

# Online Learning in a Post-Pandemic World

and its wider role in learning and development



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# Executive summary

Online learning has seen a dramatic increase in popularity over the past decade as more and more businesses look to find a learning and development strategy that is suitable for them. We will explain why online learning has become a key learning strategy and the changing of mindset from more traditional learning methods to innovative and more flexible solutions. We will also look into why the recent Covid-19 pandemic has meant that online learning has and will continue to play a vital role in supporting the upskilling of staff, ensuring they are ready to rise to the workforce challenges of the upcoming years.

The rise of online learning has traditionally been attributed to two or three key facets that synchronous learning methods such as face-to-face struggle to meet - namely lack of time, inconvenience in time or venues to learn, or struggling to meet the cost financially to take part in learning. It is true that online learning has the advantage here, but recent research has also shown that online learning is now seen as the leading method in how people retain information.

**Research from the World Economic Forum shows that on average students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom - whilst also taking 40-60% less time to complete than traditional learning methods.**

Covid-19 saw companies and trainers turn to online learning for the first time out of necessity. Companies who traditionally used face-to-face training moved online as a way of effectively keeping staff up-to-date on the latest guidance and legislation changes and now plan to stay training their staff through online companies.

Meanwhile, trainers have had to adapt their working practices and can see the value of online learning as a means of effectively training more people, whilst also keeping costs down for both them and their clients.

The other impact of Covid-19 has been to exacerbate fault lines in the workforces of major sectors - notably catering and retail, construction and health and social care. Businesses and organisations face upheaval in the coming years as they come to terms with the evolution of the workforce due to automation and labour shortages. This means that retaining staff is more vital than ever and online learning is one way that staff can be encouraged to remain in their position by offering courses designed to upskill and maintain compliance.

To meet the needs of an ever changing workforce and skills shortages, online learning gives businesses value for money, flexibility and high quality education. Online learning shouldn't, therefore, be viewed as a threat to traditional learning methods such as face-to-face, but rather be viewed as an effective way to supplement and enhance a positive learning culture.



**Richard Anderson**  
Head of Learning and Development  
at High Speed Training

# Introduction

As a leading provider of online learning, High Speed Training has supported **over two million learners** in gaining accredited certificates.

Where once this form of training was viewed with scepticism and derided as an option lacking rigorousness and only affordable to large companies, now it's an attractive training solution for anyone – from individuals to large corporations.

**But why has online learning become so popular and how has the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to this?**

