

LEARNING HUB · DECISION GUIDE

# LMS vs. Training Firm vs. Managed Partner

*The honest comparison nobody puts in their sales deck*

Option A

## LMS platform

You buy the software. You build the content. You manage everything.

Option B

## Training firm

You hire an agency to design a programme. They deliver it. You manage the rest.

Option C

## Managed partner

We build, deploy, and run your entire learning infrastructure. Under your brand.

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## The decision most L&D teams get wrong

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Every organization trying to solve a workforce learning problem eventually faces the same three options: buy a platform, hire a training firm, or find a partner who does both. And almost every organization ends up choosing based on the wrong criteria — usually whatever the vendor in the room makes most compelling, or whatever seems most familiar.

This guide is an attempt to give you a more useful frame. Not which option is theoretically best, but which option is right for your specific situation — based on your internal capacity, your compliance exposure, your budget, and what you actually need the outcome to be.

We will not pretend to be neutral. Learning Hub is a managed partner, and we believe that model is right for a specific set of organizations. We will tell you honestly when it is not.

*Every option has a catch. The one nobody puts in their sales deck is the catch that ends up mattering most.*

This guide covers all three catches — including ours.

## Option A: LMS platform

An LMS (Learning Management System) is software for hosting, delivering, and tracking training content. You pay a licence fee — typically per user per year — and the platform gives you the infrastructure to build and deploy learning programmes. The content, the instructional design, the maintenance, and the ongoing management are all your responsibility.

### What you get

- A platform for hosting and tracking training content
- Completion reporting and (sometimes) assessment tools
- User management and access controls
- Integrations with HRIS, SSO, and other systems (varies by platform)

### What you do not get

- Content — you build it, buy it, or hire someone to build it
- Instructional design or SOP alignment
- Ongoing management — someone on your team owns the platform
- Deployment support beyond onboarding calls

### The hidden costs LMS vendors do not lead with

Platform licences are only the beginning. The real cost of an LMS is the internal resource required to make it work.

Cost category	What it actually means
<b>Platform licence</b>	Typically \$3–\$8 per user/month. At 500 users, \$18,000–\$48,000/year before content or admin costs.
<b>Content creation</b>	Building one hour of eLearning costs \$10,000–\$50,000 when designed professionally (ATD, 2025). Most LMS buyers underestimate this by 3–5x.
<b>Internal admin time</b>	Running an LMS typically requires 0.5–1.0 FTE of L&D resource for content management, user admin, and reporting alone.
<b>Content maintenance</b>	Every SOP change requires a content update. Most organizations discover their content is 6–18 months behind their SOPs within 18 months of launch.
<b>IT integration</b>	HRIS sync, SSO setup, and ongoing IT support are rarely zero. Budget 40–80 hours of IT resource at deployment and ongoing quarterly maintenance.

**Implementation timeline**

From contract to first cohort trained: typically 3–6 months. Content build adds further delay.

**Right for you if**

- You have an L&D team with dedicated content creation and platform management capacity
- Your training needs are relatively stable — infrequent SOP changes, low content maintenance burden
- You have IT resource available for integration and ongoing support
- You have time — 3–6 months to deployment is acceptable

**Wrong for you if**

- You are in a high-turnover, high-SOP-change environment (retail, hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing)
- Your L&D team is already stretched and cannot take on platform ownership
- You need to be live and training within 4–8 weeks
- Your content needs to reflect your actual SOPs, not generic off-the-shelf modules

*Most organizations that choose an LMS discover the content problem after they have signed the licence.*

The platform is the easy part. The content, the management, and the maintenance are where LMS projects stall.

## Option B: Training firm

A training firm designs and delivers learning programmes. You engage them for a project — typically a content build, a training delivery, or a curriculum design — they deliver it, and the engagement ends. Some firms offer retainer relationships, but the default model is project-based: defined scope, defined output, defined end date.

### What you get

- Professional instructional design and content development
- Expertise in learning methodologies and programme structure
- A delivered output — content, curriculum, or facilitated training
- Independence from your internal L&D capacity constraints for the project duration

### What you do not get

- Ongoing management — when the project ends, ownership returns to you
- Platform infrastructure — you still need somewhere to host and deliver the content
- SOP alignment over time — content built to your SOPs today is outdated when your SOPs change
- Reporting or compliance tracking — unless specifically scoped and priced

### The project-to-reality gap

Training firm engagements tend to work well during the project and poorly after it. The content produced reflects your SOPs at the time of build. Your SOPs change. Your content does not — unless you commission another project. This cycle is expensive, slow, and creates the SOP drift problem that is the root cause of most compliance gaps in regulated industries.

