

Kaplan Financial Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 54838

Name of lead inspector: Ian McMillan HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Kaplan Financial Ltd
6th Floor, St James' Building
Oxford Street
Manchester
M1 6FQ

Telephone number: 0161 237 3366

Information about the provider

1. Kaplan Financial Ltd (Kaplan) is one of the country's largest providers of accountancy and financial training. Approximately 10% of its work as a training provider is government-funded provision managed through contracts with the Greater Manchester Skills Funding Agency. Kaplan provides training courses in over 20 locations throughout the United Kingdom as well as home study and on-line learning for thousands of students providing professional accountancy and tax training qualifications.
2. Kaplan is part of Kaplan Inc., a worldwide provider of educational and training services and a subsidiary of The Washington Post Company. This inspection focused on Kaplan's Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes in business, administration and law (accounting and finance). Kaplan also runs customer service vocational programmes; inspectors sampled aspects of this provision during the inspection. Kaplan currently has 614 learners working towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2, 3 and 4 through Train to Gain. A further 1,515 apprentices are working towards intermediate and advanced level awards; 461 learners are on higher level 4 apprenticeships.
3. Kaplan employs 91 full-time staff to support these programmes. Government-funded training is managed by Kaplan's training centre managers. Most learners are recruited through Kaplan's extensive employer contacts and through its newly established schools' apprenticeship progression programme.
4. Learner numbers have grown significantly since the previous inspection. Recent funding changes and response to government priorities have increased the level 2 and 3 provision and reduced the number of level 4 Train to Gain learners.
5. Kaplan provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Ufi North West
 - Economic Solutions

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	614 learners
Apprenticeships	1,976 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	Grade
Business administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

6. The overall effectiveness of Kaplan's provision is good. Managers at all levels provide effective leadership that has successfully raised expectations and promoted ambition for learners. Kaplan has implemented a sound range of improvements to ensure more learners successfully complete their programmes within agreed timescales. The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Learning is good and many learners progress within their organisation and achieve at higher levels. Kaplan has good arrangements to monitor and support learner progress. Kaplan works very productively with learners, employers and other partners to provide training that meets their needs well. Arrangements to assess learners at work are flexible, efficient and well managed. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and well prioritised. Learners say they feel safe and protected. Kaplan successfully creates a culture of respect and care for learners and staff. Managers measure achievement although analysis of the outcomes for different groups of learners is not always sufficient. Insufficient use is made of the results from the observations of teaching and training to inform improvement planning.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Learners enjoy their training programmes and the proportion of learners achieving their qualifications is high. Too many learners have previously not completed within agreed timescales. However, this issue has been resolved. There is no significant difference in the outcomes between different groups of learners.
- Progression from intermediate to advanced levels and onto higher training is good and strongly promoted by Kaplan and employers. Employers speak highly of the skills and competencies that learners develop. Learners routinely use these skills to improve significantly their own economic well-being and the business performance and organisational effectiveness of their employer.
- The standards of learners' work are good and current learners are progressing well. Learners feel safe; the prioritisation of appropriate health and safety arrangements in the workplace and in the Kaplan training centres is satisfactory.
- Teaching and assessment are satisfactory and learning is good. Learners develop good technical knowledge and skills. There is good use of computer technology to support learning. Tutors are experienced and have excellent subject knowledge. Teaching sessions are satisfactory. The more effective sessions include a blend of teaching methods that make learning interesting. The less successful sessions do not stretch the more able learners.
- Assessment feedback from tutors to learners is constructive, providing learners with clear direction on areas to improve. Reviews of learner progress are satisfactory, with good support from employers. However, too many reviews fail to account for the wider benefits employers provide to learners.
- Resources are good; training rooms provide a pleasant learning environment. Kaplan's own bespoke on-line interactive resource systems are good and are used very effectively to support learning.
- Kaplan provides a broad range of programmes that meet learner and employer needs well. For example, foundation programmes provide opportunities for the less able learners, learners' attendance at sessions is planned very flexibly and more able learners can fast-track through the programmes. However, the introduction of work-based projects and key skills training into the programme is often left too late.
- Kaplan has very good partnership arrangements. It works well with schools to promote accounting careers. It works effectively with the standard setting bodies to develop new qualifications that currently include a level 1 qualification in book-keeping. It has also developed transitional units that support progression from level 4 to professional accountancy status. Kaplan is very effective in meeting the organisational and business needs of its partners.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners receive good support from training staff. Staff are always available and highly approachable, providing prompt and effective responses to learners' requests for help. Initial

assessment is not used well to inform the learners' plans for learning. Guidance during induction is satisfactory. Learners receive good information and advice to support progression.

