

Why are so many L&D Professionals "Open to Work" in 2025

Setting the scene for a market poised for change

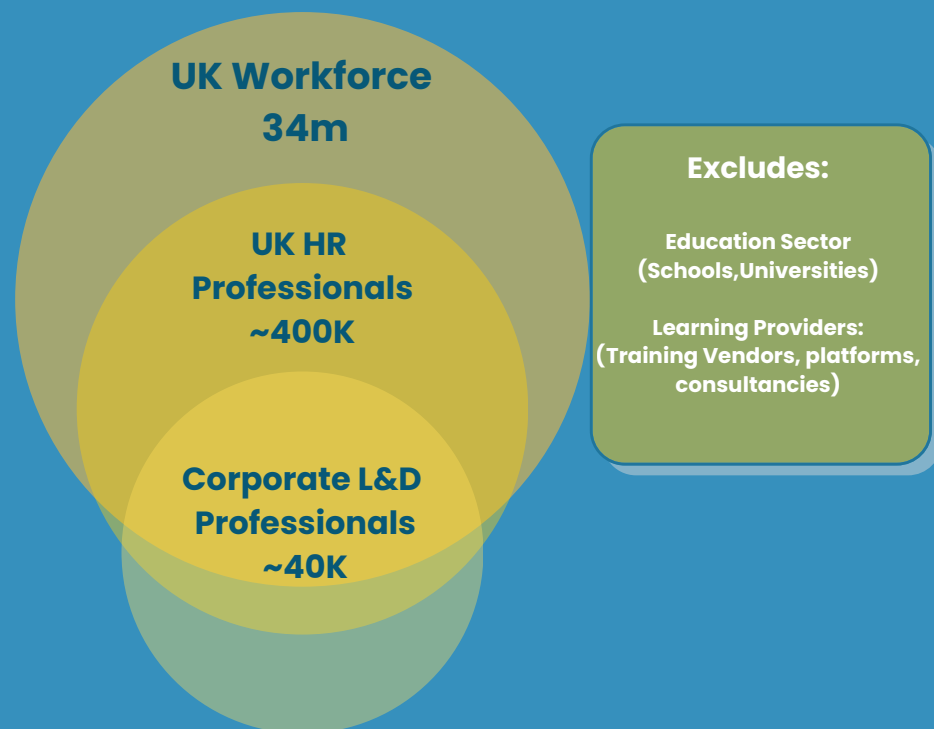
If you're a corporate Learning and Development (L&D) professional scrolling LinkedIn in 2025, the wave of "Open to Work" banners among familiar faces might feel unsettling. Colleagues are now in transition, teams are shrinking. Vacancies are fewer. And you're left wondering: is this a temporary dip or a sign of deeper disruption?

At Blue Eskimo, we've combined AI-powered market analysis with over 20 years of specialist recruitment expertise to understand what's really happening in the UK's corporate L&D job market. What we've uncovered is a perfect storm, a mix of soft redundancies, shrinking vacancies, changing job expectations, and the rapid rise of AI. But we've also found signals of adaptation, resilience, and opportunity.

This article explores the data behind the headlines: how many professionals are actively seeking roles, what's happening to vacancies, why some roles are disappearing, and where future-ready L&D professionals can focus their efforts. If you're navigating this shifting market, you're not alone and you're not without options.

As specialist recruiters in the L&D industry, we aim to go beyond vacancies and offer real insight into the forces shaping the market. This report provides context, data, and practical intelligence for anyone navigating change in 2025

Corporate L&D Talent Pool : Estimated size with UK Workforce



This analysis focusses solely on corporate L&D professionals, those employed in internal learning functions across UK businesses, excluding Education and Learning providers simply due to differing workforce dynamics, contract structures and market forces and so as not to inflate or dilute.