What the proposal looks like	What reality often looks like
<i>10-week content build, 12 modules delivered</i>	12 modules delivered — but 3 reflect SOPs that have since changed, and 2 need updating for new regulatory requirements. No update process scoped.
<i>Facilitator-led workshops for all 500 staff</i>	Workshops delivered. 40% of staff missed the live session due to scheduling. No self-serve alternative was built into scope.
<i>Learning programme design and curriculum map</i>	Curriculum delivered. Programme requires a platform to deploy. Platform selection and build not included in scope — now a separate workstream.
<i>End-to-end onboarding content build</i>	Content built. 18 months later, 60% of content is misaligned to current SOPs. A refresh project is required — at similar cost to the original build.

## Right for you if

- You have a one-time, bounded learning need — a specific module, curriculum, or programme build
- You have a platform to host and deliver content after the project ends
- Your SOPs are stable and content is unlikely to require frequent updating
- You have internal capacity to manage deployment, tracking, and ongoing maintenance

## Wrong for you if

- You need continuous alignment between your training content and evolving SOPs
- You do not have a platform or L&D team to absorb the output after delivery
- Your compliance requirements mean content must always reflect current procedure
- You need ongoing performance reporting that connects training to business outcomes

*A training firm builds you a house. A managed partner lives in it with you — and fixes the roof when it leaks.*

## Option C: Managed partner

A managed partner takes end-to-end ownership of your learning infrastructure. Content design, platform deployment, content maintenance, compliance tracking, and performance reporting are all managed by the partner — continuously, not as a one-off project. Your brand is on everything. Your team does not manage a platform. The partner does.

This is the model Learning Hub operates. We are not neutral on whether it is the right model — we believe it is, for a specific kind of organization. We will tell you what that looks like below.

### What you get

- Fully managed content design and build — aligned to your specific SOPs, not generic modules
- Platform deployment with zero IT resource required from your team
- Continuous content maintenance — updated when your SOPs change, without a new project
- White-label delivery under your brand — employees experience your academy, not a third-party tool
- Compliance tracking and audit-ready documentation, maintained in real time
- Performance reporting connected to business outcomes: productivity, retention, compliance

### What you do not get

- Full platform ownership — you are relying on the partner's infrastructure and processes
- In-house content creation capability — if you exit the relationship, your team does not inherit a content team
- The lowest possible unit cost — this model costs more than a bare LMS licence

### The Learning Hub model specifically

We go from signed contract to live learning environment in 4 to 8 weeks. We build content against your actual SOPs. We manage the platform so your IT team has zero involvement. We update content when your processes change. We report on completion, competency, and compliance outcomes — not just clicks.

<b>Week 1–2</b> Discovery & SOP audit	<b>Week 2–3</b> Content design & structure	<b>Week 3–5</b> Build & white-label setup	<b>Week 5–6</b> Review & QA	<b>Week 6–7</b> Pilot cohort	<b>Week 7–8</b> Full deployment
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### Right for you if

- You are in a high-turnover, compliance-heavy, or rapidly scaling environment
- Your L&D team does not have the capacity to build, manage, and maintain a full learning infrastructure
- You need to be fully operational in weeks, not months
- Your brand and employee experience matter — you want an academy that feels internal
- You want reporting that connects to business outcomes, not just completion rates

## Wrong for you if

- You have a mature, well-resourced in-house L&D team that wants to own content creation
- Your learning needs are simple and stable — a basic platform would genuinely suffice
- You are not prepared to give a partner meaningful access to your SOPs and operational processes

*We do not give you software or courses. We give you a workforce that keeps pace with your business — and the evidence to prove it.*

## Head-to-head: the honest comparison

The table below uses three ratings across each dimension. Green means the option genuinely performs well here. Amber means it works but with caveats or conditions. Red means this is a known weakness of this model — not a reason to rule it out, but something to plan for.