- Leadership and management are good. Managers have a clear focus on improving success rates and continuously improving provision. Communication and teamwork are good. Demanding targets are set and progress against them is monitored closely, using reliable, accurate data.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. All relevant staff have completed a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Learners are safe, although there is insufficient promotion of e-safety. The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity are good. Good initiatives widen participation. Kaplan monitors the participation and success rates of different groups of learners but there is insufficient use of this information when action planning.
- Quality improvement systems are well established and used well to inform improvements. Kaplan has introduced a range of effective actions to ensure more learners succeed within agreed timescales. Actions include closer scrutiny of individual learner progress at reviews, regular performance reporting to identify underperformance and more focused and effective learner support.
- Written procedures relating to quality improvement and learner and employer involvement are insufficiently detailed. Observation of teaching and learning does not effectively promote improvement.
- Kaplan provides good value for money. Success rates are good and learners make good progress. Resources for staff and learners are good and well managed.

What does Kaplan need to do to improve further?

- Ensure learners continue to complete their programmes successfully within agreed timescales.
- Improve teaching and learning strategies to make teaching more collaborative, interactive and suited to the needs of all learners.
- Broaden the scope of progress reviews to increase the involvement of employers and to take more account of learners' personal and work-related development.
- Introduce work-based projects and key skills tasks sooner in the learning programme, particularly in smaller companies, to ensure learners produce high standards of work on time.
- Improve the use of the results of initial assessments to better plan, support and personalise learning.
- Develop more guidance for learners to improve their understanding of e-safety.
- Develop better arrangements to use information on the performance of different learner groups to support actions and improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the professionally run and well-planned classes
- learning a lot from each training session
- the very good centre facilities
- the excellent support from tutors
- the flexibility to access courses on different dates and times
- clear handouts and good books to help me study
- fantastic website with lots of materials for each unit
- careers advice which is tailor-made to my strengths and weaknesses.

What learners would like to see improved:

- better administration of courses and projects
- more time on some subjects so we are not rushed before exams
- smaller classes so we get more individual help
- more information about other career options.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the excellent choice of facilities and ways for employees to study
- flexible approach to arranging training
- regular feedback on learners' progress.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more information from assessors about learners' academic progress
- clearer communication on deadlines for projects and timetable changes.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 2

7. Kaplan has a good capacity to make and sustain improvements. Kaplan has a clear focus on continuous improvement and improving success rates. Staff are enthusiastic and highly motivated; they are committed to the success of their learners and the organisation. Overall success rates are good and more learners are completing within agreed timescales. Challenging targets are set and achieved throughout the organisation.
8. The self-assessment process is well established and used effectively as an improvement tool. Staff at all levels are involved in the development of the self-assessment report and the views of learners and employers are taken into account. The report is broadly accurate, although insufficiently evaluative. It informs a quality improvement plan; progress against the plan is monitored regularly and well. Resources are good and used well to support learners and staff.

Outcomes for learners Grade 2

9. Most learners achieve their qualifications across all programmes. Accountancy learners achieve particularly good examination pass rates. Few learners now leave their programmes without achieving.
10. Learners develop excellent employability and vocational skills. Over 80% of learners now achieve their learning aim. Employers value highly the good standard of learners' work and their vocational and academic attainment. Too many learners have achieved outside the agreed timescale. However, current provider data for 2009/10 show this has improved significantly.
11. Progression from intermediate to advanced and higher level programmes is good. Kaplan's good promotion of apprenticeships with schools has led to an increasing number of young people entering employment and apprenticeship training. Many learners secure promotion, increase their responsibility at work, progress well within their company and improve their economic well-being.
12. Learners feel safe; health and safety is carefully considered and appropriately prioritised. Personal safety and more general safeguarding considerations are promoted satisfactorily during induction and throughout the training programme. Learners are safe in the workplace. Healthy eating information is available in all training centres. However, healthy eating options are not always available for learners in centre canteens.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Learning and assessment are good. Teaching is satisfactory. Programmes are very effectively planned and co-ordinated to meet demanding qualification requirements. Learners enjoy well-organised, fast-paced learning sessions. These sessions are effective in developing learners' technical knowledge and preparing them well for their examinations. In less effective sessions there is insufficient challenge for the more able learner and little use of discussion or question and answer techniques to make learning more interesting. Kaplan has developed an extensive range of high quality learning resources and support material, including text books, class and revision notes, many of which are available on-line. Tutors and learners are increasingly using these resources and integrated computer technology to support learning.
14. Arrangements for assessment in the workplace are satisfactory; assessors use a good range of assessment methods. Kaplan works hard to plan carefully learners' workplace projects. This project work provides clear benefits for learners and supports employers' organisational development. However, mainly in smaller organisations, learner projects do not always start early enough, often resulting in poor timely completion.
15. Monitoring of learners' qualification progression is very effective. Tutors communicate with employers who appreciate the clarity and accuracy of information about learner progress. However, reviews focus too often on module and exam completion and generally fail to discuss any wider personal development or record employer actions or interventions that support learning and development. Equality and diversity and the well-being of learners are adequately checked during reviews. Initial assessment and induction processes are satisfactory.
16. Kaplan is good at meeting learner and employer needs. The range of provision extends from foundation to professional levels in accounting and learners generally progress rapidly. Kaplan is successful in extending the skill levels of more able learners. Learners and employers have a choice of attendance options to suit their needs. Tutors and assessors respond quickly to all requests for flexibility and support. Kaplan's partnership arrangements with employers and the qualification awarding bodies are well established and successful. Kaplan has developed a range of learning programmes and other support for businesses that are highly tailored to the needs of the financial sector.
17. Arrangements to guide and support learners are good. Kaplan provides effective support to ensure learners succeed and progress to higher level awards. Information, advice and guidance for learners, parents and employers are particularly good. Kaplan has developed a good range of information and promotional materials to support potential and existing learners. Kaplan's website promotes apprenticeships well to schools, parents and school leavers. It also promotes its scholarship scheme and a summer school programme for new applicants. The company engages frequently with business education