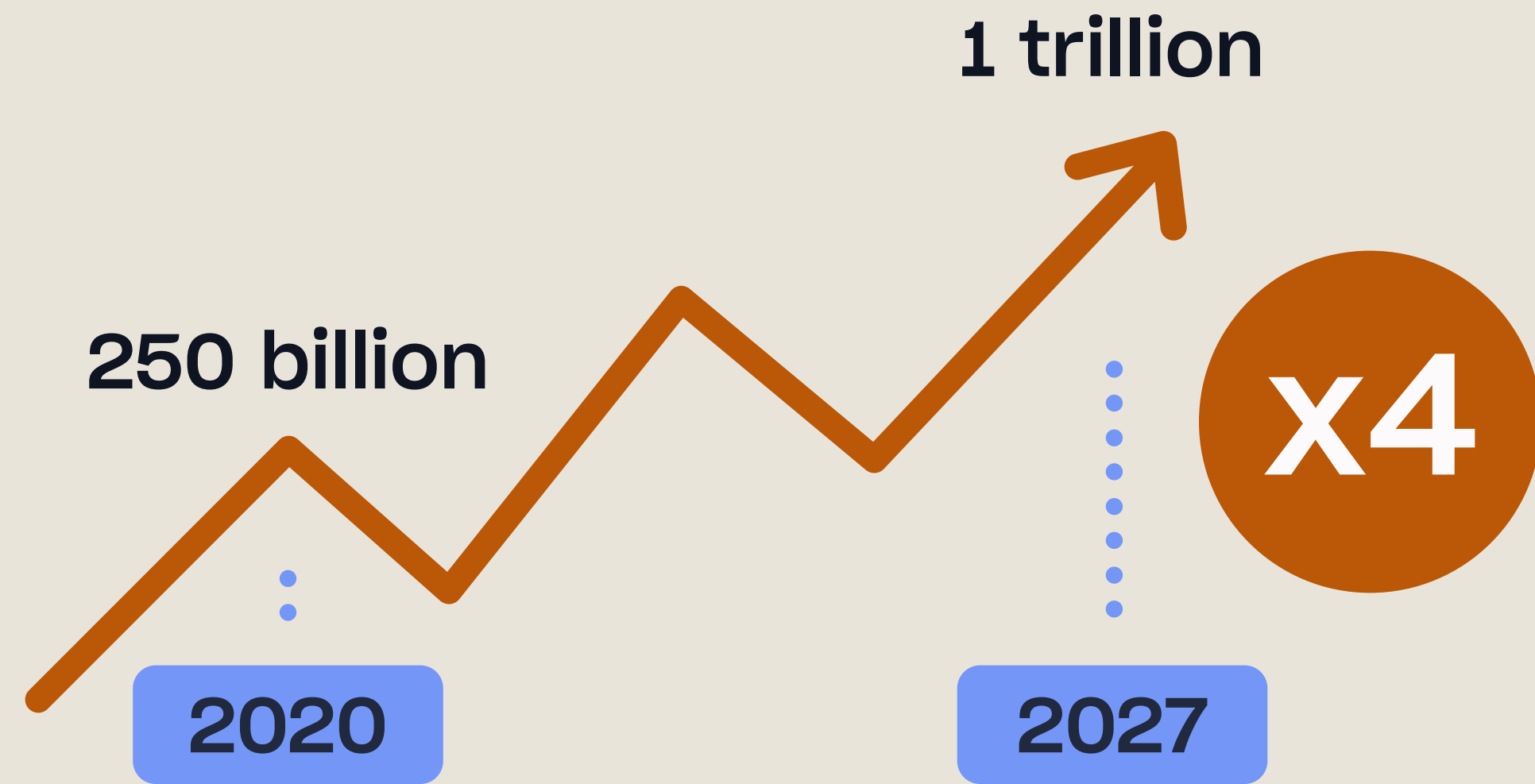
To understand the shift in thinking, we look at the traditional benefits of learning online, and then look at the changes in thinking about the usefulness of learning, through a mix of research and case studies. The past decade has seen academics and business leaders unite in their praise for online learning for both practical and pedagogical reasons.

We also examine how the pace of change that businesses face to meet an evolving workforce leaves online learning best placed to form a key part of a learning and development culture. We look at how businesses have transformed their approach since 2020 and how attitudes amongst traditional trainers have switched to adapt both an asynchronous and synchronous style of teaching.

Moreover, we examine how key sectors are witnessing shifts in skills needs and staff shortages which have not been so significantly felt in years. To counter this we look at the role that online learning could play in order to rapidly upskill the UK workforce in order to meet the ever changing needs.



# Industry growth



The global online learning industry is expected to quadruple from 250 billion dollars in 2020 to over 1 trillion by 2027.

This continues the dramatic growth of over 900% since the start of the 21st century. More and more people are turning to online learning as part of their company training culture and it is clear to see why this is the case.

# Overcoming barriers

A recent report from the World Economic Forum found that barriers to learning included issues such as lack of time and financial constraints, and it's not surprising that these are barriers which online learning can help to overcome.

## Current barriers to learning



of adults claim they do not participate in training because they lack time due to work commitments.



report a lack of time due to family responsibilities.



mention a lack of financial resources.



state that training took place at an inconvenient time and place.

# Benefits to both the learner and business

Yet whilst traditional issues of cost and flexibility are key reasons why many turn to online learning, **research shows that there are also clear benefits to the learners.**



Online training is now seen as the leader in how people retain learning. Research from the World Economic Forum shows that on average **students retain 25-60% more material when learning online** compared to **only 8-10% in a classroom**, whilst also **taking 40-60% less time to complete** than traditional learning methods.

