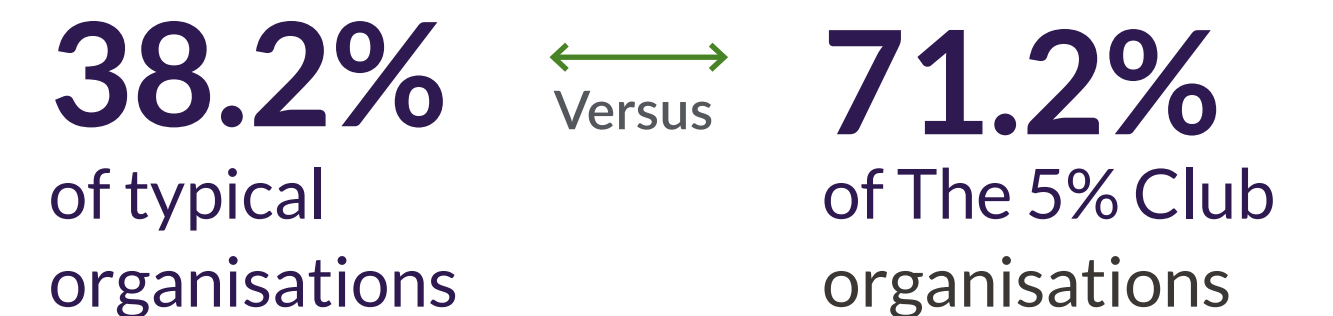
Members of The 5% Club were significantly more likely to report these benefits than typical organisations. This indicates that the more committed your organisation is to L&D the greater the returns.

STATISTICS:

An increase in employee engagement from long-term skills training was reported by:



An increase in employee retention from long-term skills training reported by:



Follow this link to find out more about learning and development benefits

Key findings

3. L&D budgets are under threat

Despite acknowledging the broad range of benefits, our survey shows many organisations are cutting their investment in L&D over the next 12 months.

Fewer organisations will invest in university degrees, vocational qualifications, Level 2-3 apprenticeships and mentoring/coaching over the next year. The same trend is seen with short term courses and mental health awareness training.

Follow this link to find out more about L&D budgets

STATISTICS:

Top three biggest L&D cutbacks

Mentoring and coaching

Down by

9.5%

Apprenticeships

Down by

9%

Vocational qualifications

Down by

6.5%



Survey backdrop: Is there a mental health crisis?

Employee mental wellbeing is a high-profile topic in HR circles. But is there really a crisis?

There is plenty of evidence to support the premise that we are living through a mental health crisis. According to a 2020 global survey by Gallup¹, 7 out of 10 people report they are struggling or suffering.

A 2021 survey of 2,000 people by CIPHR² concluded that 49% of UK adults feel stressed for five or more days a month. And according to research conducted in 2021

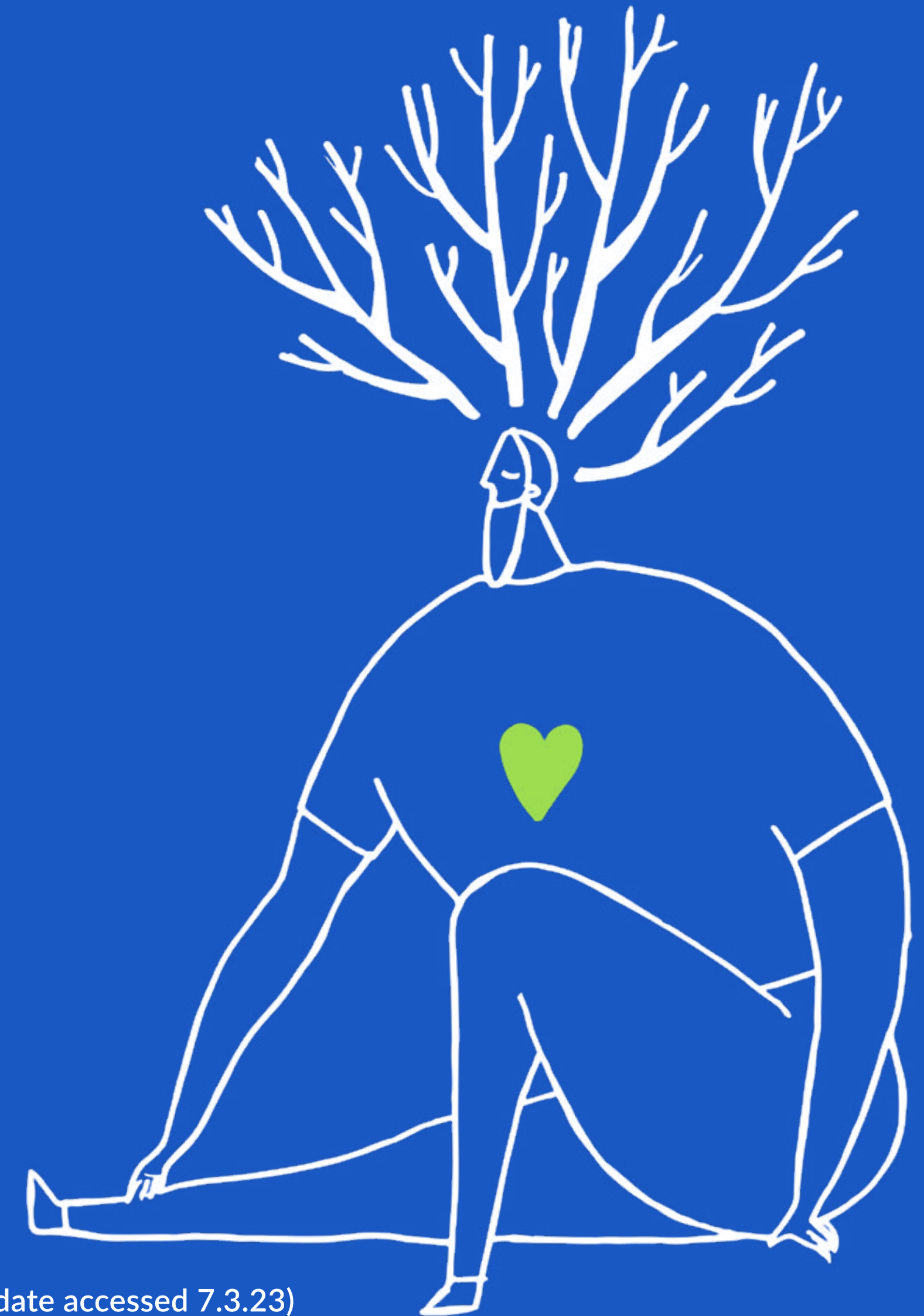
by Westfield Health³, 51% of UK workers said they were less than a month away from burnout.

At the same time, as a nation we have become more open about discussing mental health and wellbeing. As more people feel able to speak up about mental health there may also be a perception that mental health is declining.

¹ Follow this link to access the [‘The Mood of the World’ report by Gallup](#) (date accessed 7.3.23)

² Follow this link to access the [‘Workplace Stress Statistics in the UK - How stressed in the UK in 2021?’ report by CIPHR](#) (date accessed 7.3.23)

³ Follow this link to access the [‘Wellbeing trends 2022’ report by Westfield Health](#) (date accessed 7.3.23)



Viewpoints

The 5% Club's CEO, Mark Cameron, believes that this complicates the picture.

“Now more than ever there is a greater awareness of mental health and associated issues. The Covid pandemic has served to magnify awareness, as does continued media coverage. And there is a lot going on for young people, much of which is unfamiliar to them. Young people have never come across inflation, a global pandemic, or the levels of global uncertainty that now exist; all deepened by an ongoing climate crisis. One minute they are furloughed, then they are back to work. Then they are working from home, and then they are asked to return to the office. These are unusual extremes and they affect people deeply, especially young people; and it is all compounded by the ongoing discussion in the media, which can all serve to paint a bleak picture.”



Mark Cameron

CEO, The 5% Club

According to Kris Ambler, Workforce Lead at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), employers still find it hard to talk to employees about mental health at work.

“Providing spaces where we break down those barriers – whether it's a session about mindfulness or a session about taking a step back and finding time for yourself – that show a commitment to health and wellbeing, can boost morale. Any preventative or educational intervention shows employees they are in a supportive culture where they can have those more difficult conversations about mental health.”



Kris Ambler

Workforce Lead, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Employee demand for mental health support is high

Organisations need to be attuned to the impact of both greater awareness and willingness to openly discuss mental wellbeing and the pressures on individuals and businesses that cause stress and mental health issues. For organisations in every sector, there is a significant demand for mental health support, training and resources to be available.

This is on top of a range of other L&D initiatives that seek to address engagement, recruitment, retention and leadership, plus improve employees' technical and professional skills.



What are the top causes of stress?

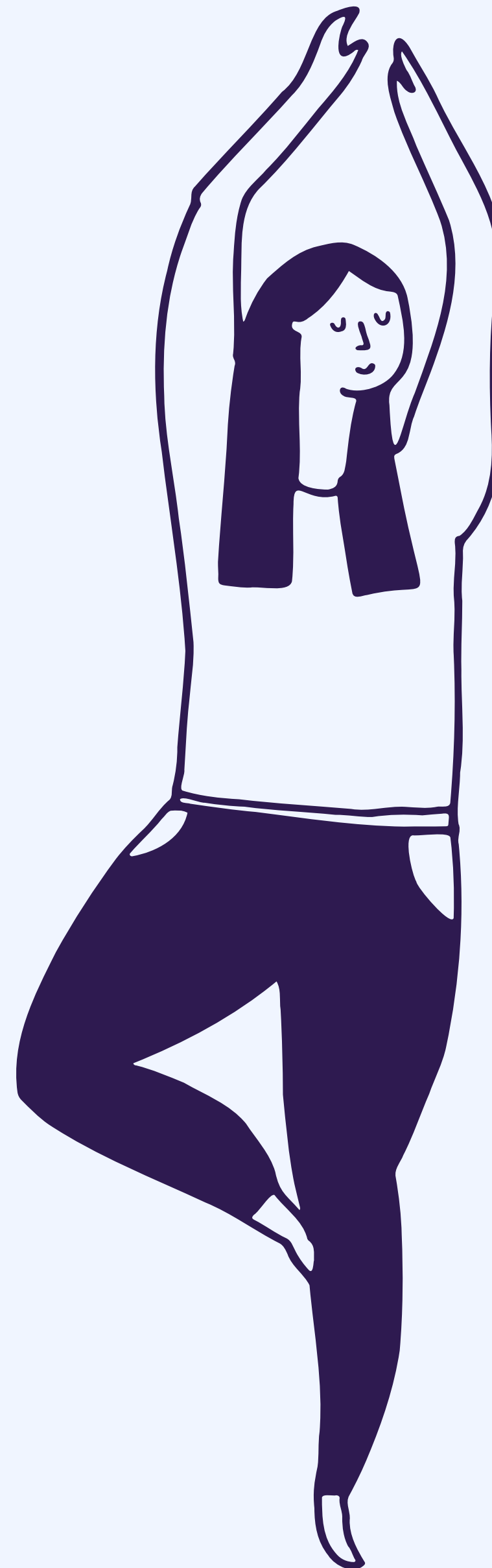
1. Cost-of-living crisis

Across all organisations, the cost of living is, by far, perceived as having the greatest negative impact on employee wellbeing.