We modelled the UK's corporate L&D population by applying two data-based assumptions to the total employed workforce:

- UK workforce (2025): ~34 million (ONS)
- HR share of workforce: ~1.2% (Forbes, CIPD, Wikipedia/HRCI)
- L&D share of HR roles: ~15% (HRCI, industry norms)

Calculation:

$34,000,000 \times 1.2\% \text{ (HR)} = 408,000 \text{ HR professionals}$
 $408,000 \times 15\% \text{ (L\&D)} = \sim 61,200 \text{ L\&D roles}$

After excluding professionals in education and learning providers (e.g. universities, training vendors), we estimate ~40,000 corporate L&D professionals employed within UK businesses.

Sources: Office for National Statistics (ONS), HRCI role breakdown, Forbes HR benchmarks, and internal benchmarking by Blue Eskimo.

The corporate L&D job market in 2025 feels more competitive than it has in years. Despite a relatively static UK economy, many learning professionals are open to work — not due to a single disruption, but because of a convergence of structural shifts.

Our analysis suggests that around 2,550 corporate L&D professionals (6.4%) are actively seeking roles. This figure represents a rolling snapshot, not an annual total, and reflects those currently in the market due to redundancy, fixed term contract completions, career breaks, or voluntary exits. With an estimated 1,100 open vacancies in August 2025, that's an average of 2.3 active, qualified candidates per role, though for many roles, competition is far higher, and applicant volumes also include those currently employed.

The drivers behind this supply pressure break down as follows (snapshot estimate, August 2025):

- Redundancies (12-month rolling estimate): ~1,000
- Fixed-term contracts ending: ~400
- Voluntary exits (burnout, workload, reactionary): ~400
- Soft involuntary exits (e.g. managed exits): ~750

Our estimate of 2,550 active job seekers in August 2025 reflects a point in time view. It incorporates those recently exited from roles, many of whom remain inmarket for several months. While we model annual L&D exit rates at 2–3%, the number of active job seekers at any given time is shaped by hiring speed, market sentiment, and internal movement.

This pressure is intensified by a drop of 56,000 UK job vacancies between April and June 2025, bringing the total to 727,000 (ONS 2025). With 71% of L&D teams expecting flat or reduced budgets (Blue Eskimo 2025) and 27% of private sector firms planning redundancies, largely in response to a 15% rise in National Insurance Contributions (CIPD Q1 2025), the L&D market is facing a critical moment of reset.

Qualified **L&D** Candidates per Vacancy



“In 2025, job competition varies widely. For every L&D vacancy, there are between 1.58 and 3.85 qualified **active job seekers. Our modelled average is 2.3.”**

Is 2.5% Too High? Why It’s a Fair Estimate

Redundancy in corporate L&D may seem low on the surface. The official UK redundancy rate sits at 0.39% per quarter, which roughly doubles when annualised to around 1.56%. However, our analysis applies a probability based adjustment, estimating a higher 2.5% annual redundancy rate for corporate L&D professionals. This accounts for the unique pressures facing the function in 2025 including budget cuts, AI-driven role redesign, and restructuring.

L&D roles are often among the first to be consolidated or deprioritised during change, making the profession disproportionately affected compared to the broader workforce. Our estimate is not speculative. It reflects real world observations, vacancy tracking, and consistent patterns among displaced candidates.

While headline redundancy figures may seem modest, they often miss softer forms of workforce exit including fixed term contract non renewals, managed exits, and internal redistribution. Given these trends, we believe a doubling of the national average is both fair and reasonable when viewed through the lens of today’s corporate learning landscape.

But it’s not just about exits, the time it takes to secure a new role has grown significantly, especially in a market where vacancy levels remain low. This extended job search cycle has created a backlog of qualified professionals still actively seeking work, even months after their initial exit.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.5% Redundancy in L&D Annualised | ONS UK Averages (0.39% per Quarter) 1.5% annualised |
| 2.5% Redundancy In L&D Annualised | Aligns with data such as PWC AI jobs Barometer and the assumption that some L&D jobs are disproportionately affected 27% of Employers planning redundancies in 2025 (CIPD) |
| 2.5% + Redundancy in L&D (Upper End) | However, this likely includes: Project roles Fixed-term contracts Broader “leaving due to restructure” scenarios |

If the number of professionals actively seeking L&D roles has grown, how many roles are actually out there to be filled?