Online learning allows students to learn at their own pace, and at a time convenient to them, allowing for optimal learning at their own choosing.

## Learner Experience

Students can also go back and take time to go over any aspects of learning that they want to, whenever they wish. The flexibility of online learning is further enhanced when companies put the learner in control of what they learn.

Additionally, many companies like High Speed Training are looking at how the learner can take control of the information they wish to learn, through features such as tailored learning or optional modules. If learners have this level of comfort and control over when or what they learn, it naturally means that they are likely to be in a position to take on more information.

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“I really enjoyed the course and listening to the audio was very helpful. I could listen while on the train. A lot of examples, quizzes and summary of each section makes it easier to remember the main information. I feel like I can understand my students more now and provide more support.” -

**Customer Review, Dyslexia Awareness**



# Benefits to both the learner and business

It is clear that as well as benefiting learners, large organisations have a lot to gain from the switch to online learning.

A study by IBM found that their staff learned nearly **five times more material through online learning**, without any increase in the time spent. This benefit is reflected in the cost to the company. Without the need for costs for travel, room hire, instructors and equipment, along with the saving on staff time, **IBM believes they saved approximately 200 million dollars.**



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**five times more**  
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Online learning also does its bit for the environment too.



The Open University estimates that e-learning courses consume an average of **90% less energy**



and produce **85% fewer CO2 emissions** per student than conventional face-to-face courses

“Why should 30 teachers travel an average of 4 miles each to a central venue for an hours information dissemination when this can happen on Zoom.” -

**Mike Fleetham**, Director at Thinking Classroom



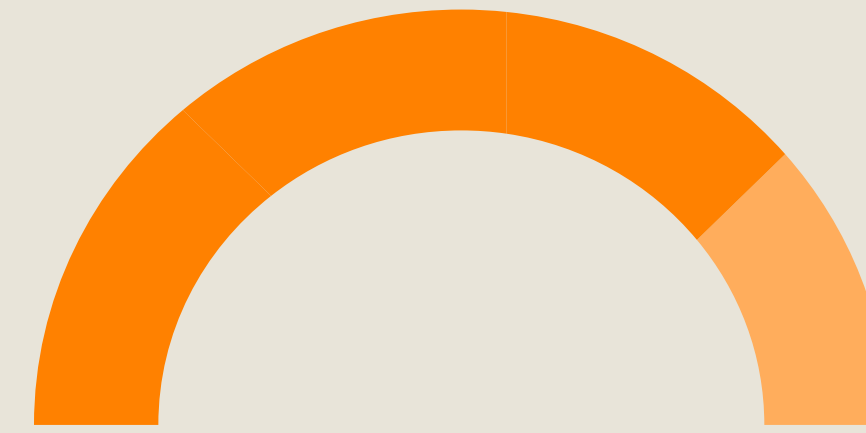
# The impact of Covid-19

## Changing Mindsets

Like all industries, the pandemic has forced e-learning to re-examine its offering and ensure that it is ready to meet the ever-changing needs of businesses and learners. Whilst online learning was perhaps previously seen as simply one potential way of training and upskilling, now it is highly regarded as a serious option for many large organisations. No longer is online learning viewed as some sort of poor relation to traditional learning, or simply a fad – Covid-19 saw attitudes towards it shift overnight.