During the pandemic, working from home and the associated social isolation, the stress of home schooling and the impact of furlough or having to work through the constraints of Covid, were all high on the agenda. Now the focus has shifted to rising costs and stress caused by those increased costs.

(Figure 1)

Kris Ambler explains: “Energy bills, food, childcare, fuel – all of these have gone up while wages haven’t in real terms. There are lots of problems with financial anxiety, which is the number one cause of depression and anxiety right now in the UK. Those who have existing problems with mental health issues are worsened by financial crises and financial crises can create stress and depression.”



2. Workload pressure and recruitment difficulties

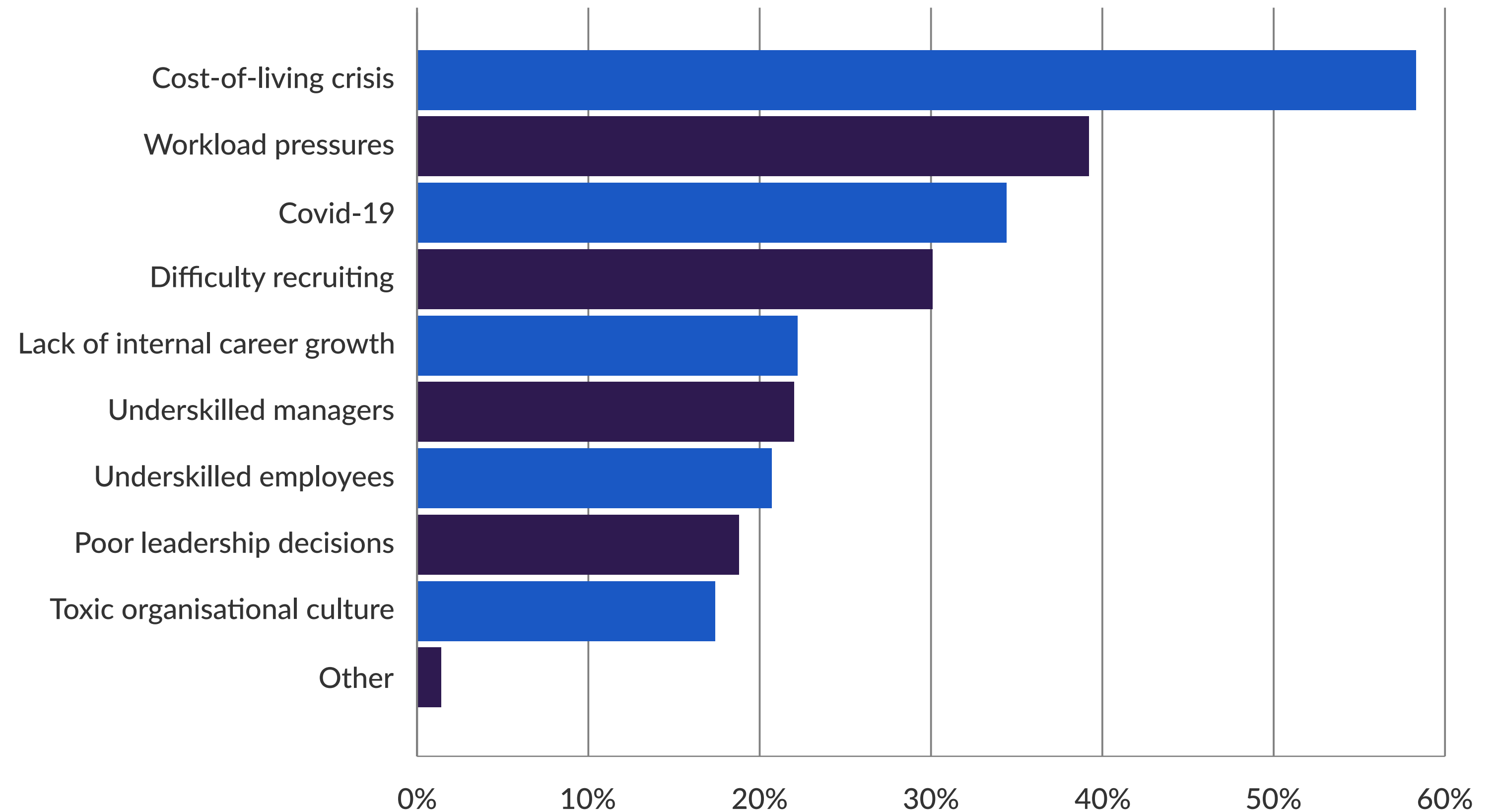
Workload pressure is the second most cited negative impact on employee wellbeing. Alongside this, difficulty recruiting is also one of the most commonly identified reasons for employee wellbeing issues. Of course, these two factors influence each other – more unfilled roles mean greater workload for current employees.

3. Covid-19

That isn't to say that the impact of Covid isn't still being felt. It is a particular issue for organisations in the public sector, and across all organisations 34.4% of respondents said Covid was still a significant issue when it came to the wellbeing of their employees.



Figure 1: Which of the following (if any) are currently having a negative impact on employee wellbeing within your organisation?



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

Viewpoints

Mark Cameron believes employers have a responsibility, because of the greater awareness of mental health and the high cost of living, to help employees at this time.

“It is for employers to provide assurance on work and career pathways – the threat of redundancy compounds these issues – and we know there are employers who are going out of their way to help with cost of living. We have heard in the media that up to 50% of employers have offered cost-of-living bonuses. It is not the financial value that is important (although clearly that helps); it is the recognition to the employee that there is a cost-of-living crisis, their employer recognises this, and wants to help. It is not just an employer engagement and branding activity, and therefore not just about a business case – although, again, that helps. And in the context of heightened awareness of mental health and employee resilience, for many employers it is just the right thing to do.”



Mark Cameron

CEO, The 5% Club

“Employers need to signal continuity to their employees and provide reassurance. People who were already in a precarious situation are going to be really worried that there may be redundancies coming and that’s going to amplify insecurity.”



Dr Volker Patent

Lecturer in Psychology, The Open University

Finding one:

Training boosts mental health

Our survey shows training in general (not just mental health training) can alleviate stress and bolster mental wellbeing.

Our first insight is that all kinds of training, whether that be long-term skills training, short courses or wellbeing-focused interventions, produce a wide range of benefits. These include improved skills, engagement and organisational culture through to immediate improvements in stress levels and mental wellbeing.

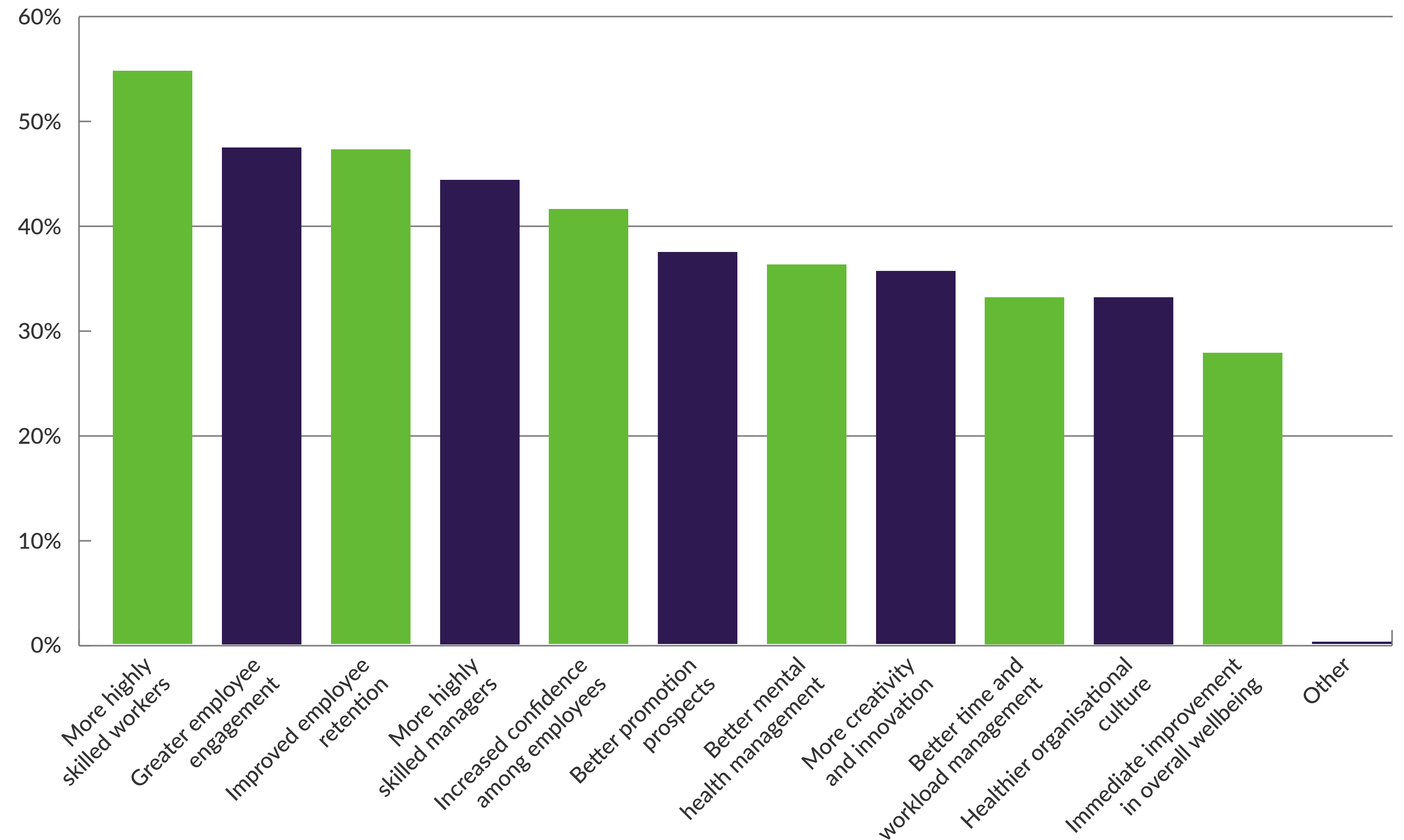


Unexpected benefits to long-term skills training

It comes as no surprise that employers that offer what we refer to as 'long-term skills development and professional training' say the primary benefits are better skilled workers, better engagement and better retention. Included within this group are apprenticeships, degree programmes, industry accreditations, mentoring and coaching.