Based on vacancy tracking and employer data, we estimate that in August 2025 there were between 700 and 1,450 open corporate L&D roles across the UK, with a realistic working midpoint of around 1,100 vacancies. These figures focus on roles within internal learning teams and exclude freelance gigs, training providers, and the education sector.

In reality there can be duplication, some roles may still be advertised yet filled and some roles could be advertised but not actively being hired. This number is based entirely on an estimate.

When compared to an estimated 2,550 job seekers, this translates to a ratio of approximately 2.5 qualified professionals for every available role. In some categories such as learning design, digital content, or mid-level generalist roles, that ratio is likely even higher. Anecdotally as recruiters we have seen extremely high application rates for roles, application rates that are unprecedented in some cases.

This imbalance helps explain why many skilled candidates remain in the market longer than expected, and why competition is fiercer than in previous years.

It's also part of a broader trend. Vacancy levels across the UK have declined for 36 consecutive months, and corporate L&D has seen a steeper-than-average contraction. While this isn't a collapse, it does represent a slow erosion of opportunity, particularly in sectors tightening their budgets or consolidating teams. Fewer roles. Longer waits. More people applying. And for many in the profession, that pressure is being felt in real time.

L&D Vacancies at a Glance – Aug 2025



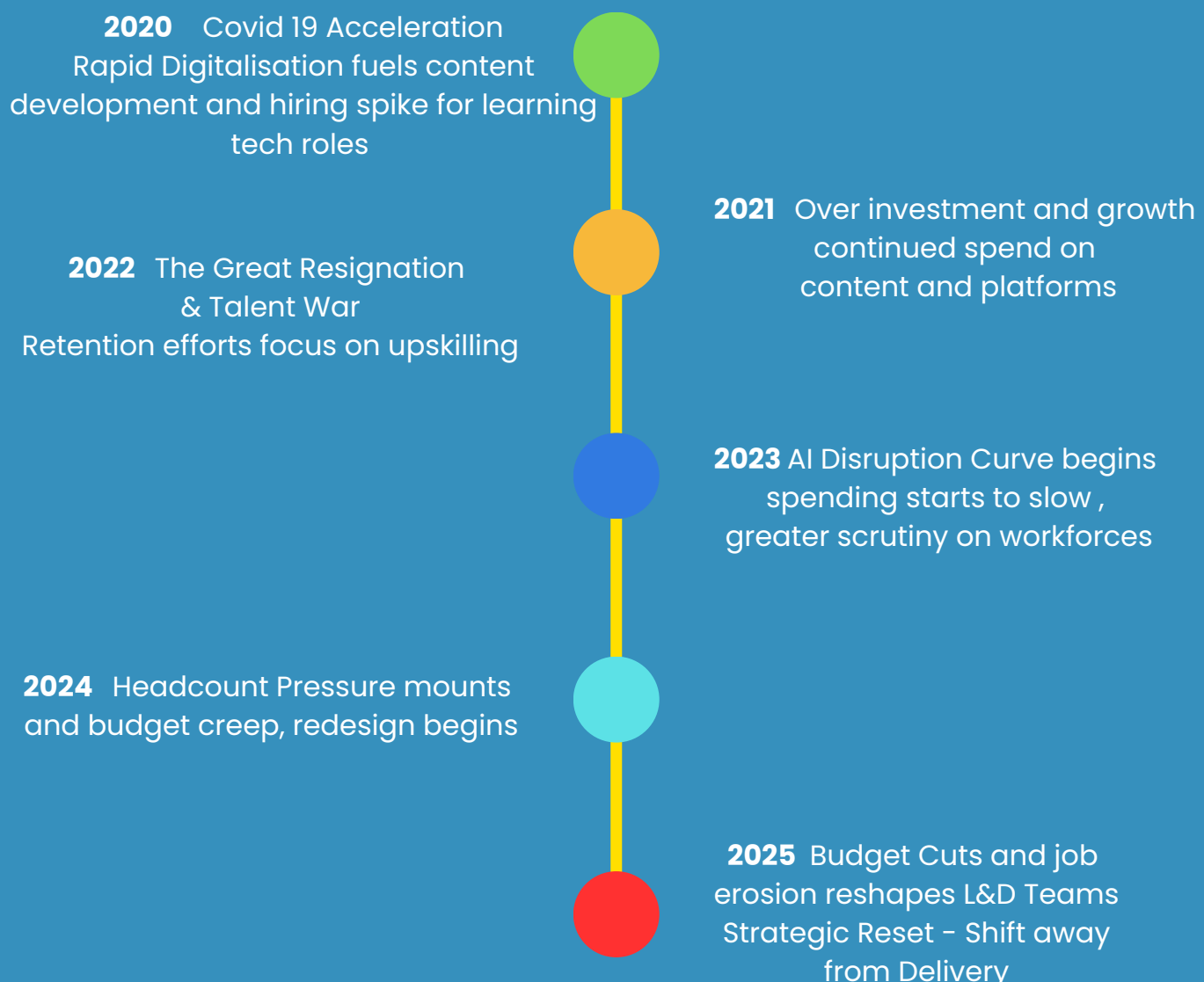
How We Estimated This

- Based on ONS Labour Market Data (727k UK vacancies)
- 0.1%–0.2% estimated to be corporate L&D roles
- Adjusted using Blue Eskimo vacancy trends and AI modelling

