



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TRAILBLAZER STANDARDS:

Interview with Cassandra MacDonald, November 2016

Cassandra MacDonald, Head of Professional Service Apprenticeships at Kaplan UK, talks about the new Trailblazer standards and the results of our recent employer recruitment survey.

Could you give a brief overview of the new Trailblazer standards that are coming into effect?

Yes, the new standards are based around specific job roles and detail the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices should be able to demonstrate by the time they have finished their Apprenticeship. They are designed by employers and where possible should align with professional registration e.g. ICAEW, CISI, AAT. They should be sufficiently stretching to require at least a year's worth of training and development.

Why are previous frameworks being replaced?

The Richard Review in 2012 found that frameworks were cumbersome and confusing with, in many cases, employers not always clear on what their apprentice was actually doing or what skills they were acquiring. The old frameworks were also very broad, such as 'Business Admin' - so it wasn't always clear what job role they were relevant for.

From our recent survey, it appears that many are still unaware of the new standards - what can be done better to promote awareness of these?

To a large extent this is understandable, as many standards have been in development for some time so it would have been confusing for employers to get to know two systems. However now that more and more standards are being signed off as ready for delivery, and with the imminent changes to funding, it is vital employers understand what the new standards are and what they will mean to them.

Awarding organisations, professional bodies, providers, employers who lead the Trailblazer groups, and supporting organisations such as the AELP and National Apprenticeship Service all need to work together to promote and educate others in their sectors as to what is around the corner.

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The Level 3 Assistant Accountant Trailblazer Standard is now ready for delivery – what more can you tell us about this?

I am really excited about this new standard as it is going to provide employers with far more flexibility over how they develop their future talent. For instance, it can include studying for all or some of AAT Level 2 together with Level 3 in a shorter time frame than is currently the case. It also allows for more choice over which units you want to complete.

The new standard will also require apprentices to build up a portfolio of skills and behaviours that they have demonstrated in the work place and reflect back on these via a professional discussion at the end of the Apprenticeship. This means that the Apprenticeship is no longer just about passing exams, but also relates directly to performance in the workplace which is a really positive step.

How has Kaplan been involved in Trailblazers so far?

Kaplan has been heavily involved in Trailblazers across the Financial Services and Accountancy, representing both ourselves but also many of our smaller employers on all the key sector groups. In Accountancy we have helped shape the assessment plans for the Level 3 and Level 4 standards, work which was recently praised by OFSTED in our latest report who praised the “significant contribution” we had made and our collaborative way of working. This puts us in the best possible position, we believe, to advise our current and future employers of best practice when adopting these new standards.

What does the future hold for the Trailblazer standards and what are the key dates that people need to be aware of in the coming months?

The most exciting developments in the near future are the new standards being created at Levels 6 & 7 which will enable a complete Professional Qualification such as CIMA or ACCA to be completed via the Apprenticeship route. This will be a game-changer both in terms of enabling companies to spend their Levy but also make a significant contribution towards the training spend of many other organisations. We hope the Level 7 standard will be available for delivery in early 2017.

Secondly a really key date to watch out for is April 2017 when the Levy comes in and funding rules change for any employer engaged with Apprenticeships. This is likely to be a natural point where you will begin to transfer to the available new standards.

Good providers are here to guide and help you through these changes so if you are considering the switch or wondering what it means for you, then please get in touch with us today.

How can businesses get involved in these Trailblazer standards?

For those that are already ready for delivery, businesses can get involved by starting to deliver them. For the standards currently in development, businesses should contact the representative responsible for that group which can be found on the DFE’s website. This is also the place to find information if an employer wants to create a group to create a new standard i.e. for job roles for which a standard is not already in development.

How do they differ from existing standards?

It really depends on the individual standard - in some cases, there won’t have been an equivalent Apprenticeship in existence before so they are brand new. In other sectors, such as Accountancy, the changes are relatively minor from what employers are already used to.

The biggest change is the requirement for all Apprenticeships, regardless of sector, to have an end point assessment. In effect this is a form of assessment at the end of the Apprenticeship which tests all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours across the whole standard and this assessment will be graded.

It will differ according to the standard, but may include: an exam, case study, portfolio, interview, project or a reflective statement. Ultimately it is up to the employer group to decide the most suitable form of assessment for their sector.

What are the key practical considerations to consider when adopting Trailblazer standards?

The main thing to consider is planning for the end point assessment as this will be a pass/fail, so it is really important Apprentices are well prepared and in a position to perform well. This can be quite tricky at the moment as there has been a lack of detail around what should be included in this end point assessment. A good provider, especially one who has been involved in the development of the standards, will be able to advise you and help you plan, so we would always recommend consulting a specialist before making the decision to adopt.

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