activities such as careers events, mock interview days and presentations. Learners and employers have a very clear understanding of the vocational and professional programmes and options available to them; Kaplan regularly holds events to highlight professional career options to employers.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

18. Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers are extremely well informed about national and local priorities within their sector. Kaplan has a clear strategic direction supported well by strong and responsible financial management. Kaplan has a supportive and positive culture that is very focused on promoting high standards. Staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic; teamwork is good. Demanding targets are set and progress against them is closely monitored, using reliable, accurate data.
19. Internal and external communications are highly effective. Resources and accommodation are good; staff are highly professional, well qualified and knowledgeable. Kaplan have invested in good internet-based technologies which benefit learners by enabling access to learning resources at a time and place to suit them. Staff benefit from good staff training.
20. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. There is a central single record which shows that CRB checks have been carried out on all appropriate staff. A designated senior member of staff is in charge of safeguarding arrangements and eight named safeguarding officers are in place. All staff have been, or are due to be, trained in safeguarding. Learners are reminded of the importance of safeguarding when accessing web-based resources; there is an on-screen link on each page to report any concerns. However, there is insufficient general guidance for learners on internet safety. Effective arrangements ensure the health and safety of learners and staff. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of health and safety. Records of accidents and incidents are kept and lead to actions for improvement.
21. Arrangements for promoting equality of opportunity are good. Equality and diversity and keeping safe are promoted well during learner induction and reinforced during progress reviews. Good arrangements attract a wide range of learners into learning. The learner website is comprehensive, informative and user friendly. Learners can access real time, on-line tuition via the internet, enabling remote access for learners who would find it difficult to attend a centre for tuition. Kaplan successfully promotes apprenticeships within a wide range of schools.
22. Potential learners have the opportunity to apply for a Kaplan scholarship. Kaplan provides successful applicants with free training for the accountancy technician and professional accounting qualifications. Kaplan offers an increasingly successful, free summer school programme. Young people from school who attend the programme are introduced to Kaplan and the business world and shown how to write a curriculum vitae. Kaplan has appropriate

policies covering equality and diversity supported by an equality and diversity action plan; progress against the plan is monitored regularly. Participation rates for different types of learners are monitored; participation rates are compared with the population in the geographical area in which centres are located. Managers monitor success rates for different types of learners; however, they make insufficient use of this information when developing action plans.

23. Arrangements to consult with learners are good. Kaplan collects learners' views following induction, tuition and revision. Feedback is collected from learner representatives and through learner forums. Senior, centre and course managers review all feedback and use it to develop improvement plans. Some centres inform learners about actions taken following their feedback but there is not a consistent approach across the organisation. When learners make negative comments, appropriate actions are taken. Employer feedback is collected using a variety of appropriate methods and is also used to inform improvement planning. Kaplan is in the process of developing on-line surveys for learners and employers. There is no written employer or learner involvement strategy.
24. Quality improvement systems are well established; results are used effectively to improve the provision. Recent actions have successfully increased timely success. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. Kaplan's arrangements to observe teaching, training and assessment are weak and not used sufficiently well to bring about improvement. There is too much focus on the actions of teachers and not enough focus on learning. Observer comments do not always match the grade awarded; moderation lacks rigour and observers are insufficiently trained.
25. Value for money is good. Financial performance is well monitored. Resources are good; staff are well trained and knowledgeable. Accommodation is good, as is investment in technology to support learning. Success rates are good. Kaplan's environmental policy statement sets down guiding principles relating to sustainable development. Kaplan closely monitors its environmental objectives.

Information about the inspection

26. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's national quality manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Skills Funding Agency, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the main subject area the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Kaplan Financial Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	2,590	2,590
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners		
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	-	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	-	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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