	Green — genuine strength	Amber — works, with caveats	Red — known weakness
Dimension	LMS platform Option A	Training firm Option B	Managed partner Option C — LearningHub
<b>Deployment time</b>	3–6 months	2–4 months (project only)	4–8 weeks (end to end)
<b>Content creation</b>	You build or buy it	Built for you (project scope)	Built and maintained for you
<b>SOP alignment</b>	Manual — you update it	At build time only	Continuous — updated as SOPs change
<b>IT resource required</b>	Medium — integration and admin	Low — depends on platform	Zero
<b>Ongoing management</b>	Internal L&D team owns it	Returns to you post-project	Managed continuously by partner
<b>Compliance tracking</b>	Basic (completion only)	Not typically included	Real-time, audit-ready
<b>White-label / your brand</b>	Usually available	Depends on scope	Standard — employee sees your academy
<b>Performance reporting</b>	Completion metrics only	End-of-project summary	Ongoing: productivity, retention, compliance
<b>Total cost of ownership</b>	Licence + content + admin FTE + IT	Project fee + platform + maintenance cycles	Single managed fee — predictable
<b>Best for</b>	Mature L&D teams with capacity and time	One-off, bounded content needs	High-turnover, compliance-heavy, scaling orgs

## Which option is right for your organization

Answer the four questions below. The pattern of your answers points to the right model — without requiring you to trust a vendor's framing of their own product.

### Question 1: What is your L&D team's current capacity?

An LMS gives you infrastructure but not resource. A training firm gives you a project output but not ongoing management. A managed partner gives you capacity.

<p>We have dedicated L&amp;D staff with content creation capacity and bandwidth to own a platform.</p> <p><b>LMS is viable</b></p>	<p>We have some L&amp;D capacity but it's already stretched. We need a project done, not ongoing ownership.</p> <p><b>Training firm for now</b></p>	<p>Our L&amp;D team is thin, overloaded, or doesn't exist. We need someone to run this for us.</p> <p><b>Managed partner</b></p>
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### Question 2: How often do your SOPs and processes change?

Content that was accurate at build time drifts. The faster your processes change, the faster your training becomes a liability rather than an asset.

<p>Rarely — our processes are stable and change once a year at most.</p> <p><b>LMS or training firm</b></p>	<p>Occasionally — changes happen 3–4 times a year and we can manage updates internally.</p> <p><b>Training firm or LMS</b></p>	<p>Regularly — SOPs change frequently, or we're in a regulated environment where content must always reflect current procedure.</p> <p><b>Managed partner</b></p>
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### Question 3: What is your timeline?

If you need training deployed in weeks, an LMS build or training firm project will almost certainly miss the window.

<p>We have 4–6 months. Timeline is not the primary constraint.</p> <p><b>LMS is viable</b></p>	<p>We have 2–4 months. A project-based engagement could work.</p> <p><b>Training firm possible</b></p>	<p>We need this live in under 8 weeks. We have a headcount surge, compliance deadline, or urgent gap.</p> <p><b>Managed partner only</b></p>
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### Question 4: What does success look like to your leadership team?

How you measure success determines which model can actually deliver it.

<p>Completion rates — we need to show training was done and documented.</p> <p><b>LMS works here</b></p>	<p>A specific capability — we need staff to be able to do a specific thing they can't do now.</p> <p><b>Training firm for projects</b></p>	<p>Business outcomes — productivity, retention, compliance, speed to competence, visible ROI.</p> <p><b>Managed partner</b></p>
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## What to do next

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If you have worked through the four questions above, you have a clearer sense of which model fits your organization's actual situation — not the one that was most compellingly pitched.

If the decision framework points toward a managed partner, here is what an engagement with LearningHub looks like in practice:

- 01** Discovery call — 45 minutes. We map your SOP landscape, headcount, compliance requirements, and timeline. No slides, no demo. Just an honest assessment of whether we are the right fit.
- 02** Proposal with fixed timeline. Within a week of discovery, we provide a proposal with a defined scope, a fixed 4–8 week deployment timeline, and a clear commercial model. No surprises.
- 03** SOP audit and content design. We work through your SOPs with your operational team and build a content structure that maps to real job tasks — not generic frameworks.
- 04** Build, test, deploy. We build the content, configure the platform under your brand, run a pilot cohort, and deploy. Your IT team does nothing.
- 05** Manage and report. We maintain the content as your SOPs change. We track completion, competency, and compliance in real time. You get a performance dashboard — not a spreadsheet of completion percentages.

**We go from signed contract to live learning environment in 4 to 8 weeks.**

*No IT resource required. No generic content. Your brand, your SOPs, your results.*

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