What is more surprising is the impact learning and training has on organisational culture, employee stress and mental wellbeing. While the intention behind training staff might be to improve skills, the secondary benefits are impressive. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: The primary benefits of long-term skills development courses



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)



What could this link between L&D and wellbeing mean?

Dr Volker Patent, Lecturer in Psychology at The Open University, says there is a direct correlation between developing employee skills and improved wellbeing. When staff are more capable there are **fewer organisational tensions which means less stress.**

“When you have a workforce that is competent, you are going to get less of the friction that comes as a result of people not knowing how to do stuff, to learn, think critically and solve problems effectively. Simply put, you’re going to meet deadlines, prevent problems, develop systems to work more effectively, and there’s going to be less stress caused by work not getting done properly.”

But he adds that there is a **symbolic value to long-term skills development** which can also enhance the wellbeing effect.

“The fact that you feel supported by your employer has a protective effect on your mental health. Even when you are facing a difficult situation, the fact that you know that your employer supports people, signaled by the range of interventions that are there, you think ‘I know this is overwhelming but I know I can get support’. It’s very different if you’re facing a difficult situation and you feel no one cares. The symbolic value is perhaps just as important.”

Kris Ambler, builds on this point:

“This is the secondary impact of that investment in the individual. It fosters that sense of greater motivation, award and achievement. It makes the employee feel special and valued and that there is a career progression and pathway for them.”

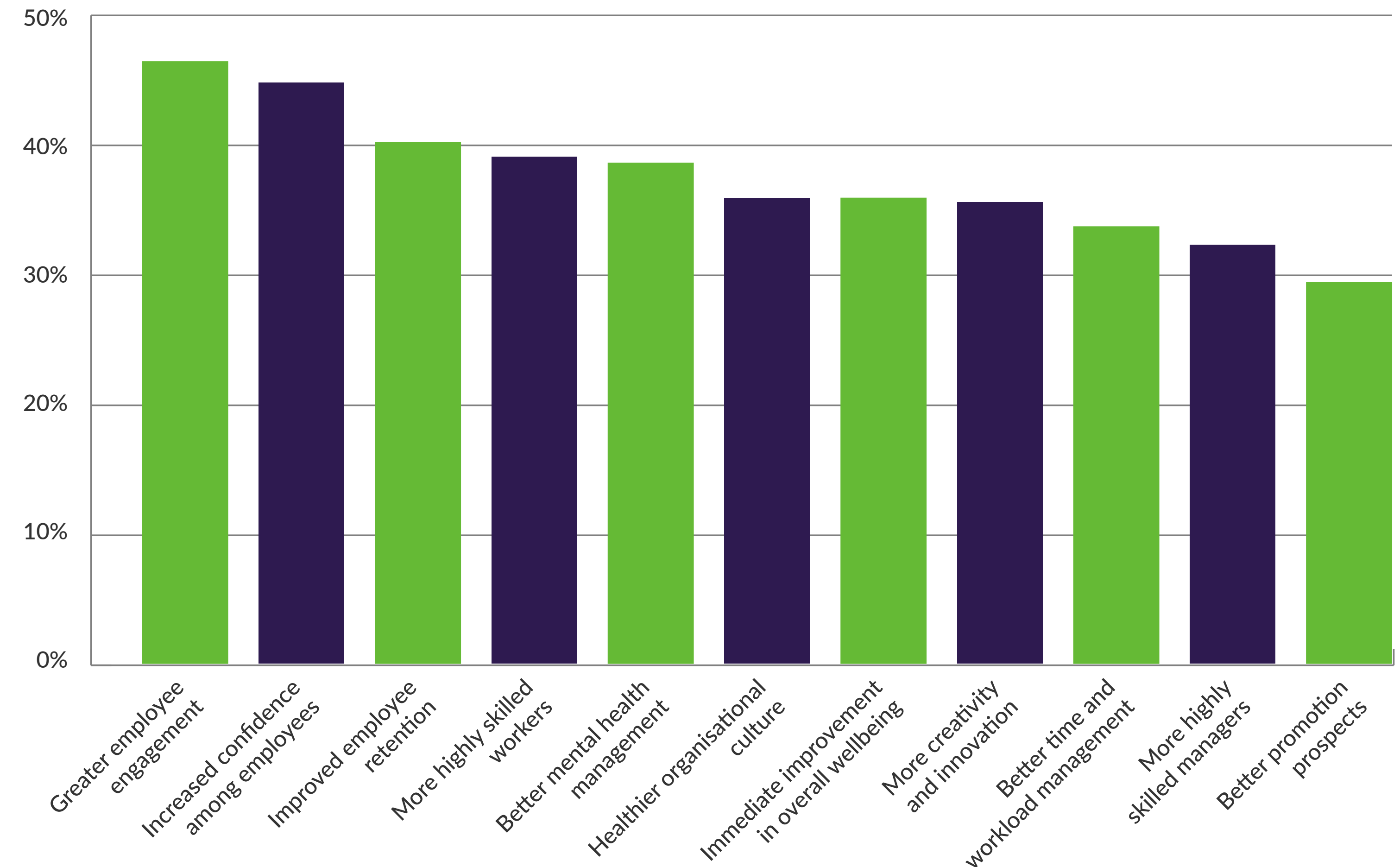
Short-term courses make a positive difference too

Short-term training courses – such as microcredentials, internally or externally delivered short courses and lunch and learns – also benefit wellbeing.

In fact, nearly half of all respondents said that greater employee engagement was a benefit of such courses, followed by increased confidence, better employee retention and improved skills.

Better stress and mental health management was cited by 4 in 10 respondents as a benefit and 36.8% said they saw an immediate improvement in overall wellbeing. (Figure 3)

Figure 3: The primary benefits of short-term skills development courses



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

Courses specifically focused on mental wellbeing are NOT radically more effective

Many organisations that took part in the survey also run programmes specifically targeted at improving mental wellbeing and reducing levels of stress. And while the mental wellbeing benefits are slightly more pronounced for such courses, they are not radically more effective. (Figure 4)

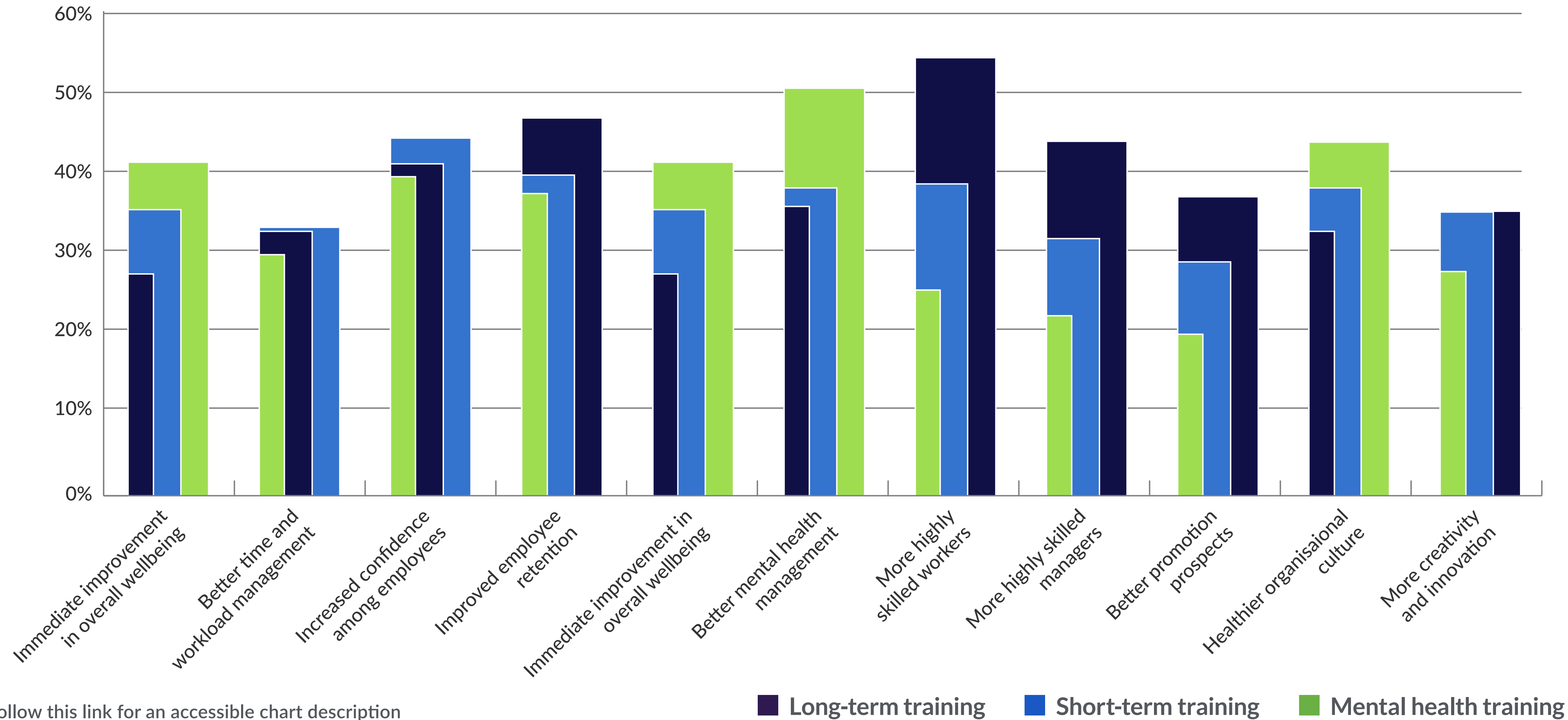
For instance, 41.7% of respondents said they saw an immediate improvement in overall wellbeing when they ran wellbeing courses. However, nearly the same proportion (35.8%) saw an immediate improvement in wellbeing when they ran short training courses unrelated to the topic of wellbeing. And 27.8% of respondents saw the same improvement when

they ran long-term training courses. We see a similar trend when respondents asked about improvements in stress and mental health management.