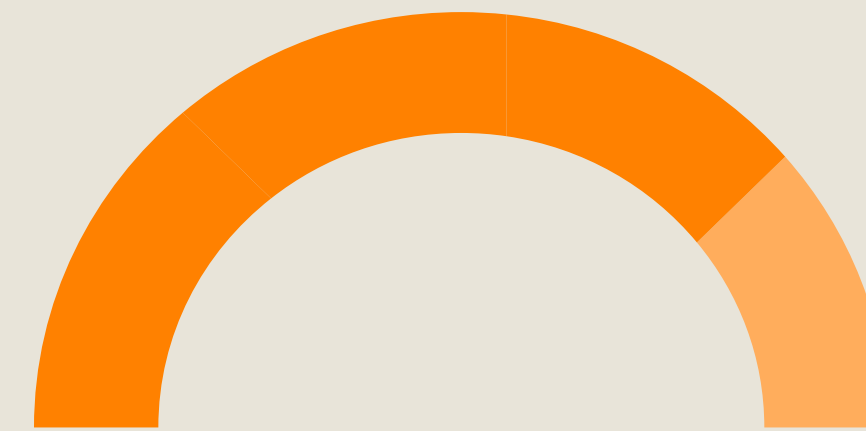
Like many training providers, at High Speed Training we recognised the need to rapidly deliver content in order to meet the ongoing challenges of Covid-19 and the ever-shifting regulation and guidance changes. Learners depended on up to date, high quality training for their teams to operate safely. We also onboarded a raft of new customers who had traditionally used face-to-face learning, so it was important to show that their need to keep workers effective and safe could be met by us.

A recent futurelearn survey of over 1000 hiring managers revealed insights into how online education has had a mindset change following the pandemic. **Three quarters of hiring managers were more likely to hire applicants with solely online education** today than they were prior to 2020. This is supported in the survey, with **75% of respondents believing online learning increases lifelong learning post-education.** Suddenly online learning was essential to keep people engaged, effective and safe.



**3/4 of hiring managers**

more likely to hire applicants with solely online education than prior to 2020.



**75% of respondents**

believing online learning increases lifelong learning post-education.

“During the times when everything had to be online, educators were able to reflect on what could and maybe should be online. We were forced to contemplate our pedagogical beliefs and practice and transform at a pace.”

“Online training became an overnight business necessity... without it I would not be operating today. Before the pandemic I experimented with Skype training sessions and demonstration lessons in my sector (education) and contributed via Zoom to a couple of international online coaching groups. None of this was a significant part of my work. For me, online learning switched from interesting to essential in the blink of an eye.”

**Mike Fleetham**

Director at Thinking Classroom

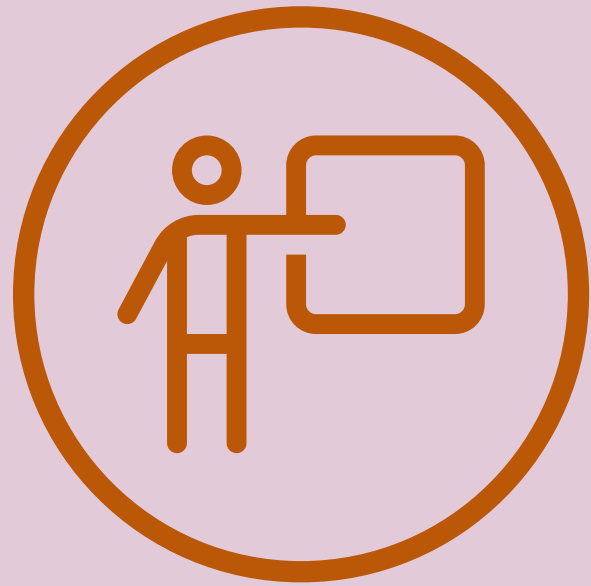


# The impact of Covid



Emma McArdle is Project Manager for Quality Assurance and Improvement in Technical Services at the University of Exeter.

Emma explained to us that the pandemic had drastically shifted how the teams were operating, and that online training in areas such as **PUWER** (Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations), **LOLER** (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations) and **DSEAR** (Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations) became the only trusted way to ensure staff were still compliant and knowledgeable about all the latest health and safety regulations that they needed.



Whilst online learning has replaced traditional learning, we do not believe that the advancement of online learning needs to displace instructor led learning.

Instructor learning can play a key role alongside online learning in a hybrid role, whereby online training can act as providing explainers, scenarios and knowledge checks on key bits of guidance, allowing the instructors to focus on quality discussion, workshops and clarifying understanding. Both Mike and Emma support this view.

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“Health and Safety is absolutely paramount to everything we do in Technical Services at the University of Exeter. We have staff who work in highly legislated environments such as laboratories and workshops, and we need to be confident our staff have the skills and expertise they need to work safely within those spaces....online training allows us to provide the same high standard of training to every member of our staff no matter where or when they work.”

