



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Kaplan Financial Ltd, November 2021

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the virtual monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Kaplan Financial Ltd (Kaplan) is making commendable progress since the November 2020 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

The impact of COVID-19

2 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

Changes since the last QAA review

3 The current number of students at Kaplan Financial Ltd is 44,738. The vast majority of these (44,218) are studying accountancy and tax programmes. The remainder (520) are on non-accountancy or tax programmes. This is a slight reduction of 4% since the academic year 2019-20. Apprenticeships account for 30% of student numbers. There are currently 178 full-time and 154 part-time academic staff, 38 of whom have management roles. Of the part-time staff, 92 are freelance tutors.

4 The key change since the last QAA review in 2020 is the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The new CEO took up post from 1 April 2021 and was previously Chief Operating Officer at Kaplan Financial. The monitoring team was able to meet with the new CEO as part of the meeting held with staff.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 Kaplan is making commendable progress on its action plan, building on good practice, and achieving actions within planned timescales. The reviewers reached this conclusion through examination of a wide range of documentation and data, including documents from external sources such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Department for Education Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance. Online meetings with students from both professional and apprenticeship programmes, supported by student survey documentation, contributed to the confirmation of progress against the action plan. Online meetings with management, teaching and support staff confirmed the documentary and student meeting evidence.

6 The Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) 2020 (HER (AP)) of Kaplan made no recommendations and highlighted one area of good practice. Kaplan's action plan therefore derives predominantly from its own identified priorities and areas for improvement, with four 'areas to address' derived from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, with 12 action plan targets.

7 The good practice identified by the 2020 review referred to the comprehensive and interactive virtual learning environment (MyKaplan) which continues to make a positive contribution to student achievement and satisfaction. Students praised MyKaplan for its ease of use and comprehensive content. Students particularly liked its flexibility, the 'chat with tutors' function, videos and recap materials. Staff reported improvements to MyKaplan, including making it the sole source of learning materials and improving its ease of navigation. Monitoring interaction with the platform takes place, ensuring that students are studying independently, with intervention by the learning coach team if students are not engaging. It is clear that Kaplan has successfully built on this area of good practice.

8 The action point - to develop a unitary quality function - plays a significant part in the achievement of the action plan as a whole, and particularly in its monitoring and effectiveness. Regular meetings across levels and sections of the organisation feed into the Quality and Improvement Plan with the aim of clearly identifying the impact of planned actions. Extensive use of surveys further informs Kaplan's measurement of success and improvement, displayed in the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboard. The dashboard provides a succinct method of gauging success across all areas of activity, including exam results, marking speed and accuracy, teaching, use of resources, and student support. It clearly shows targets and trends to inform improvement. Kaplan has achieved this action, and the further development of the quality function and its implementation continues.

9 Action points related to assessments are continuously improving formative assessments through stakeholder reviews and monitoring. More, but shorter, tests are increasing engagement levels. Students' views about formative assessments, their level of difficulty and speed and usefulness of feedback vary but, overall, students praise the academic support and responsiveness. Regular and extensive monitoring of marking accuracy and feedback maintains standards and identifies areas of improvement for markers. Students can request a re-mark of a formative assessment if they believe that it does not reflect the marking criteria. Students praise the availability and responsiveness of teaching staff, citing examples of the quick responses and support provided in the evenings and at weekends. Kaplan has achieved the action points under this heading except for a comparative analysis of mock and final results which rolls forward to the 2022 action plan. Refinements to assessments and assessment practice continue as part of Kaplan's quality improvement processes.

10 The aim of providing a more integrated experience for apprentices and to continue to develop and improve the experience of apprentices has been achieved. Kaplan united the academic and practical sides of the apprenticeship programmes to provide a more integrated curriculum. Scenarios, tailored to their precise roles, helps to provide learning in a relevant and context dependent way. Staff and students recognise that the structural features of an apprenticeship programme require students to complete learning activities which, in some cases, they may not have anticipated needing in their professional situation. The quarterly Apprenticeship Advisory Panel is a useful means of communication for students and staff to secure improvements to the programme and student experience. Student members felt that their voice was always heard in panel meetings. Examples of improvements made are the introduction of a newsletter - read by over 3,000 students, and providing regular online safeguarding information.