In addition, long-term skills development provides a broader range of benefits than wellbeing training. You get a wellbeing boost but you also get more highly skilled workers and managers, plus improved employee engagement and better promotion prospects. This suggests that, when budgets are tight and tough investment decisions need to be made, you **get a greater payoff from skills training than purely from wellbeing programmes.**



Figure 4: Reported benefits from different training types (long-term, short-term and mental health training)



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

What does this mean for you?

Almost all respondents to the survey saw a link between L&D activity and wellbeing (only 3.9% did not). However, our findings demonstrate that wellbeing benefits can be gained from all kinds of training, not just those that are focused specifically on wellbeing.

1 Measure the wellbeing impact

Consider measuring the wellbeing impact of your non-wellbeing focused training and development programmes. Such data could help increase, or at least retain, levels of investment in skills-based training during difficult financial times.

2 Increase your internal PR for learning opportunities

Promote the availability of training even to those who may not take up the opportunity. The symbolic value of offering training may be nearly as significant for them as for those who actively participate.

3 Be diverse in the L&D you offer

Offer a wide range of long-term skills training, short-term skills training and wellbeing-focused programmes. This gives you the best chance to reap a wide range of rewards for the organisation and for employees.

North Yorkshire Police's proactive approach to wellbeing

North Yorkshire Police offers a wide range of wellbeing programmes including programmes on self-care, diet, physical health and boundaries. That is in addition to its work with The Open University delivering apprenticeships for police constables and police community support officers, and programmes for special constables which provide opportunities for local people to achieve career and life goals within the force.

The intention of this combined approach is to keep people mentally and physically fit so that they won't become ill before they seek help. Janine Hall, Health and Wellbeing Manager, explains the rationale for including wellbeing alongside career and professional development training:

“We want our people to see mental health the same way as physical fitness. The Positive Psychology sessions we provide have been getting high levels of interest and people are much more likely to ask for help with health and wellbeing now than in the past. Policing is an incredibly difficult job and you're exposed to horrendous things. You need to be mentally healthy to deal with that.”



Janine Hall

Health and Wellbeing Manager, North Yorkshire Police



Follow the link to find out more about [The Open University's partnership with North Yorkshire Police](#).

Finding two:

The more you commit to L&D the more you get back

A bold, brave approach to learning and development will pay dividends, our survey suggests.

A high proportion of respondents from a wide range of organisations reported benefits from training and development ranging from improved skills to better mental health.

However, members of The 5% Club were significantly more likely to report these benefits than typical organisations.

The 5% Club comprises organisations that overtly commit to having at least 5% of their employees in earn and learn programmes.



As you can see in Figure 5, The 5% Club respondents offer a broader range of development than the non-The 5% Club respondents. More of them offer apprenticeships, short-term external courses and industry accreditations.

Throughout the survey we found that The 5% Club respondents were more likely to see the benefits of training than typical organisations, leading us to conclude that their focus and additional investment in training and development produces a wider range of benefits than those seen by typical organisations. (Figure 5)

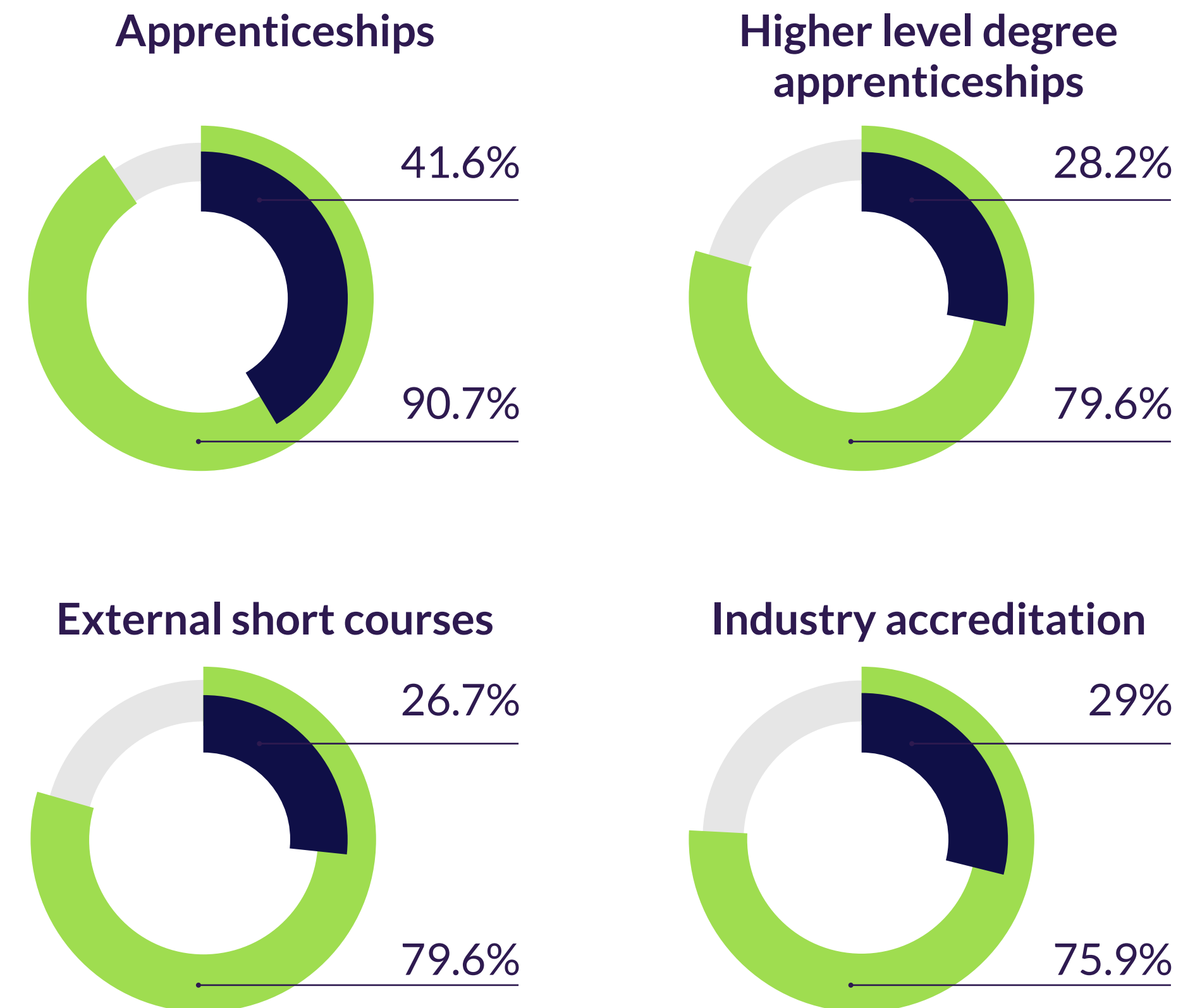
Why is this the case? Mark Cameron explains:

“We see our members as best in class. They employ 5% of the UK workforce but deliver 10% of the UK apprenticeships. They understand the need to skill their workforce. They believe in giving the UK the edge by investing in hard-to-reach talent pools in the post-Brexit, post-pandemic era.”

Across the board, The 5% Club respondents were more positive about the impact of training on a whole range of success factors.

Figure 5: Comparison of training offered by The 5% Club organisations vs typical organisations

■ Typical organisations ■ The 5% Club

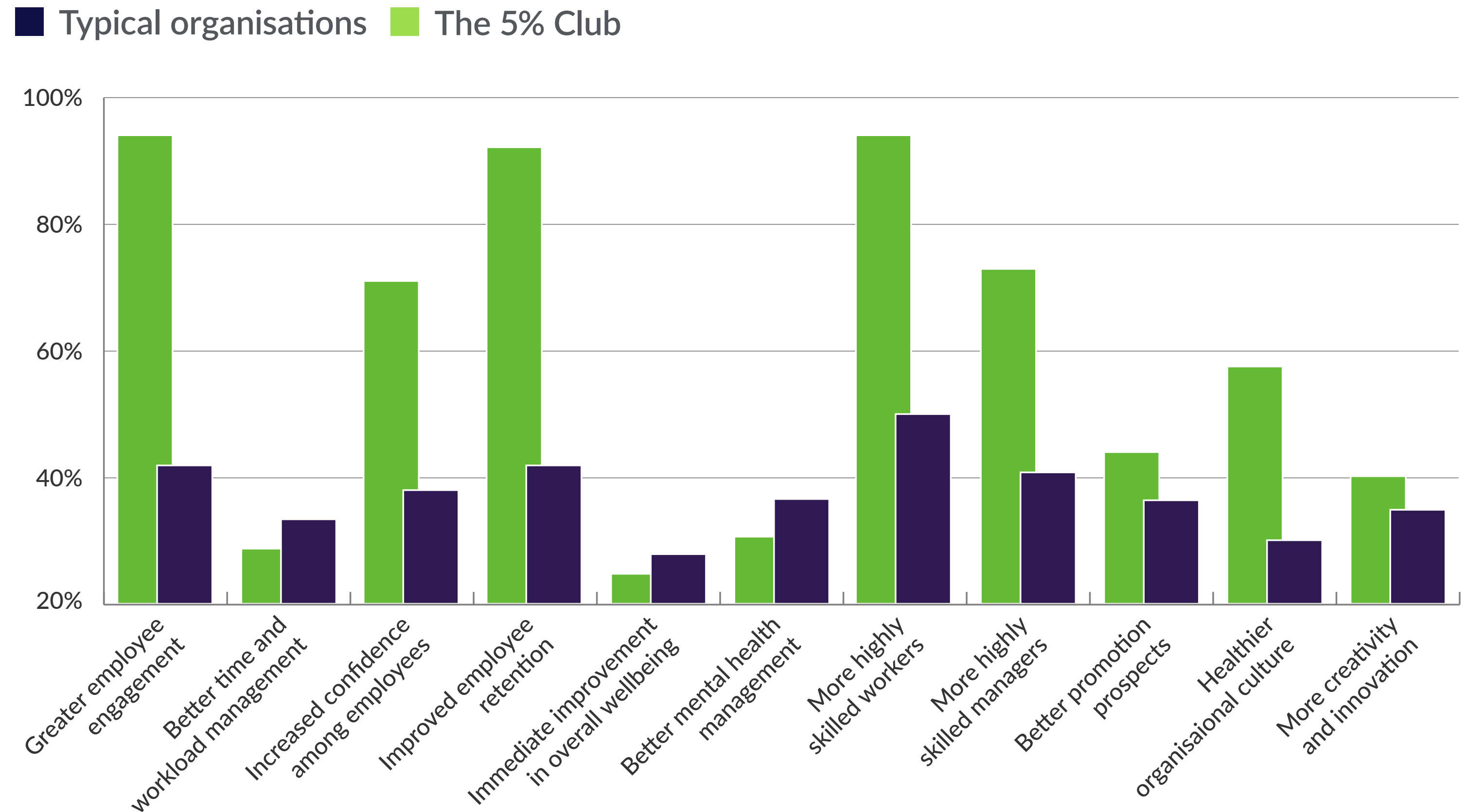


[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

ROI of long-term skills development

For instance, 42.1% of typical organisations said they saw greater employee engagement as a result of running long-term skills development programmes, while 94.2% of The 5% Club respondents saw this benefit. Furthermore, 38.2% of typical organisations said confidence improved as a result of their investment in these programmes compared with 71.2% of The 5% Club respondents. And while 42.1% of the typical organisations said retention improved as a result of these programmes, 92.3% of The 5% Club respondents saw this as a benefit. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: Benefits of long-term skills development in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations



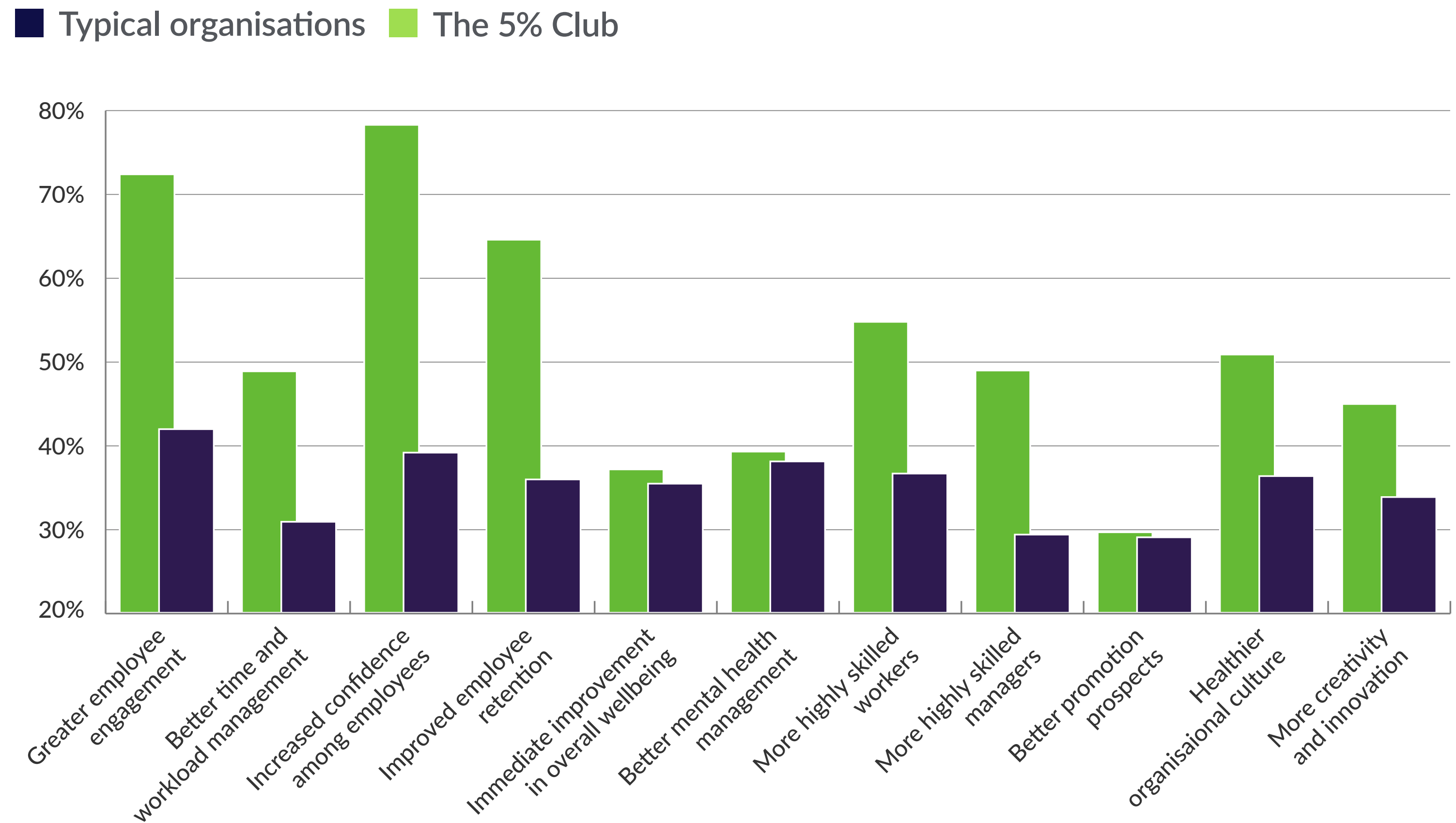
[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

ROI of short-term skills development

We saw the same story when we asked about the benefits of short-term courses (both internal and external), microcredentials and lunch and learn sessions.

Those organisations who overtly prioritise learning as members of The 5% Club were more likely to see such benefits. Only 39.3% of typical respondents said they saw increased confidence as a result of these programmes compared with 78.4% of The 5% Club respondents. And while 42.1% of typical respondents said greater employee engagement was a major benefit, 72.5% of The 5% Club respondents said they saw the same benefit as a result of their investment in these kinds of courses. (Figure 7)

Figure 7: Benefits of short-term skills development in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations



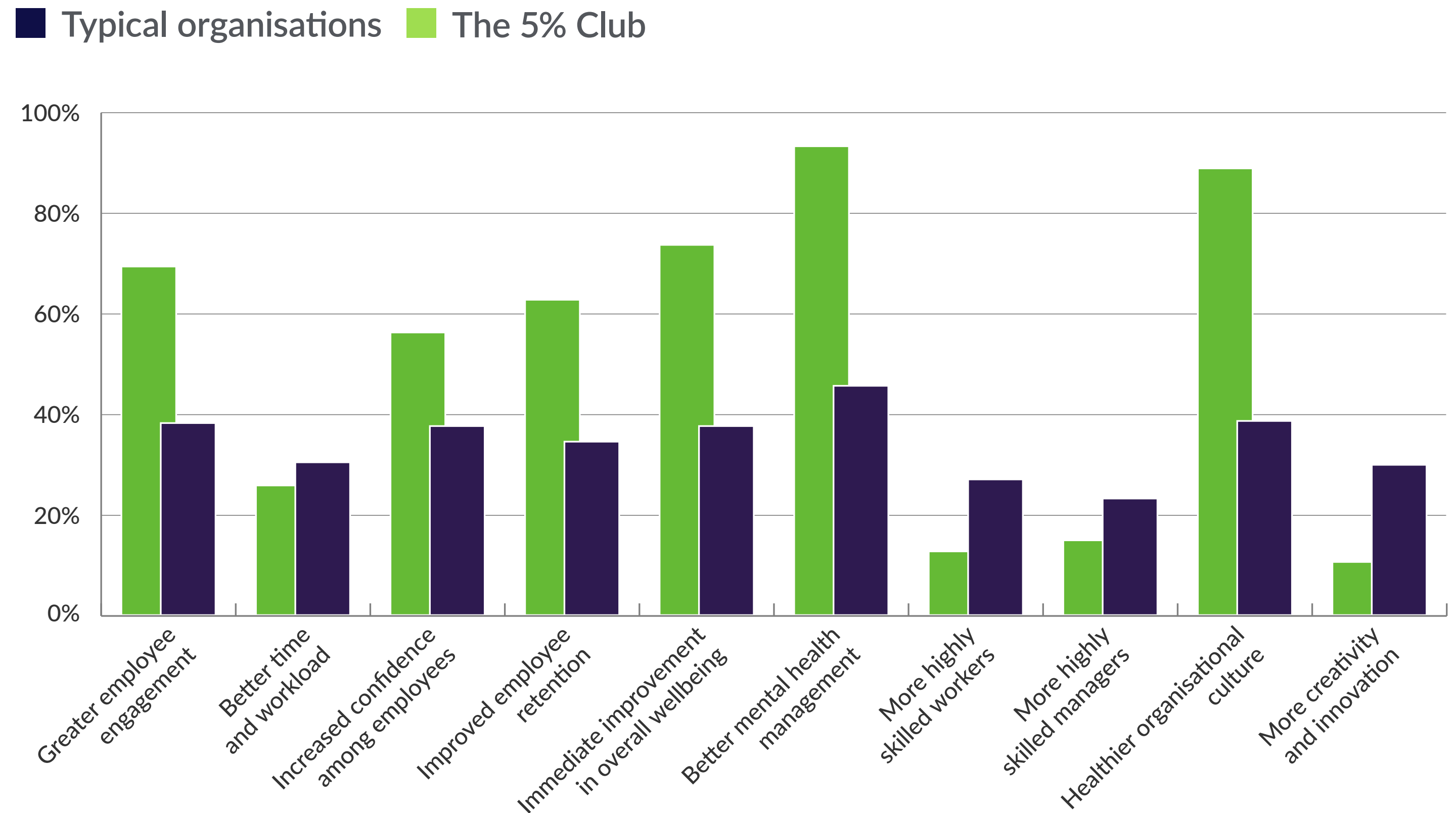
[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

ROI of wellbeing programmes

When it comes to return on investment of wellbeing programmes, it will be no surprise that The 5% Club were more likely to see benefits than the other respondents. When asked about the programmes like resilience training, wellbeing days, mental health awareness training and team building, 45.9% of typical respondents said better stress and mental health was a benefit, while 93.5% of The 5% Club respondents said they felt this was a benefit.