**Emma McArdle**

Project Manager at the University of Exeter

# Working in tandem with traditional learning

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**79%**

of L&D pros are looking towards more online learning

The case study from the University of Exeter is one which has been repeated all over the world, with recent research showing that 79% of L&D pros are looking towards more online learning as part of the learning culture.

“We’re hoping to have a hybrid approach to training when the situation allows, where some key training courses are provided in person, especially those with a traditionally practical element. However, the plan is that we will stick with online training for theory based courses which provide us with that element of flexibility which you just can’t get from in-person sessions.”

Emma McArdle

“We now know what is possible with online learning - because we had to know. Rather than limit ourselves to face to face experiences, wider Learning strategies can now include features where online learning works far better.”

Mike Fleetham

# Evolving skills shortages since Covid-19

Covid-19 has also seen the need for a change in mindset for many L&D professionals working across key sectors in the UK.

**29.5%**

of respondents thought that employee skills have deteriorated over the past 2 years

A recent people1st report into the hospitality and retail industry said that 29.5% of respondents thought that employee skills have deteriorated over the past 2 years, due to a loss of staff.

**72.2%**

of respondents state that training needs have increased due to the pandemic

Skills for Health reported that in the healthcare sector, a key insights survey showed that 72.2% of respondents state that training needs have increased due to the pandemic.

**22.7%**

report that they have lost skills due to the changing nature of the job or due to staff retirements/leaving

22.7% report that they have lost skills due to the changing nature of the job or due to staff retirements/leaving. This sector, like many others, is struggling to recruit new people to meet these needs.

“Without concerted action by employers, two-thirds of the UK workforce could lack basic digital skills by 2030, while more than 10 million people could be under-skilled in leadership, communication, and decision-making,”

**McKinseys** ‘The Economic case for reskilling in the UK: How employers can thrive by boosting workers’ skills’  
November 2020

**It is therefore clear that Covid has only exacerbated the lack of investment into the skills market.**

Notably, far more digital skills alongside more traditional core skills such as leadership, emotional intelligence, and communication skills will be seen as critical to the UK workforce in 2030. A recent McKinsey report into the state of the UK workforce showed that **up to a third of the UK workforce will need transitioning into new roles or skill levels over the next decade.**

