ACCA | Think Ahead

DEVELOPING THE SKILLS OF THE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS AND FINANCE PROFESSIONAL

About ACCA

ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global professional body for professional accountants.

We're a thriving global community of **233,000 members** and **536,000 future** members based in **178** countries and regions, who work across a wide range of sectors and industries. We uphold the highest professional and ethical values.

We offer everyone everywhere the opportunity to experience a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. Our qualifications and learning opportunities develop strategic business leaders, forward-thinking professionals with the financial, business and digital expertise essential for the creation of sustainable organisations and flourishing societies.

Since 1904, being a force for public good has been embedded in **our purpose**. In December 2020, we made commitments to the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** which we are measuring and will report on in our annual integrated report.

We believe that accountancy is a cornerstone profession of society and is vital helping economies, organisations and individuals to grow and prosper. It does this by creating robust trusted financial and business management, combating corruption, ensuring organisations are managed ethically, driving sustainability, and providing rewarding career opportunities.

And through our cutting-edge research, we lead the profession by answering today's questions and preparing for the future. We're a not-for-profit organisation.

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About this summary research report:

In 2021 ACCA published our globally relevant research [Professional Accountants at the Heart of Sustainable Organisations](#). The research examined and linked the drivers of change shaping sustainable organisations to the next decade of work for professional accountants. Further, the research identified the core capabilities of these professionals, whom business and society expect to be sustainable business and finance professionals.

In this research report, we explore why and how learning and development (L&D) programmes should:

- develop the capabilities required of these sustainable business and finance professionals
- accommodate the diverse set of learner characteristics
- respond to the trends that are changing L&D design and delivery; and
- incorporate the many factors impacting the L&D business model.

The outcome from this work is the six dimensions (features and qualities) of good L&D that learners should seek in their L&D programmes and educators should apply in developing, implementing and monitoring their strategies.

In addition to this summary report, there is a primary version of this report providing more detail specifically for educators. Of course, learners and other stakeholder may also find it useful.

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Foreword

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The learner population is growing, becoming more diverse and, with this, requesting tailored learning and development interventions that many of the latest educational innovations support. To capture this opportunity, educators must proactively take ownership of their destiny: if not, learners will look elsewhere.

The total market for professional education is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.4% from the 2021 base of £5 trillion to £7 trillion by 2030 (Pearson 2020). In part, this is due to expectations of longer working lives and rapidly evolving business landscapes that dynamically modify the capabilities required of our sustainable business and finance professionals, and introduce new ones. This is where educators play an important role in developing these capabilities in professionals who, to remain relevant, must be lifelong learners.

To be effective, many educators will need to transform their business models to accommodate a wider range of learning pedagogies, ones capable of catering for the diverse set of learner characteristics of the growing population of lifelong learners.

For some educators, innovations embedding relevant learning and development (L&D) trends may also be required. These will include collecting and embedding rich data across education processes and within learning interventions, or combining personalisation and community learning in ways that may at first sight seem nonsensical.

Further, environmental and social responsibility together with economic concerns are just as relevant to the education industry as they are to other industries. Additionally, education and the accountancy profession are the focus for many policymakers and regulators, therefore educators must also appreciate evolving policy and regulation.

To help educators, learners and employers, our research evaluates the drivers for change, including why and how L&D must evolve and identifies the dimensions (features and qualities) common to good L&D. Given that all good L&D involves reflection to drive continual improvement, we suggest you reflect on the following questions, which ACCA has also asked itself, to inform your next L&D steps as an educator, learner or employer.

- How does your experience of current L&D respond to the drivers and measure against the dimensions explored in this report?

- What can be done to improve L&D offerings?

Finally, specifically for educators, what you do next can make a valuable contribution to the achievement of UN SDG 4, Quality Education, to which many of you, and we at ACCA, are committed (ACCA 2020).

Contents

Throughout this report there is hyperlinked text, highlighted in **bold blue**, which will take you to each section or figure that is mentioned (if it is on a different page). Each page that includes hyperlinked text is flagged, top right, with the link symbol.

Executive **summary**

Our research identifies the six dimensions common to good learning and development (L&D) – features and qualities comprising all that is important when developing 'fit for the future' sustainable business and finance professionals. These dimensions take account of the drivers for L&D evolution, including the:

- **capabilities required of professional accountants**
- **characteristics of the learner**
- **learning trends and**
- **factors impacting the education business model.**

For some educators and learners, L&D has undergone rapid transformation, predominantly owing to trends associated with data analysis and the digitalisation of the education process, including the content, assessment and recording of learning achievement. Data is being used to give a better understanding of the learner and their progress, and hence to create personalised learning experiences. Equally, data is used to continually improve the L&D programme and quality of tutor interventions. Digitalisation has made it possible for L&D to reach learners who otherwise would not have access to education, which is valuable as long as the risks of technology poverty and competence are mitigated.

FIGURE E1: The professional education ecosystem – the dimensions of good L&D programmes
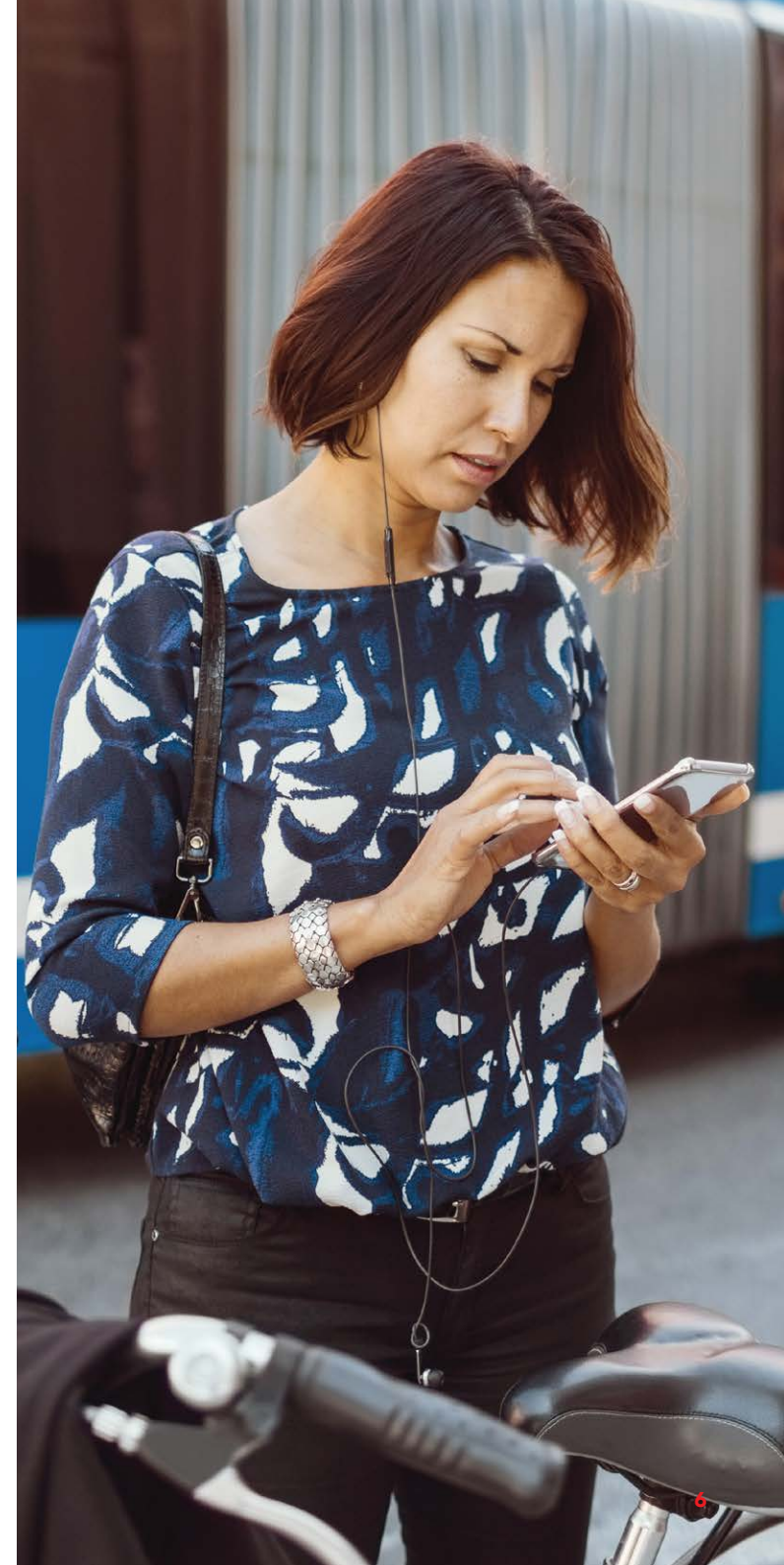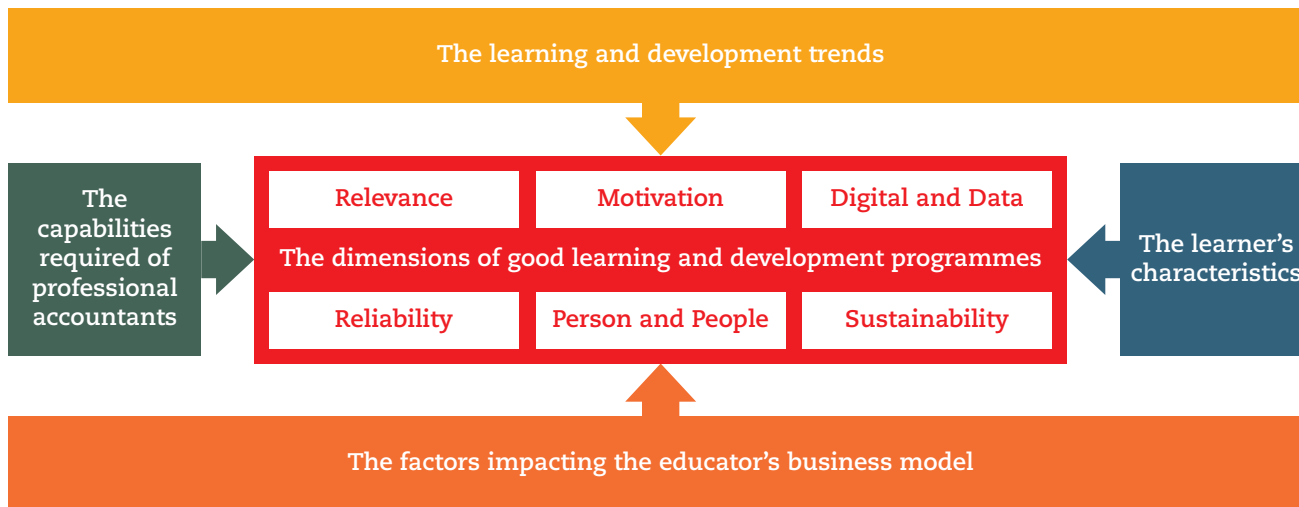
Yet for others, whether the educator or learner, L&D resembles a chalk and blackboard experience, itself revolutionary in its first attested use in 1801 (Avenia 2021)). Technology is an enabler, not the utopia of the future for L&D and should not replace our valuable and respected tutors. However, technology makes scalable some L&D innovations, for instance peer learning and gamification, that today are mostly being manually delivered.