In addition, 38.9% of typical respondents felt their organisational cultures were healthier as a result of these kinds of programmes, compared with 89.1% of The 5% Club respondents. And while 37.9% of typical respondents said there was an immediate improvement in overall wellbeing, 73.9% of The 5% Club respondents said they saw this as a benefit. (Figure 8)

Figure 8: Benefits of wellbeing training programmes in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)

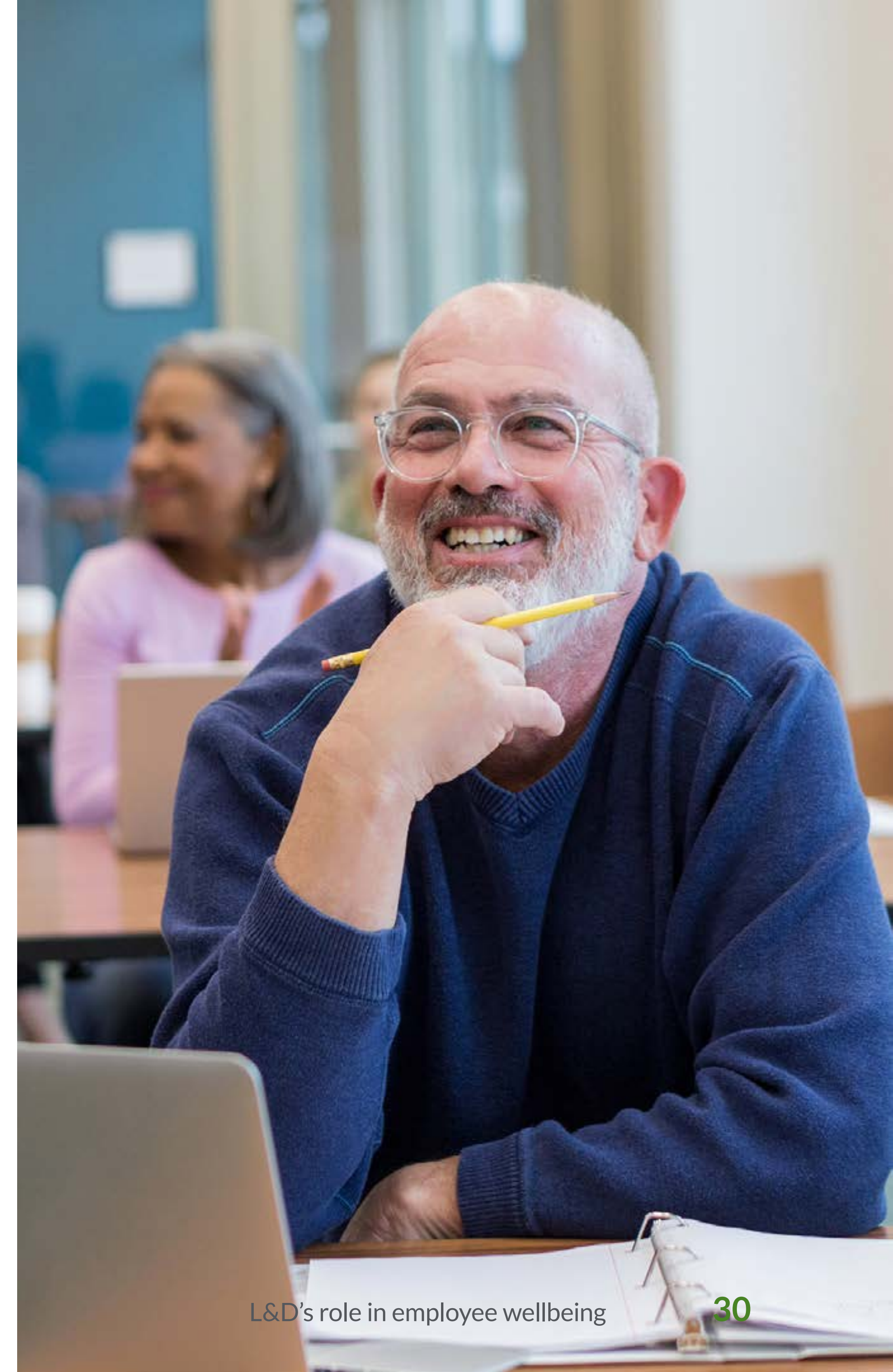
A loud and proud learning strategy makes a difference

It appears that the broader the range of programmes on offer and the more overt focus given to learning and development by an organisation, the broader the range of benefits. In this way, L&D can impact a wide range of organisational metrics from recruitment and retention to organisational culture to employee wellbeing.

Mark Cameron says that The 5% Club recognise the spectrum of benefits to individuals, the organisation and the UK from prioritising learning:

“The 5% Club are a discerning group and employer movement, they overachieve, and over-deliver; and they do that because they want to see a benefit to themselves and to the nation. Companies with a strong environmental, social and governance (ESG) agenda, and a deep focus on the ‘S’, inevitably have a strong employer brand and become very attractive to all workforce segments, but especially to Gen Z.

“As such, they will attract young employees, but also other segments that help with social mobility and societal cohesion, such as returners to work, Armed Forces veterans, ex-offenders and care leavers. And this link to ESG, social impact and a strong social value agenda can help win contracts too. So, not only is it a good and right thing to do, but there is also commercial benefit to be had.”





L&D contributes to an ecosystem of wellbeing support

That isn't to say that there is no need for wellbeing programmes specifically focused on mental health and stress reduction. These create a rich ecosystem of support, according to Kris Ambler of BACP, reinforcing the conclusion that it is the range of different programmes being offered which gets the greatest result:

“It's vitally important that organisations provide an ecosystem of support for their employees, which can include psycho-education awareness, and it is very important senior leaders are on board with that. We don't want wellbeing-washing. We want to see organisations making sound investments and set that down in a strategy the same way they would their financial strategy. Your financial health is very much dependent on your people.”

What does this mean for you?

1 Shout about this ROI to your C-Suite

Highlight these proven benefits of a wide range of L&D programmes to senior decision-makers in your organisation. Encourage a conversation about the secondary and tertiary benefits of offering a broader range of training rather than focusing only on the more obvious benefits.

2 Find your tribe

Seek out like-minded organisations and get inspired by what they are doing. You aren't the only ones connecting L&D with wellbeing. Being part of a network of organisations with a social purpose can give you confidence during challenging times.

3 Reframe your perspective

See your training as an interconnected ecosystem where the benefits are more than the sum of the parts. Look not only at the benefits of individual programmes but at the combined impact on a range of organisational success factors.

Finding three: L&D budgets are under threat

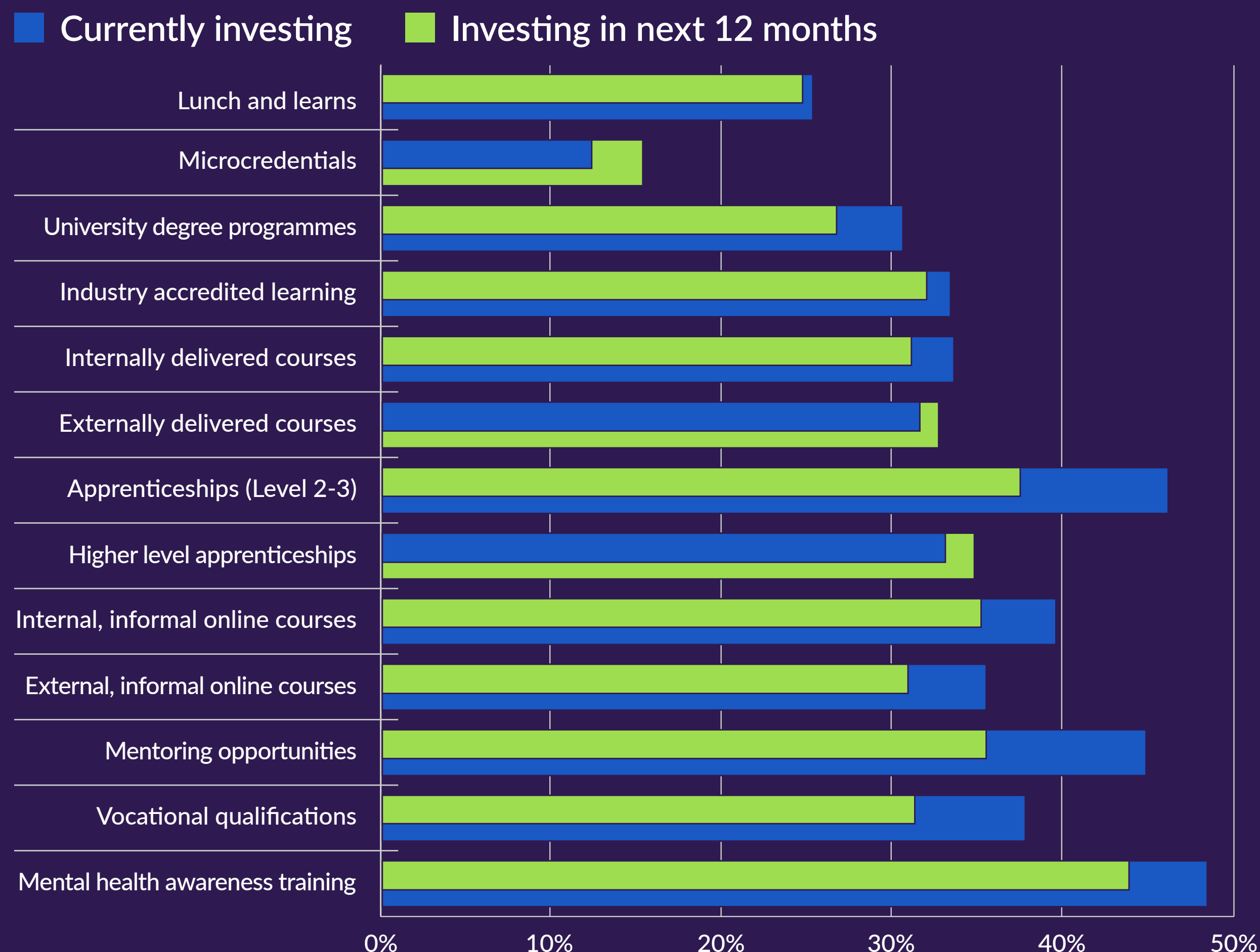
Historically, L&D has been the first to get hit with budget cutbacks. But experts warn us of the long-term harm of this decision.

Despite acknowledging the broad range of benefits, our survey shows many organisations are cutting their investment in L&D over the next 12 months.

Fewer organisations will invest in university degrees, industry accreditation, level 2-3 apprenticeships and mentoring/coaching over the next year. In particular, we will see a drop in the number of employers offering vocational training. The same trend is seen with short-term courses, particularly online courses, and mental health training. (Figure 9)

Even The 5% Club members are cutting programmes although they are starting from a stronger place.

Figure 9: Percentage of organisations (both The 5% Club and typical) currently investing in different training types vs planning to invest in next 12 months



[Follow this link for an accessible chart description](#)



The worrying result of an economic downturn?

The reduction is small in most cases, but perhaps indicative of a worrying trend which sees organisations finding short-term savings by cutting their training budgets, without fully calculating the long-term impact on recruitment, retention, skills, engagement, cultural health and stress and wellbeing.

For example, 90.7% of The 5% Club respondents, who are overtly committed to earn and learn programmes, say they invest currently in Level 2-3 Apprenticeships but only 72.2% say they will do this in the next 12 months.

Furthermore, 41.6% of typical organisations currently invest in Level 2-3 Apprenticeships and only 33.9% say they will do so in the next 12 months.

Currently 48.6% of all respondents say they offer mental health awareness training. But, in the next 12 months only 44% of respondents say they will offer these courses.

Hiring versus growing your own

This may seem like a relatively innocuous way to make financial savings and an argument could be made for buying-in the skills you need rather than growing skills internally at your own cost.

This, however, does not deliver the secondary and tertiary benefits to be gained when you train your own people. It is the very act of investing in staff development which results in greater engagement, confidence and an improvement in overall wellbeing.



Follow the link to read this [case study](#) of how software solutions company RDT addressed their recruitment challenges by growing digital skills from within.



Reactive cutbacks cause more harm than you may think

For Mark Cameron, cutting back on training is dangerously short-term thinking:

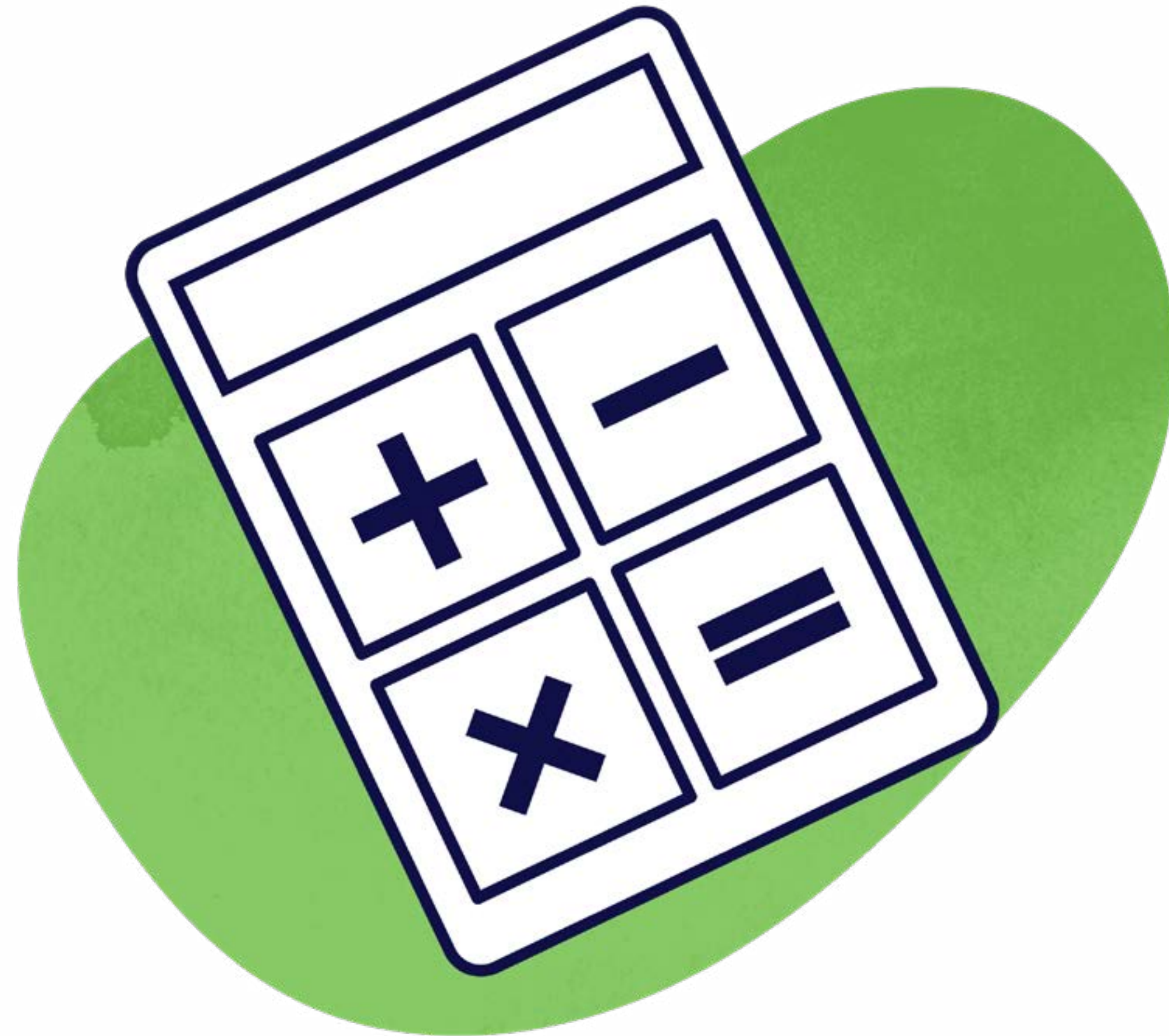
“Organisations look at where they can cut costs and they can sometimes see these schemes as a cost not a long-term benefit. The flip side is that those who hold their nerve, when they get to the other side of a downturn, they are always in a stronger position while the others are playing catch up. People should not be seen as a cost, but viewed as an asset; and like all assets they merit investment. Such an approach can give a business the strategic edge.”

Buying in skills is a fallacy

Cutting back on training, perhaps to buy in ready-trained talent instead, can also damage your employer brand, says Dr Volker Patent:

“Information seeps out of organisations. Anyone looking for a job, doing their research, may well know someone in the organisation already who says: ‘They just cut down all the investment in training’ which could damage your recruitment strategy. Anyway, it’s a fallacy to think you can just buy in the skills, because everyone else is likely doing the same.”





Continuing to invest in development is essential for business survival

At a time of uncertainty in organisations, investment in employee development can help prevent tensions in the organisation, according to Kris Ambler:

“Continuing to offer training fosters a greater sense of connection between employees and the organisation. Good employers, who want to ensure their long-term success, invest in their staff. It’s critical to survival. You’re building the foundations for the future. In industries with rapid technological change trying to maintain the competitive edge, if you don’t prioritise training you are at risk of being left behind in the marketplace.”

Cutbacks will lead to costs later down the line

The cost to businesses that cut training can also spiral, he continues:

“You’re also going to have an impact on employees – those wellbeing benefits will go. That can lead to demotivated, less productive staff, quiet quitting, burnout and then the costs begin to rack up in terms of lost time to the business versus the cost of investing in preventative interventions like counselling. Ultimately it can be more costly.”

What does this mean for you?

1 Get measuring

If you aren't already, start measuring the range of benefits from training, including the multiplier effect of a broad range of training and learning initiatives.

While not all talent has to be home-grown you may discover, as indicated by our survey, that the cost of investing in development programmes is far outweighed by the multiple benefits across a whole range of metrics.

2 Take a medium to long-term view of ROI

Consider what culture and skills you want to have in place as the economy improves. What investments today are going to put your organisation ahead of the curve then?

3 Put your money where the good data tells you to

Make sure your investments in L&D are based on solid data about what is needed in your organisation and spend your money wisely.

As Kris Ambler puts it: "Quite a lot of businesses have invested a huge amount of money on, for instance, mental health first aid training and don't know why. Avoid being reactive. Think about what your business needs are. Involve your people as much as possible in that discussion and then develop that ecosystem around people."

A stylized illustration on the left side of the page. At the top, a white outline of a rainbow arches over a small white cloud. Below this, a large green flower with five petals and several long, thin green leaves is depicted. The flower is drawn with thick green lines for the leaves and white outlines for the petals. The background is a solid dark blue.

L&D can help organisations emerge stronger

With employee wellbeing a top business priority, there is a rising demand for L&D that reduces employee stress, improves mental health awareness and provides resources for employees to regulate their own wellbeing more effectively.

In challenging financial times it can be difficult to justify increasing budgets to accommodate this demand. However, our survey – and the experts who have contributed to this report – shows that any training, no matter the type, timeframe or topic, can positively impact employee health, especially when there is a broad range on offer. Diversity here is key.

As L&D professionals, it is ever more important to be able to evidence the complex benefits that come from investing in development programmes and the unintentional costs of cutting training budgets in the medium to long term.

At the same time, try to demonstrate the multiple benefits to culture, productivity and mental health of their programmes and other initiatives. If successful, you will find yourself at the heart of the conversation about how to navigate the challenges ahead and help your organisation emerge even stronger.



Expert views across the professional spectrum

How are mental health issues being tackled within typically high pressured industries? We share case studies from the legal and healthcare professions, which demonstrate the role of L&D in supporting wellbeing issues.

Burnout and stress within the legal profession

The Open University, in conjunction with The University of Sheffield and LawCare, has developed an online training programme to support legal professionals develop resilience skills. This was in response to a recognition that the work itself can be distressing and traumatic.

The online training programme is led by Dr Emma Jones (University of Sheffield) but includes OU academic collaborators Dr Rajvinder Samra, Dr Mathijs Lucassen and Dr Neil Graffin. Dr Rajvinder Samra, a Senior Lecturer at The Open University, explains how the 'Fit for Law' course works.

“Traditionally lawyers are taught how to deal with these circumstances from a professional standpoint, not from a personal perspective. The Fit for Law course helps participants learn how to regulate their emotions by being more self-aware.

We encourage them to think about how a particular situation might make them feel and

how they might prepare to recover from that. It starts with an acceptance that some types of work are going to be excessively draining or tiring, or that working with particular people can be difficult. Learning emotional regulation and professional resilience skills helps them understand and deal with emotions in their workplace and further develop these competencies.

There is also a management development side to the training. Emotional regulation skills for managers help them read their people more effectively and respond appropriately. This matters because unless the culture supports people to take up the opportunity for this kind of training, they won't sign up. That's why it's so important for senior management to model the right behaviours too.”



Dr Rajvinder Samra

Senior Lecturer, The Open University



Reducing moral distress in the NHS

All of us have a set of personal values and a belief system. This forms a moral compass for us which transfers into our professional lives.