# Summary and conclusions

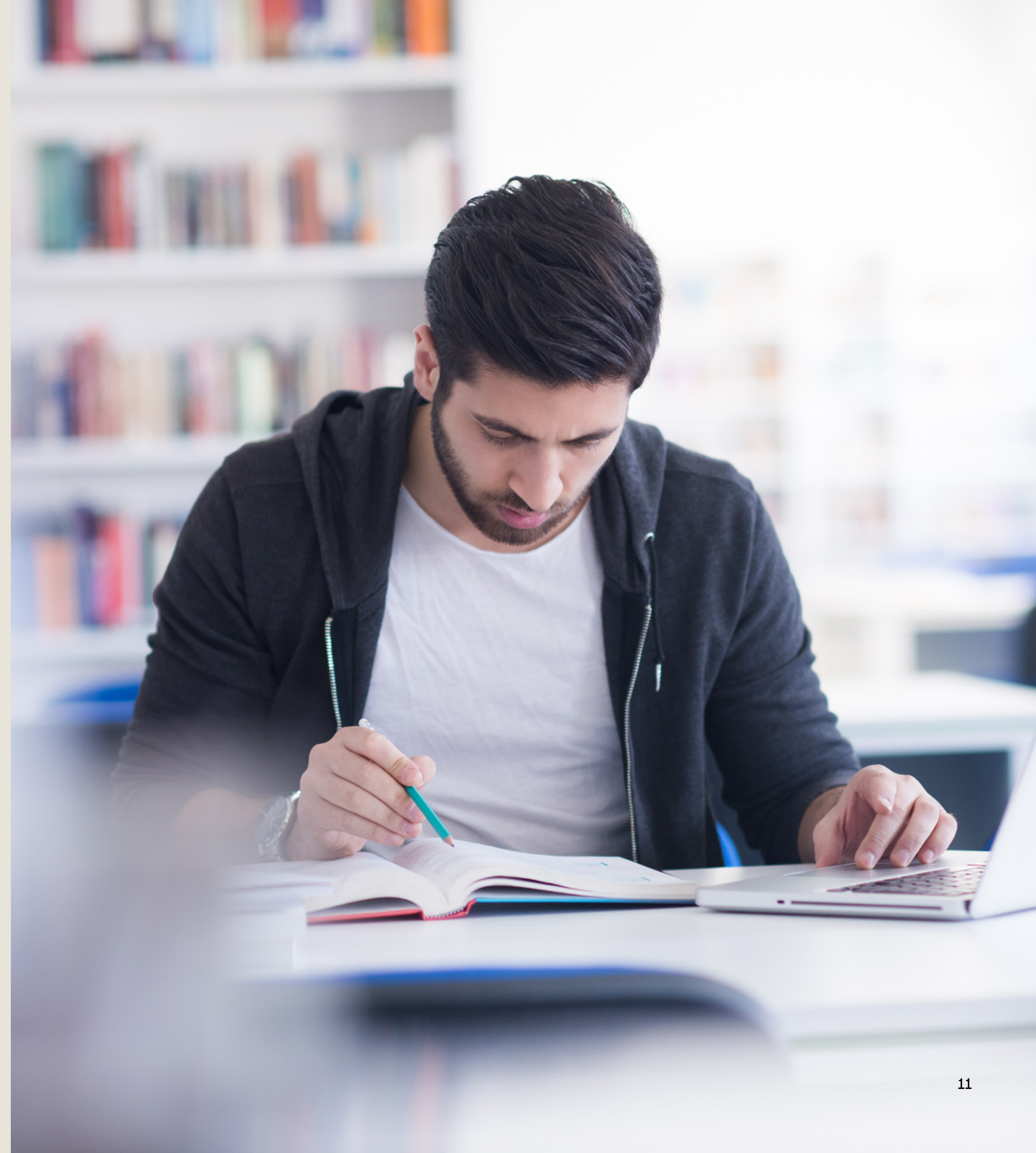
Online learning can play a vital role in your company's learning and development strategy.

Whether this is by meeting the needs of an ever-evolving workforce, or keeping employees up-to-date with the latest guidance and legislation, with its flexibility and increasing quality, it's not hard to see how online learning has developed into a key part of training in many businesses. Furthermore, it would appear that giving individuals the opportunity to learn at their own pace, and at a time convenient to them, has great benefits and can break down traditional barriers to learning for many people. With people learning at their own pace and at their own comfort, it is not surprising that knowledge retention is now seen to be higher when learning online.

Yet the flexibility of online learning means that it is not a threat to traditional means or seeks to replace it. Instead, it can be used to enhance the existing culture of learning you have in your company, through refresher training, or upskilling existing

employees, whilst allowing other methods such as face-to-face to be used for practical purposes that online cannot serve.

The ever changing nature of the jobs industries provides many challenges for businesses and their workers. Traditionally strong sectors are experiencing skills shortages, whilst others have felt a devastating impact from the pandemic. Meanwhile the advancement of technology reaching into roles that have traditionally been carried out manually will see a major reset of the UK employment market in the coming decade. As businesses seek to bring their employees up to speed with these changes, online learning can provide a great way to build up strong compliance and personal development skills, allowing learners to take cost effective training which will keep them engaged, effective and safe in the workplace.





# Further reading and references

[COVID-19: The impact on skills in hospitality, retail, travel and aviation](#)

[The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever](#)

[Adapting workplace learning in the time of coronavirus](#)

[LinkedIn's 4th Annual 2020 Workplace Learning Report](#)

[The Future of Learning and Development: A New Paradigm or an Acceleration of Existing Trends?](#)

[Case Study: Compliance at the University of Exeter](#)



From  
High Speed Training