Learners and employers are calling out for innovation, and some educators are making great strides. Some of our innovative educators are creating immersive individual and team experiences that simulate business-world scenarios so that learners can be evaluated in the context of their professional development. These educators are using gamification within their simulations, incorporating competition and informal learning to better motivate learners or enable them to experience extreme scenarios that hopefully many professionals may never encounter in the workplace but need to know how to handle.

These business simulations enable learners to practise a wide range of interconnected capabilities, especially those related to motivating oneself and others, collaborating and creating insight, before having to do it in reality in exams and at work.

Educators are having to respond to learning needs stemming from capabilities that are becoming more varied: as roles that professionals perform broaden then so too will the capabilities required. Compounding this are expectations of longer working lives, increasing the size and diversity of the learning population, and in turn introducing differing learner characteristics and needs. Therefore, while the business opportunity for educators is great, there is no single L&D solution. Learning ecosystems present a way forward to host and deliver a variety of L&D interventions, creating flexibility for learners on when, how and what kind of L&D happens. Well-designed and managed systems that can be added to over time better cater for evolving learner needs, capabilities, and L&D innovations.

Finally, there are numerous business model factors for educators to consider. Ones associated with regulation and responding to lessons learnt from the pandemic may pose challenges, for instance through introducing new processes. Nonetheless, there are also opportunities, policies driving the need for skills development and hence new business, or creating scope to contribute to a better world.

Our research identifies the six dimensions that, when embedded into L&D design and delivery, will help educators respond to these drivers. In turn, this will enable educators, learners and their stakeholders to engage positively with the following dimension defining questions, shown in Figure E2, below.

Throughout this report we make many recommendations based on what education experts around the globe do and their suggestions in response to the drivers and the dimensions, we hope you find these useful.

FIGURE E2: The dimensions of good learning and development programmes – defining questions:

Relevance	Reliability	Motivation	Person and people	Digital and data	Sustainability
Does the programme meet learner and stakeholder needs?	Can learning outcomes be trusted irrespective of the different learning approaches needed to cater for the different capabilities and characteristics of diverse learners?	Does the programme seek to understand and drive the achievement of the learning purpose and support life-long learning?	Are learners and their tutors at the heart of learning and the learning approach, at an individual and community level?	How well are digital technology and data analysis enabling the achievement of learning across content, production, delivery and monitoring?	How well are environment, social and financial sustainability issues integrated within the programme operations?

Introduction

The educator's problem that we should all care about

In a diverse global professional community, it might seem that there aren't many things we all have in common. But even if the reasons for seeking learning and development (L&D) differ, we've all experienced L&D, especially when we consider its many forms (Figure I1). Therefore, we should each have a view on the outcomes from learning because they can have an impact for generations to come. Figure I2 shows some of the good outcomes we expect from learning at its best.

Whether we form our view of desirable learning outcomes as an educator, a learner or another stakeholder, it's important to consider the big 'change driver' questions facing educators. These questions correspond to the 'ingredients' and 'recipe' of L&D, where the 'ingredients' are the capabilities acquired (ie what is learnt) and learner (the learning object), and 'recipe' is the teaching approach (ie pedagogy), which is influenced by the L&D environment.

FIGURE I1: The different forms of learning

FIGURE I2: Good outcomes learning

The key questions facing our educators include:

CAPABILITIES: how to develop the sustainable business and finance professional's capabilities?

a. **Capabilities for the roles that are yet to be defined:** according to Adecco Group, the human resources (HR) specialists, 85% of the jobs we will do in the 2030s have not been invented yet (Dehaze 2021). Further, 40% of the core skills currently used by workers are expected to change in the next five years (Andrew Jack 2021).

b. **Capabilities that are required in differing combinations for the many roles these professionals perform:** eg as set out in ACCA's Career Navigator (Figure I3), different sustainability and collaboration capabilities may be needed in developing the insights required for business transformation than for corporate reporter roles.

LEARNERS: How to cater best for a diverse learner population?