Moral distress is experienced when employees have a sense of the 'right' thing to do in given situations but constraining circumstances mean they cannot do what they believe is right and sometimes find themselves doing what they believe to be the wrong thing.

Dr Una St Ledger, a Staff Tutor and Regional Academic for Nursing at The Open University in Ireland, carried out research to understand the causes of moral distress in healthcare professionals, particularly in end-of-life care situations, and to develop strategies to help doctors and nurses cope with the complex ethical decisions they are called on to make every day and to manage the impact on them.

Doctors and nurses have a strong sense of duty of care to patients. They feel it is their

responsibility to ensure the right thing is done. If they feel they stood by, unable to do the right thing, or enabled the wrong thing, this can cause deep physical, mental and psychological anguish, and a sense of fractured identity, with negative consequences for personal and professional life.

This can happen due to personal constraints when people lack experience, moral courage, or the confidence to speak up or know what to do in a particular situation. The external constraints can be policies, legislation, power imbalances, workplace cultures or lack of resources, which make it difficult to do the right thing.

The research found that what was morally distressing for a novice nurse or doctor was different to what was morally distressing for a more experienced nurse or consultant. The latter group had developed the experience and skills to have flexibility within their moral confidence and a sense of greater control over their clinical practice. They were more able to navigate

morally complex situations and understand where others were coming from. Their position in the organisation enhanced feelings of autonomy.

That raised the question: ‘What strategies, support and education can we give people to help them recognise, manage and lessen the effects of moral distress on their wellbeing?’

Una believes that taking a multidimensional approach to the issue of moral distress will have the greatest impact. Skills training enables professionals to feel competent to navigate the complexity of moral decisions they will be faced with. Wellbeing support is vital because that allows them to reflect on their actions and inactions, reconcile the level of control they had in a situation, and to emotionally recover and sustain themselves long term in morally complex environments.

“Autonomy, belonging and competence support moral confidence. People who have a strong sense of autonomy feel more enabled to do the right thing and influential in ensuring the right

decisions are made at the right time, which reduces moral distress.

“When you feel you belong within your profession and within your team, you feel others are more likely to understand what might be morally distressing and you are more likely to work effectively as a team to solve problems and arrive at ethically acceptable decisions. Having competence, means professional competence and also moral confidence to understand morally challenging situations and to take steps to enable you to maintain your moral wellbeing.”



Dr Una St Ledger

Staff Tutor and Regional Academic for Nursing, The Open University in Ireland

About the author

Blaire Palmer

Leadership and Culture Specialist, Consultant and Coach That People Thing Limited

Former BBC Journalist and three-times published author, Blaire Palmer, has been coaching, provoking and challenging senior leaders and their teams for more than 20 years to help them work out how to lead their organisations in fast-changing times.

Now a popular keynote speaker, she addresses audiences around the world on modern leadership and how to create a culture where people can do their best work. She works in partnership with HR and L&D across industry sectors collaborating on Leadership

Development programme design and culture change initiatives. She writes frequently for HRZone, TrainingZone and AccountingWeb and is a judge for the Culture Pioneers and Accounting Excellence awards.

Blaire lives in the Berkshire countryside with her three dogs and her teenage daughter.

Find out more about Blaire on www.thatpeoplething.com

and connect on LinkedIn [/blairepalmer](https://www.linkedin.com/in/blairepalmer)



About:

The Open University

For over 50 years, The Open University (OU) has led the way in innovative distance learning. The University has a proven track record and rich heritage of providing workplace education solutions for employers across a range of sectors, which help workers fulfil their potential.



Specialising in developing high-quality learning materials, based on rigorous research and industry insight, the OU combines academic excellence with technological expertise to deliver flexible work-based learning. We have a range of options to suit individual requirements including apprenticeships, short courses, microcredentials, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes and free learning via OpenLearn.

The OU's flexible and adaptable approach enables consistent educational programmes to be delivered at scale, across geographically dispersed workforces. Through minimising the time needed in the classroom, the OU's blended delivery model is shaped around the needs of the employer and the role and responsibilities of the learner. This gives employees new skills and knowledge they can apply immediately to the workplace – increasing engagement and maximising return on investment.

The blended and online learning offered by the University means that our learning is a driver of social mobility. More than 37,000 OU students declaring a disability study with the OU, alongside initiatives for carers, disabled veterans

and those leaving secure environments.

This is why more than 2,800 organisations including IBM, various local authorities and the NHS, regularly choose the OU's learning solutions to develop their workforces. An impressive 76 per cent of FTSE 100 companies have sponsored their staff on OU courses. The Open University Business School has delivered transformational, high quality business and management education for over 30 years and is part of an elite and exclusive group of just 1% of business schools worldwide that are triple accredited.

Whether you're looking to develop new or current employees, contact the OU today to find out how flexible learning can work for your organisation.

To find out more about how the OU can help employers, please visit the website:

www.open.ac.uk/business or contact us on [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).

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Appendix

Figure 1: Which of the following (if any) are currently having a negative impact on employee wellbeing within your organisation?

Top causes of stress	Percentage
Cost-of-living crisis	58.3%
Workload pressures	39.2%
Covid-19	34.4%
Difficulty recruiting (under-resourced teams)	30.1%
Lack of internal career growth/opportunities	22.2%
Underskilled managers	22.0%
Underskilled employees	20.7%
Poor leadership decisions	18.8%
Toxic organisational culture	17.4%
Other	1.4%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 1 in the report](#)

Figure 2: The primary benefits of long-term skills development courses

Benefits	Percentage
More highly skilled workers	54.7%
Greater employee engagement	47.4%
Improved employee retention	47.2%
More highly skilled managers	44.3%
Increased confidence among employees	41.5%
Better promotion prospects	37.4%
Better stress and mental health management	36.2%
More creativity and innovation	35.6%
Better time and workload management	33.1%
Healthier organisational culture	33.1%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	27.8%
Other	0.2%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 2 in the report](#)

Appendix

Figure 3: The primary benefits of short-term skills development courses

Benefits	Percentage
Greater employee engagement	46.3%
Increased confidence among employees	44.7%
Improved employee retention	40.1%
More highly skilled workers	39.0%
Better stress and mental health management	38.5%
Healthier organisational culture	38.5%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	35.8%
More creativity and innovation	35.5%
Better time and workload management	33.6%
More highly skilled managers	32.2%
Better promotion prospects	29.3%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 3 in the report](#)

Figure 4: Reported benefits from different training types (long-term, short-term and mental health training)

Benefits	Long-term training	Short-term training	Mental health training
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	27.8%	35.8%	41.7%
Better time and workload management	33.1%	33.6%	30.2%
Increased confidence among employees	41.5%	44.7%	39.9%
Improved employee retention	47.2%	40.1%	37.8%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	27.8%	35.8%	41.7%
Better stress and mental health management	36.2%	38.5%	50.9%
More highly skilled workers	54.7%	39.0%	25.8%
More highly skilled managers	44.3%	32.2%	22.6%
Better promotion prospects	37.4%	29.3%	20.3%
Healthier organisational culture	33.1%	38.5%	44.2%
More creativity and innovation	35.6%	35.5%	28.1%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 4 in the report](#)

Appendix

Figure 5: Comparison of training offered by The 5% Club organisations vs typical organisations

Training offering	The 5% Club	Typical organisations
Apprenticeships	90.70%	41.60%
Higher level degree apprenticeships	79.60%	28.20%
External short courses	79.60%	26.70%
Industry accreditation	75.90%	29.00%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 5 in the report](#)

Figure 6: Benefits of long-term skills development in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations

Benefits	Typical organisations	The 5% Club
Greater employee engagement	42.1%	94.2%
Better time and workload management	33.6%	28.8%
Increased confidence among employees	38.2%	71.2%
Improved employee retention	42.1%	92.3%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	28.1%	25.0%
Better stress and mental health management	36.8%	30.8%
More highly skilled workers	50.2%	94.2%
More highly skilled managers	41.0%	73.1%
Better promotion prospects	36.6%	44.2%
Healthier organisational culture	30.3%	57.7%
More creativity and innovation	35.1%	40.4%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 6 in the report](#)

Appendix

Figure 7: Benefits of short-term skills development in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations

Benefits	Typical organisations	The 5% Club
Greater employee engagement	42.1%	72.5%
Better time and workload management	31.1%	49.0%
Increased confidence among employees	39.3%	78.4%
Improved employee retention	36.2%	64.7%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	35.5%	37.3%
Better stress and mental health management	38.4%	39.2%
More highly skilled workers	36.5%	54.9%
More highly skilled managers	29.6%	49.0%
Better promotion prospects	29.2%	29.4%
Healthier organisational culture	36.5%	51.0%
More creativity and innovation	34.0%	45.1%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 7 in the report](#)

Figure 8: Benefits of wellbeing training programmes in typical organisations vs The 5% Club organisations

Benefits	Typical organisations	The 5% Club
Greater employee engagement	38.4%	69.6%
Better time and workload management	30.7%	26.1%
Increased confidence among employees	37.9%	56.5%
Improved employee retention	34.8%	63.0%
Immediate improvement in overall wellbeing	37.9%	73.9%
Better stress and mental health management	45.9%	93.5%
More highly skilled workers	27.3%	13.0%
More highly skilled managers	23.5%	15.2%
Better promotion prospects	22.4%	2.2%
Healthier organisational culture	38.9%	89.1%
More creativity and innovation	30.2%	10.9%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 8 in the report](#)

Appendix

Figure 9: Percentage of organisations (both The 5% Club and typical) currently investing in different training types vs planning to invest in next 12 months

Training type	Currently investing	Plan to invest in next 12 months
Lunch and learns	25.4%	24.8%
Microcredentials	12.4%	15.4%
University degree programmes	30.7%	26.8%
Industry/professional accredited learning	33.5%	32.1%
Internally delivered short courses or masterclasses	33.7%	31.2%
Externally delivered short courses or masterclasses	31.7%	32.8%
Apprenticeships (Level 2-3)	46.3%	37.6%
Higher level and degree apprenticeships	33.2%	34.9%
Internal, informal online courses	39.7%	35.3%
External, informal online courses	35.6%	31.0%
Mentoring and / or coaching opportunities	45.0%	35.6%
Vocational qualifications (eg. NVQs, SVQ, PDAs)	37.9%	31.4%
Mental health awareness training	48.6%	44.0%

[Follow this link to return to Figure 9 in the report](#)