The current challenges in the corporate L&D job market didn't emerge overnight , they're the result of five years of accelerated change. In the wake of the pandemic, learning teams experienced rapid growth. Budgets expanded to support digital transformation, hybrid enablement, and employee retention during the Great Resignation. Organisations invested heavily in learning platforms, tools, and headcount.

By 2023, that growth began to tip into saturation. L&D teams were stretched across multiple systems, content pipelines grew bloated, and many leaders began to question the return on investment. Then came AI. In 2024–2025, generative tools like ChatGPT and Synthesia began to outpace human content creation in both speed and efficiency. As AI reshaped job roles across organisations, L&D found itself both impacted and responsible for enabling others, all while facing hiring freezes, budget cuts, and role redesign.

Today's slowdown is less a crash and more a strategic reset. It reflects the weight of accumulated changes, and now automation converging on a profession at the heart of workplace transformation.



Why are so many on the move?

The data shows a corporate L&D workforce under strain, with rising job seeker volumes, reduced vacancies, and a shrinking pool of internal roles. But what's driving so many professionals to market in 2025? The answer lies in a convergence of forces reshaping the profession from the inside out.

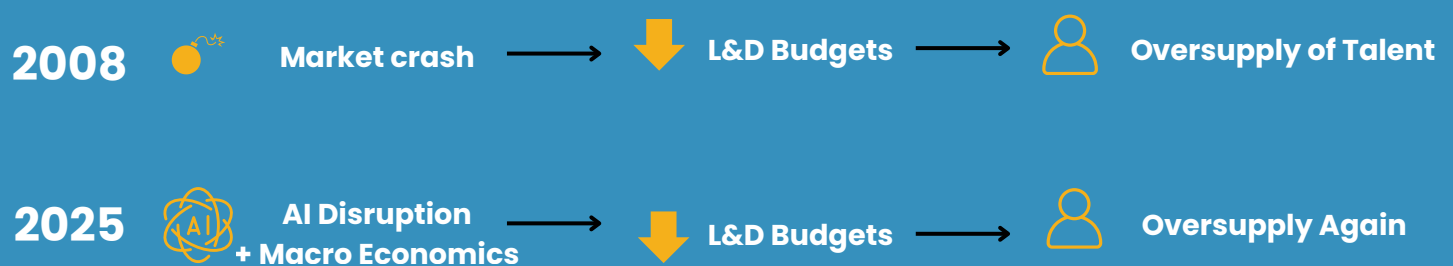
First, L&D budgets have come under pressure. This is referenced by many sources including our own annual survey data. Many organisations have paused non-essential hiring, deferred programme investment, or opted to stretch existing teams further. In this environment, hiring freezes and attrition without replacement have become common, leaving previously stable roles unfilled or consolidated. Mid-Senior level and content-focused roles appear especially affected.

