

Kaplan Financial Limited

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Kaplan Financial Limited (Kaplan) is part of Kaplan Incorporated, an international education and training provider and a subsidiary of Graham Holdings Company. Approximately one fifth of its training is government funded. All of its government funded training programmes are apprenticeships from levels 2 to 7 in administration and law, accounting and finance. The visit covers the 3,200 apprentices studying programmes between level 2 and 5. Leaders employ tutors to provide theoretical training, and talent coaches support apprentices to develop their practical skills and behaviours.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders and managers state that the curriculum content has been adjusted appropriately as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Tutors and talent coaches support apprentices to engage in new ways of working which are predominantly based around online learning. Tutors, who teach apprentices on the theoretical aspect of the programme, now provide all of their training online, as opposed to previously teaching mostly in the classroom. Leaders reported a significant reduction in apprenticeship enrolments between March and September 2020, with many employers postponing recruitment decisions.

Leaders and managers feel that tutors, talent coaches and support staff have received extensive training on how to safely and effectively provide teaching and training online. Furthermore, they have received training on how to support apprentices' mental health and well-being throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. Staff feel that they have been supported to develop these skills and that the new strategies deployed are having a positive effect on apprentices' progress.

Leaders and managers state that they have put in place a range of support measures to assist apprentices both in their working and personal lives. Managers and talent coaches have worked very closely with employers to support apprentices through this challenging time. For example, when apprentices have been furloughed, talent coaches have worked closely with the apprentice and the employer to identify any gaps in knowledge, skills and behaviours, and have provided additional support to help them to catch up.

Leaders and managers have created a range of micro websites to facilitate 'learning through lockdown'. Apprentices learn about important skills that they need to master as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. These skills include online sessions on the importance of body language when using video conference software and the need for resilience and support mechanisms to cope with the impact of the pandemic.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders and managers state that they have made positive adaptations to their previous quality systems. They now review online 'live' lessons remotely to assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers and staff continue to use electronic monitoring tools to track apprentices' progress. Staff use the tracking system to identify and intervene where apprentices fall behind, and then they help them to catch up.

Tutors have received support from senior leaders to innovate and be more reflective about their teaching. Tutors have adapted their resources and teaching methods to meet the changing needs of apprentices. For example, they have reorganised lessons to make learning more manageable in an online environment. Tutors have recorded 'live' sessions and uploaded them quickly to the online learning portal. Apprentices use the recordings to catch up if they are unable to attend a session and as a revision aide for final assessments.

Leaders, managers and staff have embraced the beneficial aspects of online learning. They feel that the quality of online learning and resources has improved significantly since the start of the pandemic. Leaders identified that they now use online training to extend their staff development programme and share best practice across the organisation. Tutors have increased their bank of online learning resources and have implemented 'booster' sessions to eliminate gaps in apprentices' learning caused by the disruption of COVID-19 restrictions. They feel that these sessions have been pivotal in preparing apprentices for their delayed examinations.

Leaders recognise the potential negative impact that remote delivery has in removing the face-to-face contact that apprentices enjoy. They have implemented a range of interactive online activities to counteract the lack of social interaction. Leaders and managers acknowledge that apprentices facing redundancy have been more difficult

to engage in learning. Talent coaches provide career advice and guidance to support all apprentices.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Leaders and managers have provided staff with additional training to help them to support apprentices. This has supported staff to provide additional training to apprentices on physical and mental well-being while working and studying from home. Courses include, the importance of healthy eating, resilience mentoring and strategies to reduce 'brain fog' for apprentices who experience anxiety.

Talent coaches are proud of the extensive information that they have developed for apprentices to inform their online safety. Talent coaches train apprentices on phishing, financial scams, the dangers of sharing personal information on social media and who they should contact if they need to report any concerns.

Apprentices say they feel safe at work and when learning online. They feel that talent coaches inform them of important topics around online safety and keeping themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices say that working in a more isolated environment can have a negative effect on their mental health. They feel well-supported by their talent coaches.

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