



# Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Kaplan Financial Ltd, November 2023

## Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Kaplan Financial Ltd (Kaplan) is making commendable progress since the [November 2021 monitoring visit](#).

## Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The current number of students at Kaplan Financial Ltd is 44,003. The majority of students are studying accountancy and tax programmes with 398 enrolled on other apprenticeship programmes. Kaplan has experienced a slight reduction in the total number of students compared to the previous reporting period of 2021-22. There has been a 2% reduction in new students studying at Level 4. The number of new students at Level 7 has increased by 2% and accounts for 84% of enrolments. Apprenticeships account for 60% of student numbers although the number of enrolments for apprentices on Level 4-7 programmes during 2022-23 was marginally lower. Overall student enrolments are 13% higher than 2020-21.

3 There is currently a total of 494 staff supporting delivery of programmes of whom 404 are full-time and 90 part-time academic staff - 85 of whom have management roles.

## Findings from the monitoring visit

4 Kaplan continues to make commendable progress on its action plan. This conclusion was reached 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 contributed to the confirmation of progress against the action plan. Online meetings were held with management, teaching and support staff.

5 The Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) 2020 (HER (AP)) of Kaplan made no recommendations and highlighted one area of good practice. The annual monitoring visit in 2021 confirmed that Kaplan had made commendable progress. Kaplan has subsequently developed an internal action plan that is detailed, thorough, evidence-based and developmental. The action plan is mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and considerable progress has been made against each of the actions over the last year. Among the most significant developments that is documented in the action plan is the development of a unitary quality function across all programmes. Over the last 12 months, this has resulted in the publication of a new Quality Assurance Policy, the implementation of learning walks and developmental teaching observations, monthly deep dives into programmes, regular centre visits and a revised governance structure.

Recent successes include the development of a larger special educational coordinator team, internal training for academic support and closer links with employers.

6 The Quality Assurance Policy was developed to meet the external and regulatory requirements of apprenticeship provision, and has been adopted widely across all of Kaplan's programmes. The policy provides a continuous quality cycle with clear plans, actions and reviews, and has a primary focus on assessing the overall impact on learners. Learning walks and developmental teaching observations have been introduced across the centre and have proved effective in highlighting good practice, as well as areas for development. There are a number of examples of innovative practice identified during observations, which have been shared more widely and become institutional practice. Deep dives allow for a focused look at specific areas of provision, most recently on Level 7 and financial services. Monthly centre visits by the quality team include meetings with students and staff, and analyse a range of data.

7 The new governance structure has established a Curriculum Committee, an Apprenticeship Leadership team, Monthly Apprenticeship Reports and an External Advisory Board. The new quality assurance and enhancement policies and practices ensure a rigorous and coherent institution-wide approach that utilises evidence from progress reports, progression and attainment data, and student feedback to inform improvements.

8 The proportion of students who are on apprenticeships has increased considerably since the last visit and apprentices now make up the majority of Kaplan students. This student profile has driven positive change in improved quality assurance and enhancement. Following a recent Ofsted visit, Kaplan introduced Project Compass - an institution-wide initiative to address issues raised in the report and subsequent monitoring visits. Project Compass covers five thematic areas, including a broad range of provision such as learning progress, employer engagement and improvements to the curriculum.

9 Kaplan closely monitors a range of key performance indicators (KPI) and has developed rigorous and proportionate processes to address issues when they arise. This approach includes a special measures procedure whereby programmes that perform less well are identified and reviewed in Monthly Apprenticeship reports. There is ongoing monitoring at Curriculum Board with oversight by the External Assurance Board. Achievement rates and student satisfaction are effectively used as key indicators of programme health, as evidenced in the Pass Rates Review, summary of learner surveys and KPI dashboard. Kaplan has a range of strategies to manage programmes with poor performance including, on one occasion last year, course closure.

10 Kaplan continues to demonstrate effectiveness in learning and teaching, student support and information and guidance, as evidenced in a range of external indicators and in the student meeting. Student feedback plays a key role in informing developments in provision. Apprentices study alongside fee-paying commercial students and there are effective processes to ensure the latter do not participate in apprentice-specific activities like Gateway, Progress Reviews and end-point assessments (EPA). Apprentices have a Talent Coach from the start of their programme and students are extremely positive about how their coaches individualise their learning and provide personal and developmental support. The MyKaplan virtual learning environment, which was noted as an area of good practice in the original report, has been developed further in the last year. It provides new tools and resources for professional development, apprenticeships skills, and maths and English courses. Positive pedagogic developments arising from teaching through the pandemic have included a more effective hybrid learning model and more flexible workplace engagement.

11 There is a focus on continuous improvement and the central team has effective oversight across the 20 UK centres. Courses and resources are developed centrally so there

is a high degree of standardisation. Centre visits and deep dives monitor standards and consistency across and within the training centres. There is a strategic focus on future developments, with a dedicated post to support this activity, and a new institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy is currently being developed.

12 There has been a small intentional decrease in student numbers directed as Kaplan seeks to focus on quality and rigour, rather than rapid growth. Apprentices now constitute 60% of the student cohort. Pass rates are monitored carefully at subject level on a quarterly basis and are benchmarked to relevant professional bodies. Interactive data software is now used effectively to analyse pass rates in a timely and systematic manner. Success rates indicate that students perform better than the average for some professional bodies. Qualification achievement rates on apprenticeships fell this year by 6%, with the sharpest decrease of 15% on Level 4 provision. A new Past Planned End Date Policy has been developed to address these achievement rates and actions are monitored at External Assurance Board. End-point assessment rates are extremely high, with 99% of apprentices completing and 90% achieving all elements at their first attempt.

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

13 Kaplan clearly demonstrates that it makes comprehensive use of external reference points to assure quality and standards. A full range of external reference points are utilised to meet UK expectations for higher education. The internal Quality Action Plan is mapped to the Core and Common practices of the Quality Code. All provision is accredited by relevant professional bodies. In the last year Kaplan has gained ACCA reapproval as a Platinum partner in all centres. It has also undergone successful Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) external quality assurance monitoring visits at six of its training centres in the last 12 months. It has annual Matrix improvement checks and underwent full reaccreditation in November 2023, receiving a successful outcome in all seven areas, with proposals for Kaplan to be used as a case study for information, advice and guidance.

14 Apprenticeship provision is governed by the relevant standards within the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework. Ofsted completed a full inspection in 2022 and a monitoring visit in June 2023. The outcomes from these inspections have led to the development of Project Compass, with actions focused on various aspects of apprenticeship provision. Actions are disseminated to all staff across all training centres.

15 As part of the new governance structure Kaplan established an External Assurance Board (EAB) which receives feedback from students and employers through reports from the Curriculum Board and the Apprenticeship Advisory panel. The EAB meets with the senior leadership team on a monthly basis and ensures external oversight and accountability of the quality of provision, apprenticeship outcomes and risk management. Minutes from the EAB meetings indicate purposeful and critical engagement with Kaplan's various quality assurance and enhancement activities.

## **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 Professor Will Curtis, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, on 14 November 2023.

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