The dynamically evolving business environment is changing the skills required of professionals, and together with expectations of longer working lives is increasing the lifelong learner population and the diversity of learning needs.
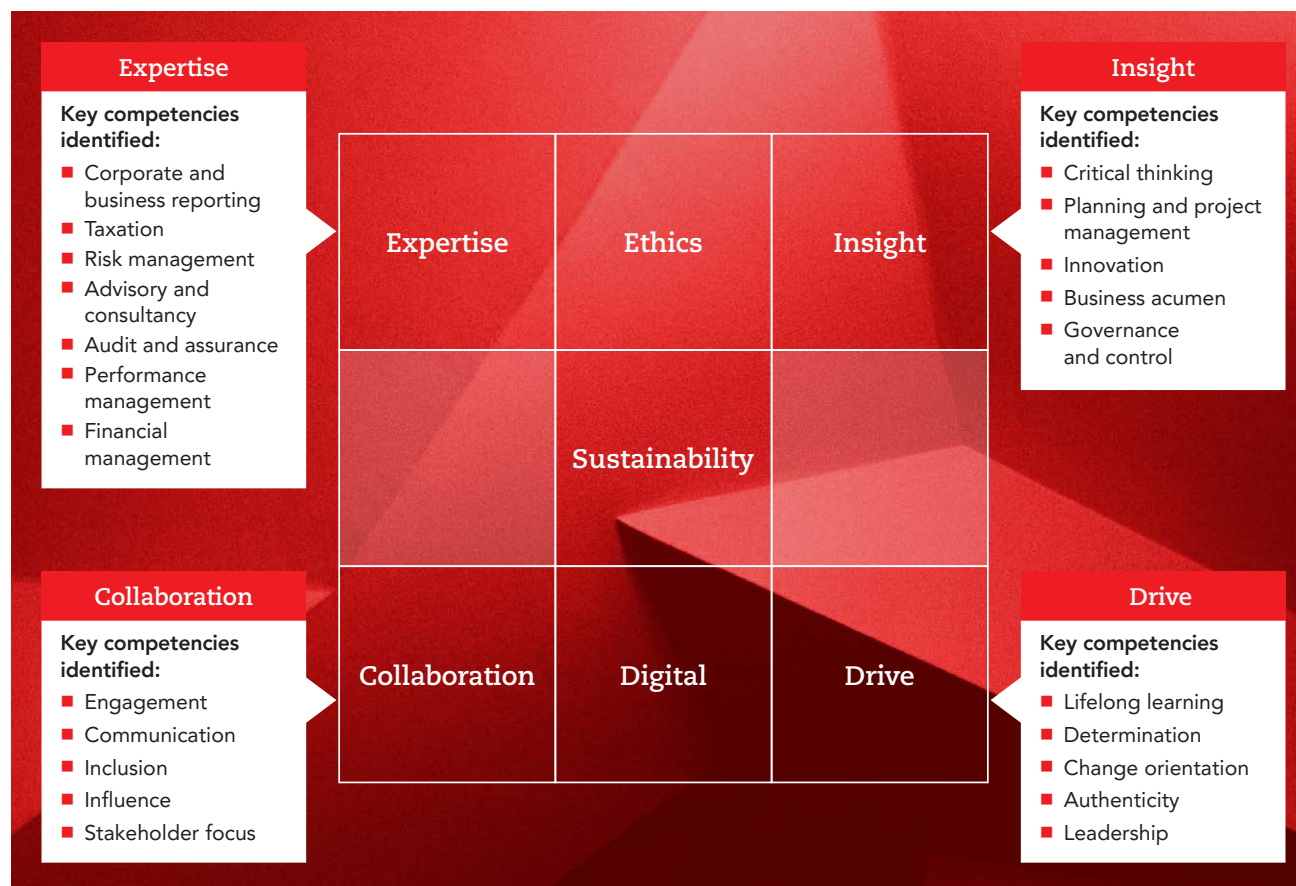
LEARNING APPROACH: What is the role of technology and other education innovations?

There's no doubt that technology has a role, but there are many views on what that role should be. Is it implementing insights derived from the enforced use of technology to accommodate Covid-19 social distancing measures? Many educational experts think technology should have a bigger role, one where data is central to successful operation and management of the education process, with artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and gamification used to drive efficiency and effectiveness, and to enhance engagement.

In summary, how should educators respond to these questions while also **realising opportunities and mitigating risks that stem from the economic, social and environmental factors that educators face today?**

FIGURE I3: ACCA Career Navigator

The ACCA Career Navigator sets out the seven core capabilities required by professional accountants, including the differing capability weightings and proficiency levels required across a career. Each of the capabilities are mapped to qualification and continual professional development (CPD) opportunities that help learners develop these capabilities.

Expertise
Key competencies identified:
- Corporate and business reporting
- Taxation
- Risk management
- Advisory and consultancy
- Audit and assurance
- Performance management
- Financial management

Insight
Key competencies identified:
- Critical thinking
- Planning and project management
- Innovation
- Business acumen
- Governance and control

Collaboration
Key competencies identified:
- Engagement
- Communication
- Inclusion
- Influence
- Stakeholder focus

Drive
Key competencies identified:
- Lifelong learning
- Determination
- Change orientation
- Authenticity
- Leadership

Source: ACCA n.d.a and ACCA 2021a

Our research

Our research answers these big 'change driver' (Figure I4) questions by considering why and how L&D programmes should best accommodate:

- the capabilities required of professionals
- the learner's characteristics
- the trends that are changing L&D design and delivery; and
- the factors impacting the L&D business model.

The outcome from this work are the six dimensions (features and qualities) of good L&D programmes that educators should apply in developing, implementing and monitoring their strategies, therefore, improving the learner experience.

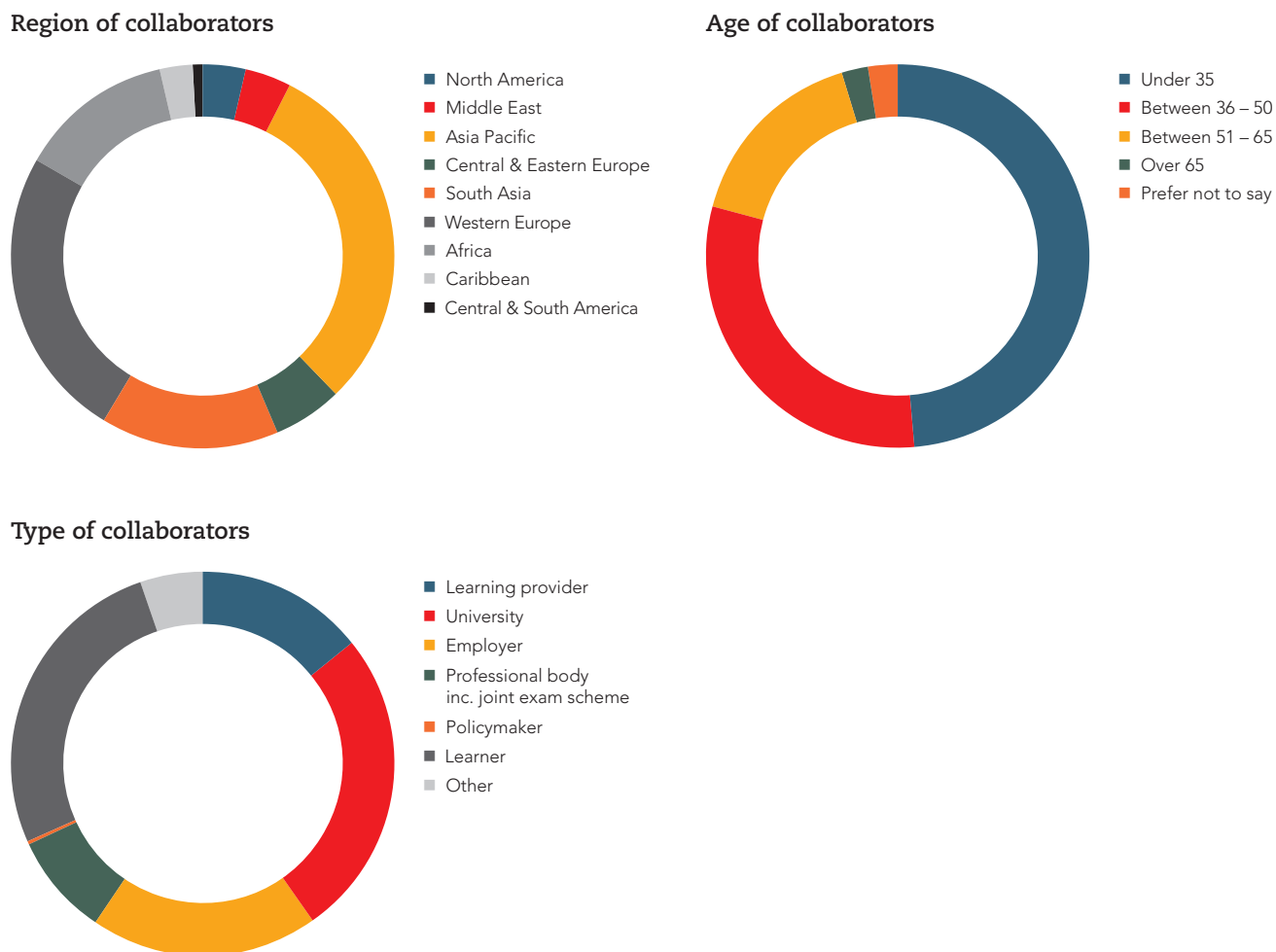**FIGURE I4:** The professional education ecosystem

The L&D trends

The capabilities required of professional accountants

The dimensions of good L&D programmes

The learner's characteristics

The factors impacting the educator's business model
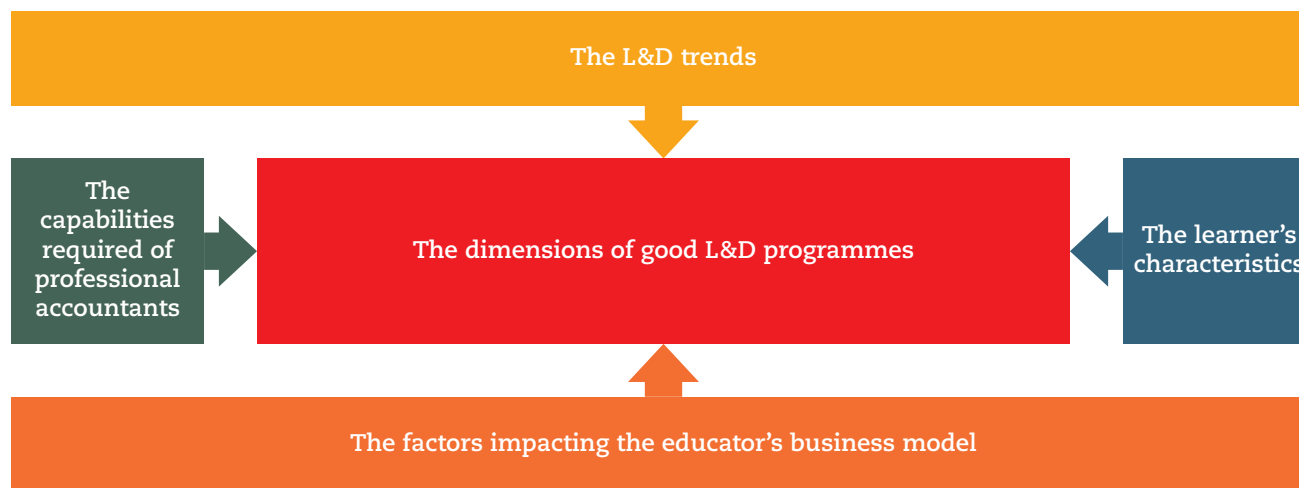
Our methodology

Just as L&D tends to be a collaborative exercise, so was our research methodology. Our rich insight is drawn from desk-based research, analysis provided by Datamaran[1], and engagement with over 800 learners, employers and educators from around the globe via a quantitative survey and roundtables. The roundtables evaluated the survey results and 'change drivers' and were attended by over 160 of ACCA's L&D experts from employer L&D functions, universities, learning providers and internally at ACCA (Figure I5). We thank all who took part.

FIGURE I5: Geographical spread, type and age range of the collaborators

Region of collaborators

- North America
- Middle East
- Asia Pacific
- Central & Eastern Europe
- South Asia
- Western Europe
- Africa
- Caribbean
- Central & South America

Age of collaborators

- Under 35
- Between 36 – 50
- Between 51 – 65
- Over 65
- Prefer not to say

Type of collaborators

- Learning provider
- University
- Employer
- Professional body inc. joint exam scheme
- Policymaker
- Learner
- Other

1   Datamaran, the external risk monitoring company, provide a fully automated solution to identify and monitor over 400 external risk factors, including ESG, on an ongoing basis – by scanning the regulatory, media and corporate disclosure environments. This helps corporate leaders with the needed integration of these accelerating risks and opportunities into core business processes: risk management, annual reporting and Board oversight

1. The **report in brief** for **educators, learners** and **employers**

Chapter 1 comprises three components of relevance to educators, learners and employers.

- ■ **Report overview:** outline of the change drivers and the dimensions of good L&D.

- ■ **The interconnected dimensions and their drivers:** explanation of the dimensions as connected to their drivers.

- ■ **The toolkit to embed the dimensions:** key steps on how to incorporate the dimensions and their drivers within L&D.

Chapter 2 explores the dimensions and drivers. **Chapter 3** provides greater detail for educators and can be found in the primary version of this report.
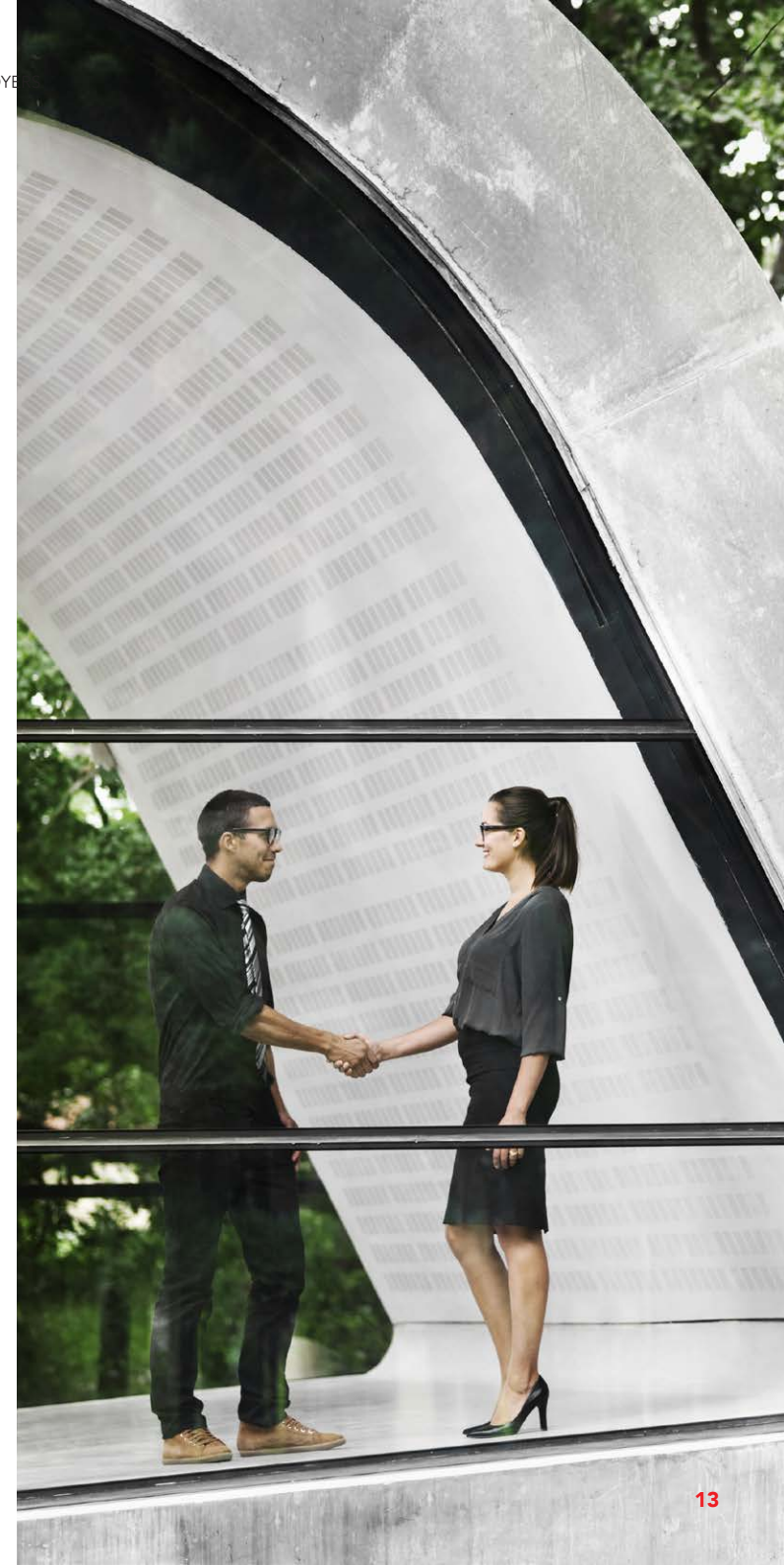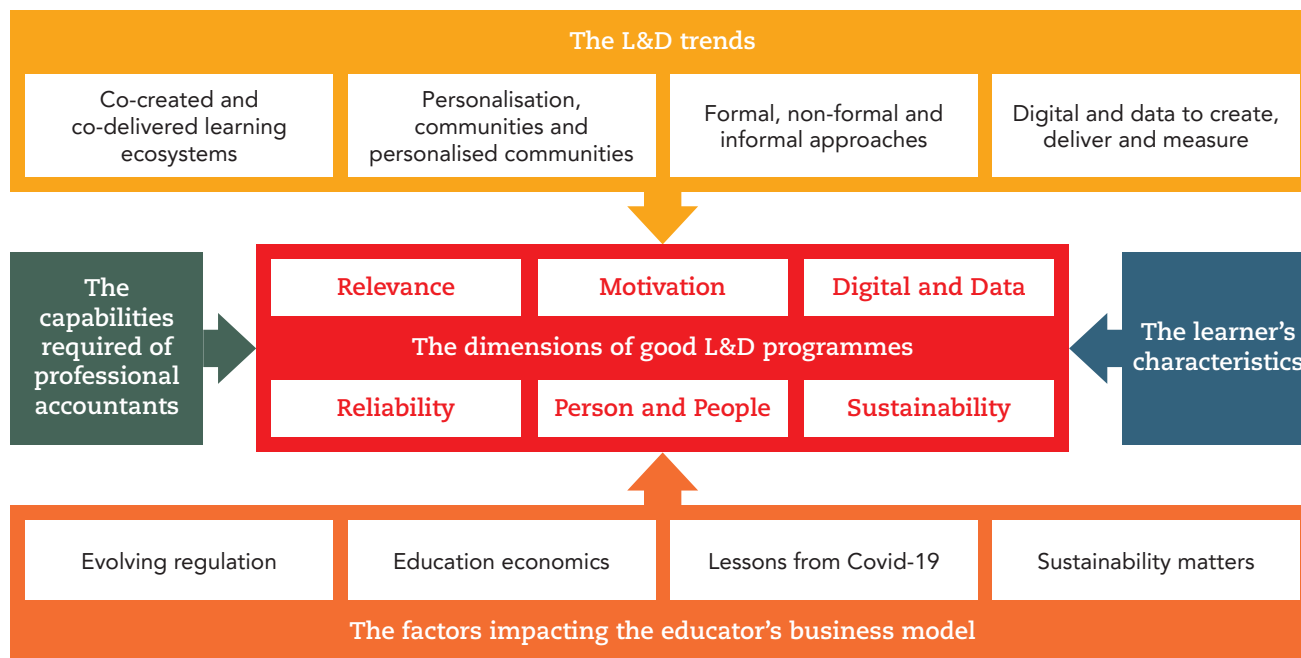
1.1 Report overview

At the heart of Figure 1.1 are the six interconnected dimensions that our research identifies as being common to all good L&D programmes. These dimensions when correctly applied to L&D will help:
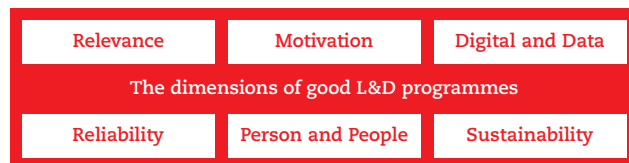
- learners develop the professional's capabilities
- educators accommodate the learner's characteristics, and therefore their needs, and
- educators respond to the trends and factors changing the industry.

FIGURE 1.1: The learning and development ecosystem – the dimensions of good L&D programmes

The L&D trends

| Co-created and co-delivered learning ecosystems | Personalisation, communities and personalised communities | Formal, non-formal and informal approaches | Digital and data to create, deliver and measure |

The capabilities required of professional accountants

Relevance **Motivation** **Digital and Data**

The dimensions of good L&D programmes

Reliability **Person and People** **Sustainability**

The learner's characteristics

| Evolving regulation | Education economics | Lessons from Covid-19 | Sustainability matters |

The factors impacting the educator's business model

1.1.1 The interconnected dimensions of good L&D programmes

Relevance	Motivation	Digital and Data
The dimensions of good L&D programmes		
Reliability	Person and People	Sustainability

- **Relevance:** meeting learner and stakeholder needs
- **Reliability:** delivering learning outcomes that are trusted irrespective of different learning approaches for a given capability or learner
- **Motivation:** driving the achievement of the learning purpose and supporting lifelong learning
- **Person and people:** placing learners and their tutors at the heart of learning and its approach, at an individual, cohort and community level
- **Digital and data:** supporting the development of L&D strategy and its implementation across content, production, delivery and monitoring
- **Sustainability:** business models employ an integrated approach to environmental, social and financial matters.

The capabilities required of professional accountants

1.1.2 The capabilities required of professionals

The fundamental skills and behaviours required of all professional accountants in differing weightings and levels of proficiency across the variety of roles they can perform (Figure I3).

The learner's characteristics
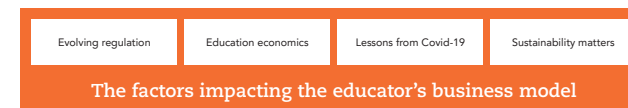
1.1.3 The learner's characteristics

The features of the learner that determine the capabilities required and L&D pedagogy, such as the learning purpose and learning approach preferences.

1.1.4 The L&D trends

The L&D trends			
Co-created and co-delivered learning ecosystems	Personalisation, communities and personalised communities	Formal, non-formal and informal approaches	Digital and data to create, deliver and measure

- **Co-created and co-delivered learning ecosystems**, enabling:
  - learning content to be combined in different ways, offered in multiple formats and at different times
  - learners to engage with each other
  - recognition and recording of learning.

- **Personalisation, communities and personalised communities:** personalised learning for specific learner characteristics and development needs, and community-based learning enabling collaboration. When the personalised and community-based learning are combined, personalised learning communities are produced.

- **Formal, non-formal and informal learning approaches:** interventions that range from structured learning, such as courses, to unstructured or unexpected learning, eg when playing a game or taking part in a discussion where learning is not the original intention.

- **Digital and data to create, deliver and measure:** supporting the setting, implementation and monitoring of L&D strategies, from managing the process, producing and delivering content to gamification that immerses learners in virtual workplace environments, including ones supported by AI to adapt the game or focus the learner on continual improvement.

1.1.5 The factors impacting the business model

Evolving regulation	Education economics	Lessons from Covid-19	Sustainability matters
The factors impacting the educator's business model			

- **Evolving regulation:** shaping the education operating model and/or L&D content directly or via changes to the accountancy profession.

- **Sustainability issues:** environmental, social and financial issues as interrelated and interconnected matters.

- **Lessons from Covid-19:** lessons learnt as the education industry recovers from the impacts of Covid-19, including better contingency business leadership, stakeholder engagement and revisions to technology.

- **Education economics:** expected growth of the total industry, especially within corporate and lifelong learning.
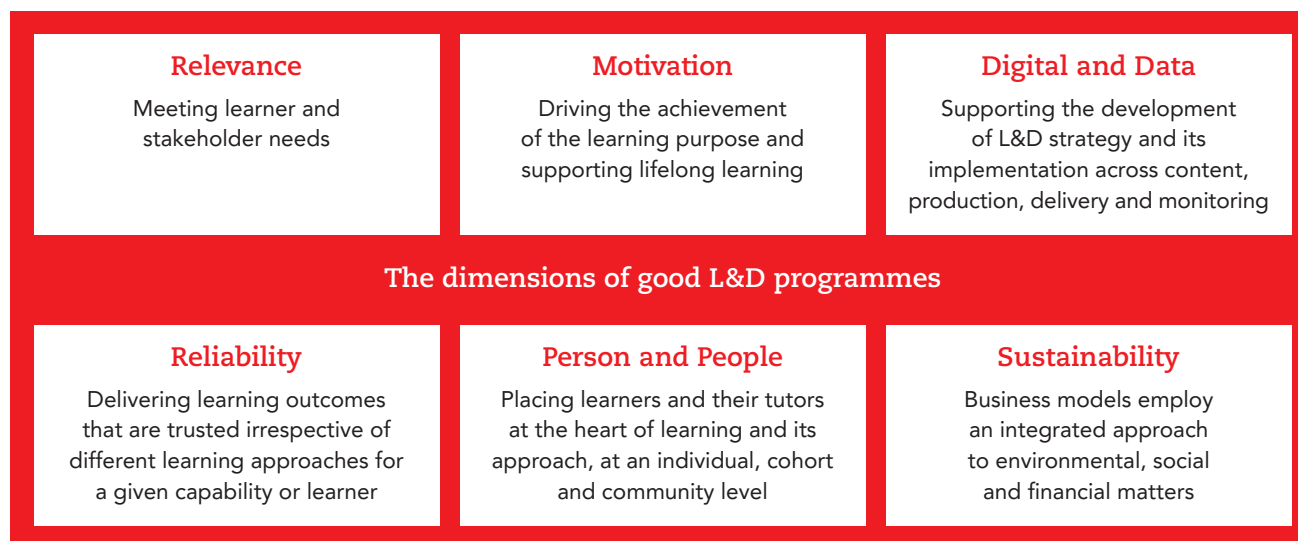
1.2 The interconnected dimensions and their drivers

Creating the professionals required by business and society, and the related change drivers, calls for educators to provide L&D programmes that are more than instructional; and this must apply to the whole end-to-end education business and L&D experience. Our research insights point to the aforementioned six interconnected dimensions (see Figure 1.2), and here we bring to life some of these interconnections in the context of their drivers.

1.2.1 Developing relevant capabilities and education economics

Our research, corroborated by similar work by others, suggests that for professionals to be effective they require specific capabilities: the crucial human capabilities of collaboration, drive, critical thinking, idea generation, and up-to-date technical competence in handling sustainability, digital and ethical issues (see Box 1.1).

FIGURE 1.2: The six dimensions

| **Relevance** | **Motivation** | **Digital and Data** |
| Meeting learner and stakeholder needs | Driving the achievement of the learning purpose and supporting lifelong learning | Supporting the development of L&D strategy and its implementation across content, production, delivery and monitoring |

The dimensions of good L&D programmes

| **Reliability** | **Person and People** | **Sustainability** |
| Delivering learning outcomes that are trusted irrespective of different learning approaches for a given capability or learner | Placing learners and their tutors at the heart of learning and its approach, at an individual, cohort and community level | Business models employ an integrated approach to environmental, social and financial matters |

Box 1.1: What others are saying about the important capabilities

The joint work of CarringtonCrisp and LinkedIn, and McKinsey highlight the skills requiring development, many of which are capabilities required by sustainable business, finance and accountancy professionals.

Organisations have identified five skills that are not widely available:

Resilience	Global mindset	Ethics & ethical behaviour	Able to manage across cultures	Accommodates new ways of working

In addition, learners expressed a need for the following skills:

- Ability to engage in digital transformation
- Strategic thinking
- Marketing
- Innovating
- Entrepreneurship
- Business development
- Creativity and design thinking
- Data analytics
- High productivity
- Risk management
- Social impact
- Decision making in complex and uncertain times
- Responsible management

Most of the skills that companies are increasingly focused on developing are social, emotional and advanced cognitive.

Skills that companies have prioritised to address through reskilling,[1] % of respondents

● Social and emotional skills ● Advanced cognitive skills ● Technological skills   2019 ○——● 2020

Skill	
Leadership and managing others	
Critical thinking and decision making	
Project management	
Adaptability and continuous learning	
Basic digital skills	
Interpersonal skills and empathy	
Advanced data-analysis and mathematical skills	
Quantitative and statistical skills	
Complex information processing and interpretation	
Advanced IT skills and programming	

[1] Out of 25 skills that were offered as answer choices; n = 700.

Source: McKinsey 2021

Source: CarringtonCrisp 2022

Further, many of these capabilities will continue to evolve alongside the business landscape, representing a major opportunity for educators today and for the foreseeable future. This is evidenced by the expectation that the education market will reach £7 trillion in value by 2030, of which 25% will come from lifelong and corporate learning (Pearson 2020). Some educators, such as Till Leopold, are already seizing this opportunity. He commented:

> 'The uptake of online courses and the number of organisations offering credentials has gone through the roof over the past 12 months and is expected to continue for some time to come'. **Till Leopold, head of action initiatives and impact coordination at the World Economic Forum's Centre for the New Economy and Society**

Source: Andrew Jack 2021

1.2.2 Person-centric engagement to understand purpose and motivate learners

A person-centric approach, such as engagement to understand the individual learner's learning purpose, goals, and preferred learning approaches, is central to driving learning motivation. Equipped with this knowledge, educators are better placed to shape learning interventions. In practice, relevance and motivation are only truly realised through strong stakeholder engagement that ensures all parties understand the purpose of the learning and appreciate what capabilities are being developed and why.

1.2.3 Personalisation, informal learning and communities for relevance and motivation

Often capability development happens in group situations, unsurprisingly, as humans often want to work and learn together. There are L&D approaches that bring together dimensions of person and people centricity, eg in the form of 'personalised communities'. These are environments where learners with complementary traits are grouped into cohorts and a mix of learning interventions are used, including unstructured informal discussions where challenge questions are introduced by community facilitators for learners to debate. The more advanced personalised communities evaluate current performance and use it to inform the next cohort grouping, thereby delivering potential benefits of more efficient and effective achievement of the learning purpose (relevance), and driving motivation.

1.2.4 Data and digital underpinning relevant and reliable learning ecosystems

Person and people centric L&D approaches are becoming more difficult to implement because the range of capabilities required across longer working lives are both expanding the learning population and making their learning needs more diverse. Learning ecosystems provide an appropriate solution to this problem: they support the trends we are seeing for non-linear and multiple ways of combining and delivering capability development, ranging from short to long bursts, formal to informal, and just-when-needed to just-in-case learning. In these systems, digital technology and data analysis are key enabling features.

- Data is central to personalisation, cohort and community interventions. Effective data collection and evaluation, including of both personality and assessment psychometric[2] data, support the appreciation of metacognition, in other words an understanding of what is learnt, how and why. Metacognition enables the identification of learning interventions that might have most impact, eg adaptive learning, in which future L&D interventions are based on performance evaluation to date, resulting in benefits of higher levels of engagement and programme effectiveness.

- Digital technology is often a feature of scalable learning ecosystems whether as:
  - a host for a variety of learning interventions and a place where learners can interact in learning communities, developing and recording their learning, or for
  - gamification and simulation applications that respectively place learners into extreme or more commonplace virtual workplace environments. This is especially valuable for learners who cannot easily access work experience.

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2   Psychometrics is a field of study within psychology concerned with the theory and technique of objective measurement that in the context of this report is related to talent and education, whether designing tests, measuring performance, or other related activities. Psychometrics aims to bring objective measurement of qualities that often cannot be easily and reliably observed, such as intelligence, personality, educational achievement and capacity to develop. (Adapted from Wikipedia (n.d.) and – Psychometrics Society (n.d.))

1.2.5 Reliable capability development required for employability

Employability is likely to be a key purpose of L&D, meaning that the reliable development of the desired capabilities is important for many learners and their employers. It is this that underpins trust. How reliability is achieved may be perceived differently by learners and their stakeholders, and may depend on the capability being developed. For instance, trust in what a specific learner has learnt will be dependent on the approach best aligned to the learner's learning purpose and pedagogical preference, which for one learner might be in an examination and another in practical experience or project/coursework. By contrast, trust in collaboration capabilities may be best achieved through repeated demonstrations with multi-stakeholder validation. Alternatively, expertise capabilities may necessitate understanding of the programme's approach to developing the desired capability, rather than or as well as assessment of the learner's competence.

1.2.6 A sustainable education business model accommodates evolving sustainability issues and regulation

As with all business, being sustainable is vital for the education business, therefore satisfying not just financial and regulatory criteria, but also environmental and social criteria of importance to the education business model. The suppliers and clients of educators are starting to take sustainability issues seriously, and many of them are making formal commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Further, the accountancy profession and education are subject to considerable regulation and policies that affect business opportunity and risks. In response, some educators are conducting many of the activities that are becoming standard for all other businesses. These activities start with horizon scanning for regulatory changes and evaluating the impacts and dependencies of their education business model across the supply and value chain. From here integrated environmental, social, regulatory and brand value-generating sustainable business plans can be enacted, all of which draw on good practice for business governance and processes.

1.3 The toolkit to embed the dimensions

Embedding the dimensions and responding to the drivers place a significant demand on educators but have the potential for rewards that justify the effort. In meeting this demand, the most effective educators take the following steps.

- **They co-create and co-deliver** with employers, HR specialists, learners, technologists, trade associations and professional bodies, for instance sharing data, developing a marketplace-style gap analysis to understand the skills required (demand) and the skills available among learners (supply), then defining and delivering the required interventions.

- **They develop the learning ecosystem** to hold and manage the learning process and content; often starting small and building from there.

- **They continually reskill and build confidence in their tutors**, so they are conversant with current business issues, the capabilities required of professionals, the available learning technology tools and the characteristics of their learners and are comfortable evolving their teaching to cater for these changes.

- **They proactively, openly and regularly review and learn lessons**, which at the time of writing, for a significant minority of educators means responding to the approach they had to take, often with haste, to respond to the impact of Covid-19.

- **They embed sustainability and integrated thinking** as an integral part of the business model, from governance and strategy through to all downstream activities.

- **They bring stakeholders on the education journey** with them, thereby overcoming risks associated with false understanding of an issue (face validity), this is particularly important when seeking investment or selling programmes linked to L&D innovation.

This toolkit, while important to educators, is useful for learners to understand and, where relevant, they should contribute to its application.

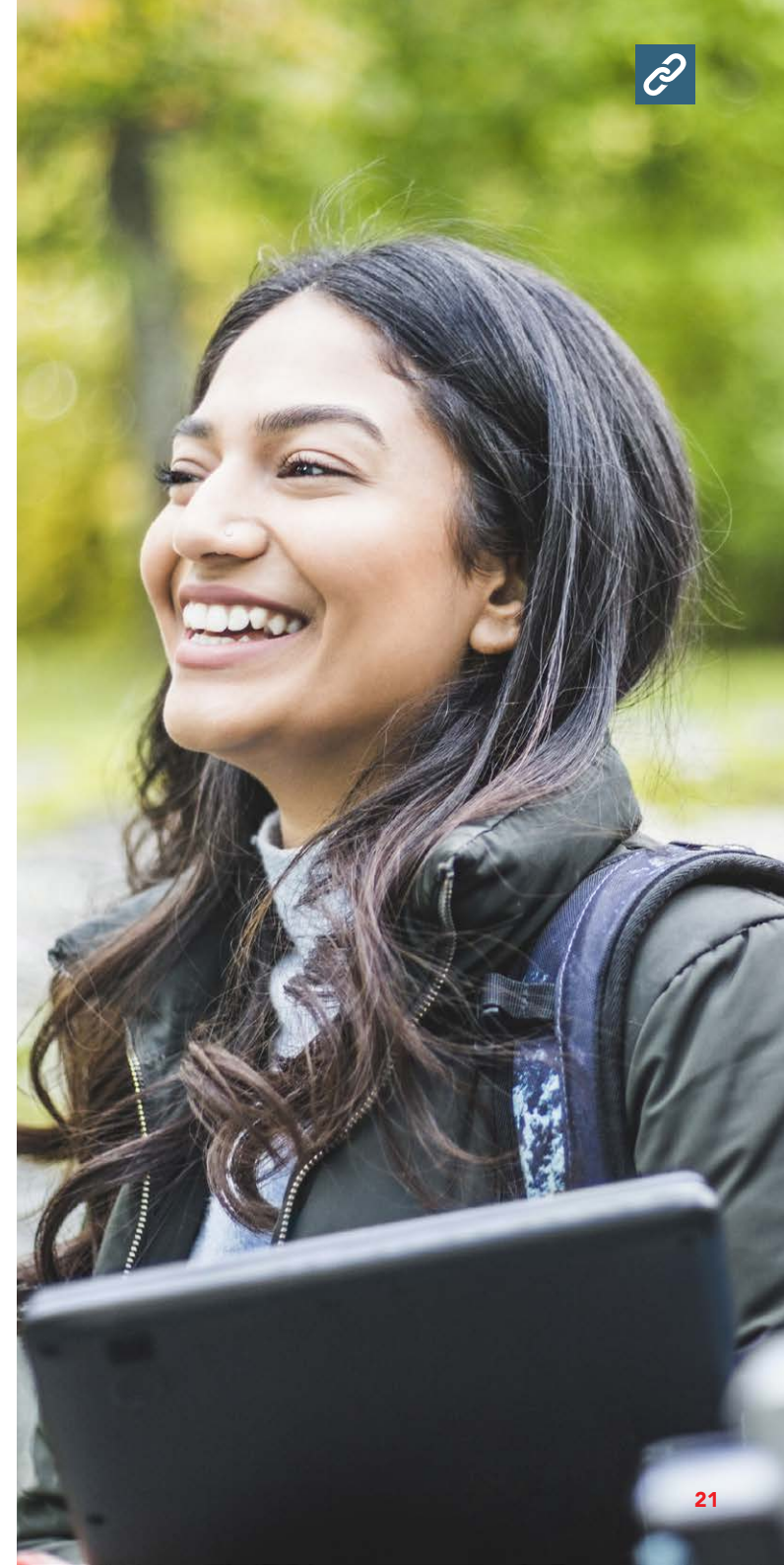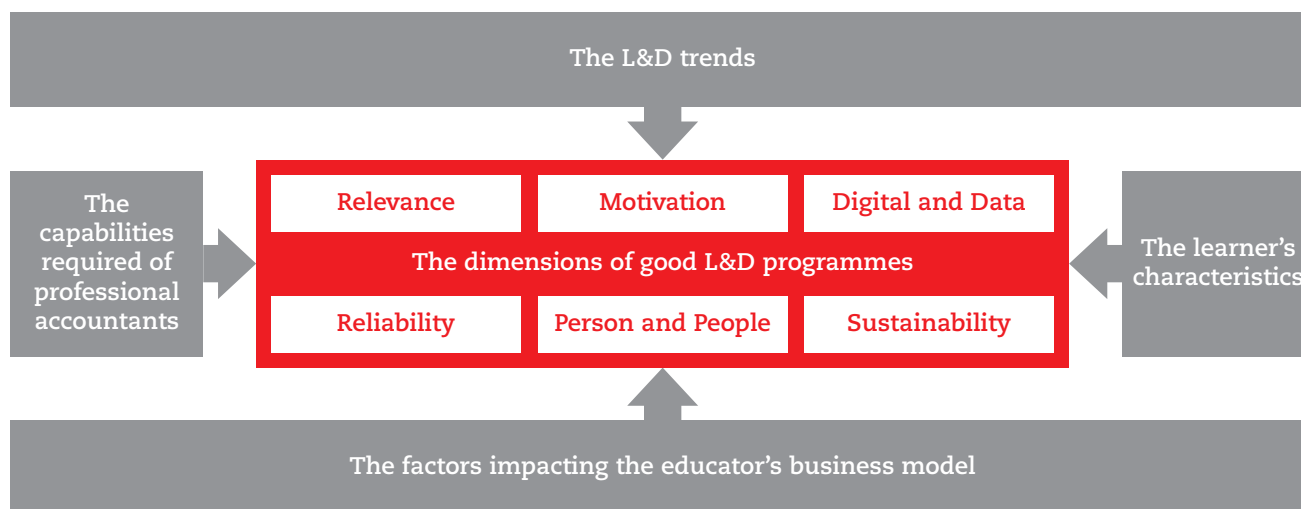# 2. **The dimensions:** their **importance** and an **action plan**

Our research has identified that highly effective L&D programmes consistently exhibit six interconnected qualities or features that we've termed 'dimensions'.

These dimensions (see Figure 2.1) include learner characteristics, and will leave educators well-placed to manage risks, realise opportunities, and thrive in a fast-changing environment. While educators should embed the dimensions across their end-to-end business, learners should consider how well their L&D programme demonstrates them (see Box 2.1).

**FIGURE 2.1:** The professional education ecosystem – the dimensions of good L&D programmes

The L&D trends

The capabilities required of professional accountants	→	Relevance	Motivation	Digital and Data
		The dimensions of good L&D programmes		← The learner's characteristics
		Reliability	Person and People	Sustainability

The factors impacting the educator's business model

Box 2.1: The six dimensions

DIMENSION	IMPORTANCE	IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS
RELEVANCE: meeting learner and stakeholder needs	When the purpose of learning for the learner and their stakeholders is met, then this should lead to greater learner programme satisfaction and effective capability development. What constitutes 'relevance' is likely to differ between learners, for instance in pedagogy, timing, combination of capabilities required, and method of learning.	Engage with learners and their stakeholders to understand their purpose and learning preferences, from which to plan and set expectation. Supported by metadata for ease of management employ multiple learning approaches that fulfil the learning requirements of: ■ timeliness ■ actionable according to purpose ■ flexibility ■ modularity ■ ability to integrate different capabilities (See section 3.3.1 in the primary version of this report).
RELIABILITY: achieving learning outcomes that are trusted irrespective of different learning approaches for a given capability or learner	When learning is deemed reliable, trust in the learner's capability and the programme is more likely. Reliability is reduced by: ■ the controllability of learner characteristics, eg L&D programmes can probably accommodate differing prior education experiences that affect L&D entry competence, whereas it's more difficult to adapt for different learner attitudes ■ the nature of the capabilities and their evolution. New capabilities can create uncertainty for programmes and the more subjective ones are harder to validate.	Develop and regularly update your learning outcomes framework. It should define the capability together with the success criteria used to monitor progress, irrespective of the learning approach. Progress monitoring should be continuous and explain: ■ how validation (proof of progress) is done, including any associated inherent subjectivity and uncertainties to help manage expectations of confidence in the learning and its outcomes ■ date stamping (indicating when competence for a learning outcome was achieved) to help provide a sense of currency, which is of particular importance for those professional expertise capabilities that are subject to rapid change, eg tax ■ how quality is measured through graded achievement. Manage expectations, especially limitations, through clear communication.