11 Achievement of the action plan points, noted in the previous paragraphs, is facilitated by extensive and effective communication with students, which is itself an improvement action point for Kaplan. Students are surveyed at the end of modules and quarterly, with results feeding in to the KPI dashboard and used for targeted improvements. Although recognising that studying more modules generates more surveys, students welcomed being asked for their views. Students confirmed that Kaplan followed up surveys, sometimes communicating personally and then implementing clear improvements. Although, as

recognised by the Matrix Standard report, percentage response rates to questionnaires are low - at 14% or 7,100 responses for October 2020, there are 22,325 responses for 2021 and Kaplan is confident in the statistical relevance of the response.

12 Kaplan identified the need to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) notification and support and has achieved the objectives for 2021. Fundamental to achieving the objective is the appointment of a SEND coordinator and a rolling training programme for staff, with 235 staff having already received training. An Additional Learning needs (ALS) brochure and questionnaire provide clear and detailed guidance for staff and students, including a broad range of circumstances where students might require additional support beyond the narrower definition of SEND. A well-organised tutorial structure supports identification and support for additional needs and complements the work of the SEND team. Students confirmed clear guidance on identifying and accessing additional support. Although Kaplan does not have a qualified counsellor, signposting and online sites support mental health and wellbeing.

13 In addition to its action plan, Kaplan identified Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as good practice in its self-evaluation document for the 2020 review. As identified by the 2020 review, Kaplan takes a systematic approach to the training, support and management of its staff. The materials on MyKaplan form an effective resource for staff training and development. New academic staff receive an effective induction with support and monitoring by Tutor Mentors, Kaplan Buddies and Faculty Managers. Talent Coaches, who support apprentices, receive an extensive four-week induction. Kaplan encourages and supports staff to undertake either a postgraduate teaching qualification or a Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training. Currently, 11 members of staff have completed the Level 5 Diploma, plus 9 staff currently studying, with 27 staff having completed PGCert/PGCE or Master's in Education. No staff have Higher Education Academy or Advance HE recognition. MyKaplan and the Kaplan Tutor Academy provide extensive support programmes and materials for staff including refresher, booster, and bite-size courses. Observation of teaching also provides useful feedback for teaching staff to share and improve teaching. As Kaplan delivers programmes from a range of professional bodies, staff need to maintain their professional registration and competence, which Kaplan supports by paying professional body fees. The 2020 Matrix report identifies Kaplan induction and CPD as strengths, further reinforcing the self-identified good practice.

Student data return

14 Kaplan closely monitors the results of formative assessments to prepare students for the final examinations, created and marked by the various professional bodies (see paragraph 9 above). However, the collection of final results data is dependent on students agreeing to share with Kaplan details of the exams that they sit and the results that they achieve. Kaplan gathers and analyses the pass rates of its students as part of the KPIs which are reviewed across the organisation to seek improvement. Kaplan aims to outperform the sector by up to 20% depending on the awarding organisation. For 2020-21, Kaplan's pass rates exceed professional body averages. For example, the results for Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) students exceeded the average by 40% although numbers on these programmes are low at nine students currently enrolled. ACCA papers exceeded the average at between 24% and 28% with over 12,000 students enrolled. Figures for ACA were lowest, at between 0% and 5% with over 12,000 enrolled. Kaplan analyses results in fine detail - for example, on ACCA programme, by level, region and tutor. The pass rate for those students disclosing their results was 68% out of 2,039 students in March 2021. Achievements for apprenticeship rolling programmes vary from 83% pass (53 completers) from Level 4 Associate Project Manager in the 2018-19 cohort to 12% Level 6 and 100% Level 4 Junior Management Consultants (16 and 22 completers respectively from 2019-20 cohort). Overall, Kaplan results are good, exceeding professional body levels and analysed

thoroughly to encourage improvement, thereby clearly maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities of its provision.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

15 Kaplan uses the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) to inform their policies and procedures and in evaluations of higher education programmes. Full mapping of its Teaching and Learning Strategy with the Quality Code is part of the 2020-21 action plan and achieved with detailed consideration of Core and appropriate Common practices. Kaplan's action plan demonstrates effective use of the Quality Code as a routine feature of quality improvement and enhancement. External reference points are important to Kaplan who operate within the frameworks of a wide range of professional bodies who provide their qualifications. Kaplan also considers Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework where it applies to levels of their apprenticeship programmes, and the Matrix Quality Standard accreditation for the Information, Advice and Guidance of the apprentice programmes provides a further set of external reference points for Kaplan. Kaplan clearly demonstrates highly-effective engagement with relevant external reference points including the Quality Code.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Alan Weale, QAA Officer, on 17 November, 2021.

QAA2637 - R13160 - Dec 21

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2021
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk