

Kaplan Financial Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Kaplan Financial Limited was inspected in July 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Kaplan Financial Limited (Kaplan) is part of Kaplan Incorporated, an international educational and training provider and a subsidiary of Graham Holdings Company. Approximately one tenth of its training is government funded. The very large majority of its training programmes are apprenticeships from levels 2 to 7 in administration and law, accounting and finance. The monitoring visit covered the apprenticeship provision up to level 5. A very small minority of the programmes are subcontracted to other providers. Kaplan currently has around 3,500 apprentices, around 10 adult learners and 185 advanced learner loan learners.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in identifying and implementing actions to bring about swift improvement to the quality of provision?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and senior managers have worked hard since the previous inspection to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the areas they need to improve, in order to raise the standard of education and training that apprentices and learners receive.

Leaders and senior managers have created an appropriately detailed quality improvement plan. They use the plan to correctly identify a range of improvements that are needed to enhance the experience apprentices and learners receive. The actions contained in the plan are monitored appropriately by leaders, managers and advisory board members on a frequent basis. Leaders and managers rightly acknowledge that more specific actions would lead to swifter improvements.

As a result of new improvement planning by leaders, senior managers and staff, apprentices and learners now receive a more personalised learning experience. Apprentices' starting points are now recognised by a new 'onboarding' process which identifies the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they possess at the start of their programme.

Tutors and talent coaches use 'onboarding' information to plan a curriculum that meets more effectively the specific training requirements of apprentices and learners. However, in a small minority of cases, managers do not allocate talent coaches to apprentices in a timely manner, which results in them not receiving the support from their coaches quickly enough.

Talent coaches now monitor more assiduously the progress that apprentices make on their programmes, so that they can achieve by the planned end date. They set learning targets for apprentices throughout their programme, but these are not sufficiently aspirational for a small minority of apprentices. For example, talent coaches do not always set apprentices challenging targets to achieve the higher grades of merit or distinction in their examinations and end-point assessments.

Most apprentices develop their English skills well throughout their programme. Those apprentices who need to complete their English functional skills qualifications are allocated a talent coach to support them in their learning. A small minority of apprentices who have already achieved functional skills in English are referred to a talent coach to develop their skills further, in order to meet their personal development aspirations and/or their employers' requirements.

Most apprentices develop their understanding and knowledge of 'Prevent' through the completion of activities during 'onboarding', which is further reinforced through activities using online resources. Talent coaches discuss the issues relating to 'Prevent' during progress reviews with individual apprentices. Consequently, most apprentices and learners have an appropriate understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in their workplace and in their communities.

How effectively do senior managers monitor adult learners' and apprentices' progress? How effective are intervention strategies when learners and apprentices are not making the progress of which they are capable?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have successfully improved the information they receive about the current progress that apprentices and learners are making on their programmes. They use this information to ensure that those apprentices who are not progressing as expected receive additional support to help them catch up quickly.

Leaders, senior managers and the assurance advisory board now receive monthly reports identifying the progress that apprentices and learners make on their programmes. The information contained within these reports is constantly evolving as managers and staff continue to question how they can further monitor and improve the apprentices' and learners' journeys.

The large majority of apprentices are making the progress expected of them. Leaders and managers have implemented strategies which include additional support sessions for apprentices as technical examinations draw closer, weekly development visits in preparation for synoptic tests and the recruitment of industry specialists to support apprentices in their career development. The vast majority of these interventions are successful in supporting apprentices to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours, and consequently apprentices and learners make a positive contribution to their employers' businesses.

How useful and accurate is the information that governors receive about the performance of the business? How assiduously do governors hold leaders and managers to account to swiftly improve areas of underperformance and ensure that all learners and apprentices make the progress of which they are capable?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have been successful in recruiting a highly reputable assurance advisory board to hold senior managers to account to initiate the necessary improvements. The board members have experience from across the further education sector, which they use to challenge leaders and senior managers on improvements to the quality of the provision. They have only had a few meetings but are already having an impact in ensuring that the quality of learning is at the centre of all improvements.

The advisory board meets on a termly basis. Members scrutinise the quality improvement plan to assess actions taken since the previous meeting. They receive appropriate information on the progress that senior managers have made in improving the standard of education and training. However, they do not record what is discussed or set clear actions to ensure that leaders and senior managers have acted swiftly enough.

How effectively have leaders and senior managers improved the management of underperforming subcontractors so that all learners and apprentices receive high-quality training?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have been highly effective in improving the quality of learning that apprentices receive through subcontracting arrangements. Since the previous inspection, managers have reduced the number of subcontracted providers significantly. They currently subcontract with two organisations, which provide specialist training for 19 apprentices.

Leaders and managers have taken the strategic decision to only deliver apprenticeship programmes in the longer term. This plan has resulted in the proportion of adult learning courses incrementally reducing. They have implemented a more rigorous due diligence and associated operating procedure for remaining providers, to ensure that the quality of education and training for these apprentices is of at least the same standard as that provided by Kaplan. Managers use the strengthened policies and procedures well and, as a result, apprentices and learners have benefited from improved subcontracted provision.

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