

Learning and development

Learning and development are essential components of a modern public service that is prepared for the future. Emergent policy challenges, unpredictable crises, and evolving technology combine to create a constant demand for new skills and competencies among public servants. To keep up, governments must find ways to source the capabilities they need, and this often means by developing existing staff. Well-designed and wide-reaching learning systems are therefore vital for governments, to continually develop staff throughout their careers and identify and address the need for skills over time.

A learning strategy is an administration's overarching plan for the continuing development of skills and competencies within its workforce. OECD countries with learning and development strategies organise and implement them in a variety of ways. These strategies can be implemented through different institutional arrangements: they can be centrally organised, distributed throughout ministries, left up to individual managers, outsourced, run through schools of government or other means, or through a combination of options. The majority of OECD countries, 25 out of 37 (68%), have a learning and development strategy or plan at the central level (Figure 13.3). Many of these also report having additional strategies within ministries or agencies; 24 out of 37 countries (65%) have ministry-level plans, whether or not there is also one at the central level.

Well-designed incentive structures are important. They give employees reasons to take up learning opportunities and make use of the learning and development systems. These incentives are not necessarily financial; the use of performance evaluation, career progression and feedback cycles can be more effective and contribute more to an overall culture of learning. The most common practices to encourage learning are giving employees choices in the content of their learning (35 out of 36 OECD countries, 97%) and giving employees time to purposefully engage in learning opportunities (25 out of 36, 69%) (Figure 13.4). But more and more, OECD countries are encouraging learning by building it into other human resources processes in the career path: 15 of 36 countries (42%) consider learning in promotion decisions and 25 of 36 (69%) in performance evaluations, while 12 out of 36 (33%) incorporate it into feedback outside of formal evaluations. Only 4 of 36 countries (11%) mandate minimum amounts of training.

As governments continue to face unprecedented global and societal problems, having a depth and breadth of skills to call upon in the public service becomes more pressing. Learning and development is taking a leading role in modern governance. Korea, for instance, created a modern e-learning platform that allows employees to become micro-content creators and encourages greater learning through interaction. In the United Kingdom, the administration is working to bring the training offered across ministries under one umbrella to make it more

widely available to its workforce of nearly half a million. Leadership development is a specific emerging focus. For example, Israel is developing a “simulator” to train its top managers to manage crises and change, while Canada has developed a leadership development programme and an in-depth competency framework across top levels.

Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the learning and development module of the 2022 Public Service Leadership and Capability survey. Respondents were senior officials in central government human resource management (HRM) departments, and data refer to HRM practices in central government. The survey was completed by all OECD countries with the exception of the United States, as well as the OECD accession countries of Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. There are considerable variations in the definitions of the civil service as well as the organisations of the central level of government. Public servants are defined as all government employees who work in the public service, who may be employed through various contractual mechanisms (e.g. civil servant statutes, collective agreements or labour law contracts), on indeterminate or fixed-term employment contracts, but not normally including employees in the wider public sector, who are usually regulated under alternative employment frameworks (e.g., most doctors, teachers, police, the military, the judiciary, or elected officials). Schools of government in this case refers mostly to centralised schools within administrations, although it could in some cases also refer to external or partner institutions.

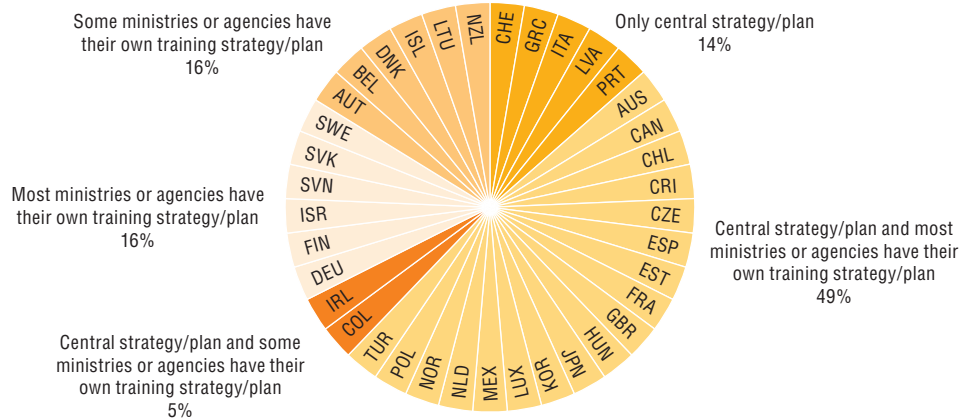
Further reading

- OECD (2023), *Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5b378e11-en>.
- OECD (2021), *Public Employment and Management 2021: The Future of the Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/938f0d65-en>.
- OECD (2019), “Recommendation of the Council on Public Service Leadership and Capability”, *OECD Legal Instruments*, OECD, Paris, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445>.

Figure notes

13.4. Data for Lithuania are not available.

13.3. Learning and development strategies for the central government workforce, 2022



Source: OECD (2022), Public Service Leadership and Capability Survey.

StatLink <https://stat.link/t4cg69>

13.4. Incentives for employee learning and development in central governments, 2022

| Country | Employees can choose some training programmes of interest rather than have only specific mandatory courses | Employees can have additional time off for engaging in development | Considered in performance evaluations | Individual learning plans are developed for all/most employees | Considered in promotion decisions | Learning is incorporated into the feedback cycle outside of formal evaluations | Point schemes for attending training | Minimum amount of time spent in formal training or development |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Australia | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Austria | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Belgium | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Canada | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Chile | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Colombia | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Costa Rica | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Czech Republic | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Denmark | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Estonia | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Finland | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| France | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Germany | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Greece | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| Hungary | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Iceland | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Ireland | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Israel | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Italy | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Japan | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Korea | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Latvia | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ● |
| Luxembourg | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Mexico | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ● |
| Netherlands | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| New Zealand | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Norway | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Poland | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Portugal | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Slovak Republic | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Slovenia | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Spain | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| Sweden | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Switzerland | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Türkiye | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| United Kingdom | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● |
| OECD Total | | | | | | | | |
| ● YES | 35 | 25 | 25 | 18 | 15 | 12 | 6 | 4 |
| ○ NO | 1 | 11 | 11 | 18 | 21 | 24 | 30 | 32 |
| Brazil | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bulgaria | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Croatia | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Romania | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Source: OECD (2022), Public Service and Leadership Capability Survey.

StatLink <https://stat.link/hv0pz7>



From:
Government at a Glance 2023

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2023), "Learning and development", in *Government at a Glance 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/f587ba0a-en>

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