Second, the impact of AI is being felt, not just as an L&D sector disruptor, but as a quiet force of automation and role redesign. From content generation to performance support, AI tools are beginning to replace some of the more manual, repetitive tasks in learning teams. While this doesn't always result in job losses, it is changing the shape and scope of roles, particularly in areas like instructional design, digital content, and coordination. Roles are evolving faster than many organisations are hiring.

Wider AI impact

AI also has a much more significant impact in L&D, specifically the automation and transformation of roles and technologies across the workforces for which L&D is responsible for training and developing. This impact is potentially highly significant for those unable to adapt and engage with stakeholders to influence and affect change.

In 2025, L&D teams are no longer just designing training for traditional competencies, they're expected to support widespread upskilling and redefinition of work. Roles in customer service, marketing, data analysis, finance, compliance, and operations are being reimaged by AI. Employees need to develop new digital fluency, judgment, prompting skills, and the ability to work alongside algorithms. This creates urgent demand for fast, scalable, AI-literate training yet paradoxically, it seems many learning teams are being downsized or restructured at the very moment they're most needed.



Is the market as bad as 2008?

At first glance, the L&D slowdown in 2025 doesn't match the sheer scale of the 2008 financial crisis. Back then, UK unemployment peaked at 8.4%, and over 147,000 redundancies were recorded in a single quarter. By contrast, 2025's overall unemployment rate sits at 4.7%, with 99,000 redundancies in the most recent quarter. But the comparison masks a critical difference: the targeted nature of today's disruption, and the opportunity it presents.

Where 2008 was a systemic financial collapse, 2025 is a skills based correction (along side macro economic challenges), accelerated by technology, shifting priorities, and evolving job demands. Within corporate L&D, we estimate jobseeker activity is disproportionately high 6–7% of the workforce or around 2,550 professionals. But this isn't just about cost-cutting; it's about roles being redefined, functions merged, and expectations transformed. The rise of AI has both streamlined some traditional learning tasks and created demand for entirely new capabilities, from prompt engineering to digital enablement and adaptive learning design.

What makes 2025 different, and potentially more hopeful is the runway for recovery. In contrast to the prolonged stagnation after 2008, today's market is already adapting. A recent Forbes study (2024) found that 40% of organisations are actively upskilling their workforce in AI-related competencies, and many are beginning to reframe learning as a strategic enabler rather than a cost centre. For L&D professionals who can reposition their expertise, particularly in data, AI, behavioural change, and capability building the market may tighten before it rebounds, but it's shifting toward their strengths.

Conclusion

Navigating Change with the Right Support

The corporate L&D job market in 2025 is challenging, but it's not without direction. As roles evolve and competition increases, staying informed, adaptable, and connected has never been more important. At Blue Eskimo, we understand the nuances of the learning profession because it's all we do. Whether you're exploring your next opportunity, navigating career uncertainty, or seeking to hire a future fit L&D professional, we're here to help with honest advice, deep sector knowledge, and access to the most relevant roles and candidates in L&D.



Expert career guidance and support



Market Insight and salary benchmarking



Tips and support including AI Skills

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