▶

Box 2.1: The six dimensions (cont.)

DIMENSION	IMPORTANCE	IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS
MOTIVATION: driving the achievement of the learning purpose and supporting lifelong learning	To remain relevant, learners will need to be strongly driven to achieve the capabilities required for continual development (see Figure I3).	For identified capabilities, especially drive and collaboration, develop a S.M.A.R.T. plan (specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and timely) with continual formative and summative assessment together with feedback for learners to assess and continually improve their progress. Aim for learning that is engaging; often this includes personalisation (see subsection in section 3.3.2 on personalisation in the primary version of this report).
PERSON AND PEOPLE: placing learners and their tutors at the heart of learning and the learning approach, at an individual, cohort and community level	Learning is all about developing people, so must have the individual learner at the heart but should also recognise that we operate in collaboration with others, so the broader learning community and cohorts must be considered too. Those facilitating learning are equally important, eg tutors are crucial to the successful implementation of innovation or other changes, such as developing new capabilities.	Create opportunities for teamwork activities, where learners can develop through interaction with their peers, and reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses across the capabilities (see subsection in section 3.3.2 on personalised communities in the primary version of this report). Innovation and other change-related activity should position learners and their tutors as the designers, and employ a balanced combination of co-creation, collaboration and communication methodologies.
DIGITAL AND DATA: technology and analysis supporting the development of strategy and its implementation across content, production, delivery and monitoring	Use of digital and data will enable the development of programmes that can efficiently, effectively and with scalability meet the diverse needs of learners and capabilities.	Simplify existing data and digital L&D before introducing new elements. Focus solutions on the most effective interventions, eg learning ecosystems that enable learner engagement with the L&D content and with other learners, collect and analyse learner and programme data (see section 3.3.1 and section 3.3.4 in the primary version of this report).
SUSTAINABILITY: the education business model employs an integrated approach to environmental, social and financial issues	Sustainability issues are likely to affect educators, either directly via accounting, governance and reporting requirements or because the educator is part of a larger value and supply chain. Further, sustainability, as regards both the content and the operating model, is of interest to many learners (see section 3.2 in the primary version of this report), so is likely to be a factor when learners select their educator, as well as their employer.	Understand the value chain extending to suppliers and customers, from which to identify potential commitment areas to UN SDGs, environmental and social goals, plus intangible value risks and opportunities (see section 3.4.4 in the primary version of this report).

Conclusion
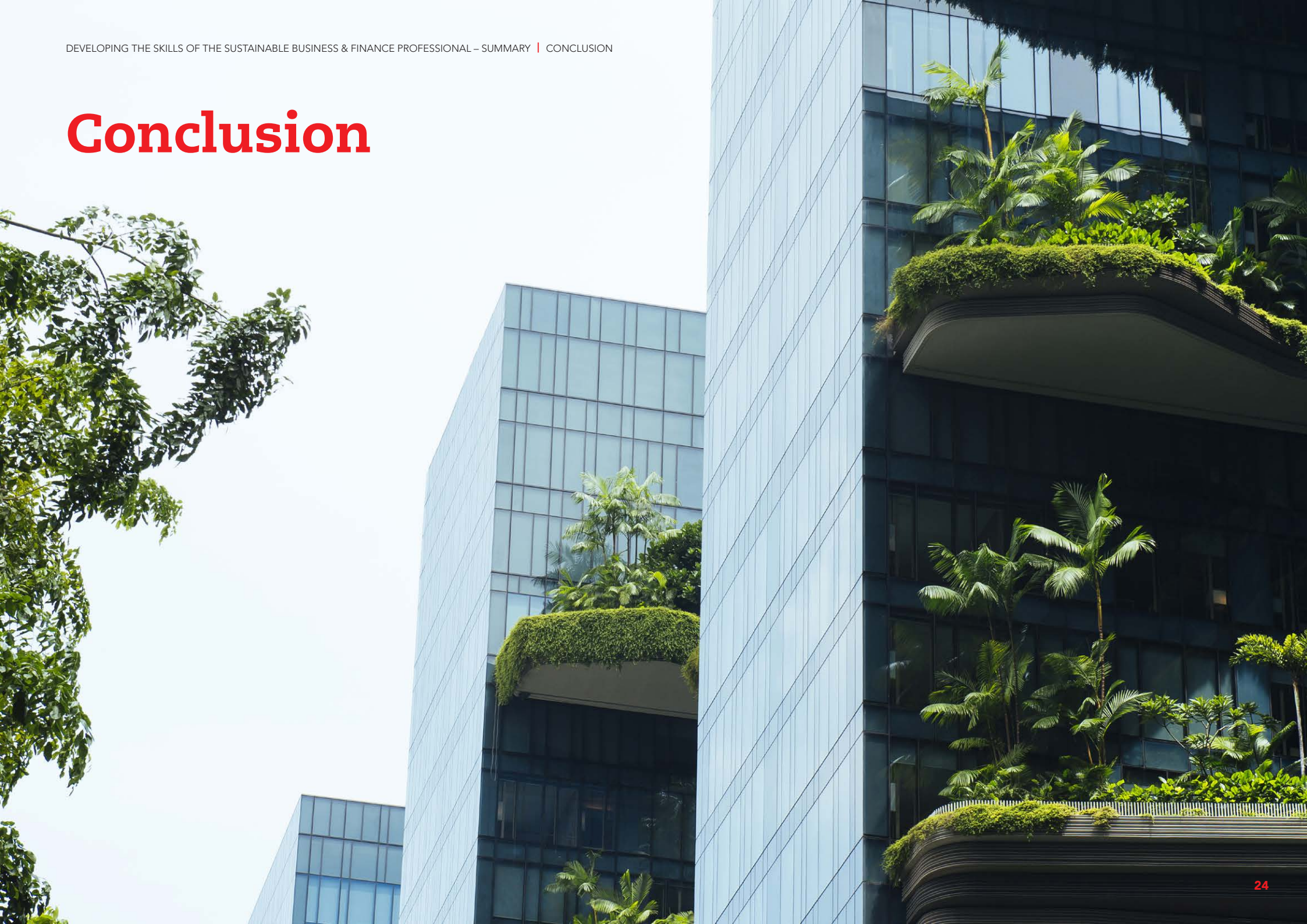
Our research set out to explore the 'ingredients' and 'recipe' that must come together to drive effective learning.

The 'ingredients' related to the capabilities required of professionals and the learner are evolving. Changes in the capabilities required owing to rapidly progressing business landscapes call for a broader range of skills, and a growing learner population bring with them a diverse set of learning requirements.

The education industry, once accused of being slow to innovate, is dramatically transforming in response to drivers of new learning trends and factors changing the education business model. Data-informed learning is paving the way for continual improvement for the learner and educator, and extends across the end-to-end education process, from the design to evaluation of learning. Digital technology is also immensely powerful in hosting L&D, as evidenced by trends for learning ecosystems that support flexible learning. This will become more than an L&D hosting tool, for instance in the form of gamification, enabling learners to develop in realistic and sometimes extreme workplace simulations. Further, when L&D interventions incorporate 'in team' learning then there's scope for learners to experience personalised communities, enhancing metacognition, while also driving the practice of demanded interpersonal capabilities related to drive and collaboration.

The results of our evaluation of these drivers are six dimensions that together underpin quality L&D, which learners should seek in the programmes of their educators:

- **relevance:** meeting learner and stakeholder needs

- **reliability:** delivering learning outcomes that are trusted irrespective of different learning approaches for a given capability or learner

- **motivation:** driving the achievement of the learning purpose and supporting lifelong learning

- **person and people:** placing learners and their tutors at the heart of learning and the learning approach, at an individual, cohort and community level

- **digital and data:** supporting the development of L&D strategy and its implementation across content, production, delivery and monitoring

- **sustainability:** business models employ an integrated approach to environmental, social and financial matters.

Educators who embed these dimensions are well placed to realise the economic opportunities associated with a growing education market and to respond to the vast amounts of regulation that applies to them and the accountancy profession.

PI-FUTURE-SKILLS-DEVELOPMENT-SUMMARY