Kaplan International Colleges

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

March 2012

Key findings about Kaplan International Colleges

This is a report of an Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Kaplan International Colleges. The review took place in a series of visits in March and April 2012.

The QAA review team (the team) formed the following judgements about Kaplan International Colleges:

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the academic standards of the awards it offers through its embedded college provision.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students through embedded colleges.

The review team considers that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself, its embedded colleges, and the programmes that they deliver.

Good practice

The team identified the following **features of good practice** at Kaplan International Colleges (KIC):

- the strength of self-reflection in KIC as demonstrated in particular by the self-evaluation document (paragraph 1.23)
- the independent dimension in the management of academic standards provided by KIC's appointment of external examiners (paragraph 1.38)
- the effective liaison, communication and collaboration with KIC's higher education partners (paragraph 2.3)
- the work of KIC's University Placement Service (paragraph 2.15)
- the quality of the pastoral and academic support provided for students (paragraph 2.16)
- the pre-admissions support provided by KIC staff to applicants (paragraph 2.18)
- the organisational cohesion of the KIC network of colleges and partner higher education institutions, including the work of its Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ) (paragraph 2.19)
- the staff development provided for KIC's management, administrative and support staff (paragraph 2.20).

Recommendations

The team makes the following recommendations to Kaplan International Colleges.

The team considers that it is **advisable** for KIC to:

- review the design and content of the transcripts issued by KIC, so as to ensure that there is no confusion regarding the ultimate responsibility for the KIC award (paragraph 1.33)
- provide a dimension of external assurance for the pre-master's programme offered at Kaplan International College Bournemouth in accordance with KIC's revised Academic Standards and Quality Manual (paragraph 1.39)

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About this report

This report presents the findings of the Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight[1] (ECREO) conducted by QAA at Kaplan International Colleges (the provider; KIC). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review was carried out by Mr D Batty, Ms J Clarke, Professor M Cook, Mrs B Hodgkinson, Dr M Ruthe, Professor G Taylor (reviewers), and Dr P Findlay (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*.[2] The review involved an initial briefing visit to KIC's central management in offices in London, visits to the seven KIC embedded colleges, and a final review visit to the London offices. KIC submitted a self-evaluation document to inform the review, and the team also considered a range of documentation provided by KIC, and by the individual embedded colleges. The self-evaluation included an analysis of organisational strengths and areas for development and was judged by the team to be helpfully reflective and evaluative. The team met a cross-section of KIC staff both centrally and in the colleges, and met a group of students at each college visited. In the course of each college visit, the team also met representatives of the partner university, or universities.

Please note that if you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used in this report you can find them in the Glossary.

The embedded colleges are developed in close partnership with KIC's partner universities, and in the majority of cases are situated within the relevant university.

Types of partnership

Within the KIC network of colleges, partnerships with higher education institutions can take slightly differing forms. The most typical model, as found at the Brighton, Glasgow, Liverpool Nottingham Trent, and Sheffield colleges, is a direct and close articulated relationship with an individual university in which the college is embedded within the university campus, and where the students who are successful at the required level will progress directly onto that university's higher education programmes. Exceptions to this are currently found at two colleges in the group. Kaplan International College London has independent premises in London and prepares students for study at three different university institutions (City University, Cranfield University, and the University of Westminster). The second exception is Kaplan International College Bournemouth (KICB), which is currently the only KIC college where programmes are externally validated, rather than approved through an internal KIC process linked with the formal agreement with the local partner institution. KICB students may progress to a variety of higher education institutions as well as to Bournemouth University. The College has a close relationship with that University but is separately located in its own premises. KICB is also distinctive in offering closely integrated study paths in English language.

Programmes, progression routes and awards

KIC pathway programmes lead to the following internal KIC awards in the various subject areas offered through the colleges: Foundation Certificate at level 3 of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), Diploma at level 4 of the FHEQ, Graduate Diploma at level 6 of the FHEQ, and a Pre-Master's, also at level 6 of the FHEQ. Glasgow International College has mapped its awards against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The awards, and the programmes which lead to them, are specific to each college and are determined by the detailed negotiation on student learning outcomes, which takes place between the college and the partner university. The programmes of study lead,as w,llead protrms.

which is responsible for the oversight of academic standards and quality. In each of the embedded colleges, management responsibility rests with the College Director.

KIC has established a Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ), which is based in Nottingham, and which, together with colleges, has responsibility across all the KIC colleges for academic development and enhancement and for coordinating quality assurance, also giving focused support to newly established colleges within the network. A further KIC network-wide support function is the University Placement Service (UPS). This service has secured arrangements with a wide range of universities to place students from the colleges who have successfully completed the KIC programme, but not necessarily qualified for direct progression to the partner institution.

Detailed findings about Kaplan International Colleges

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 Ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and the quality of KIC programmes lies with its Senior Management Team. KIC as the provider directs, facilitates, and supports its embedded colleges in their maintenance of academic standards and assurance of academic quality. Following a review in 2010-11, KIC has adopted a more devolved approach to the management of its embedded colleges, with significant aspects of decision-making and quality assurance now taking place at the local college level. Quality management procedures operate within a federal structure, with responsibilities lying at both the central and college level. Partner universities play a key role in this as defined in cooperation agreements. New policies and procedures have been recently developed and introduced to support the new arrangements: a revised Quality Assurance Framework was launched in 2011, with an accompanying procedural guide, the Academic Standards and Quality Manual, being updated in 2011-12. A first KIC Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy was developed in 2010-11, providing colleges with a framework to produce their own local strategies. Working with the College Director, each college has an Academic Director (or equivalent) and a programme committee, with a specific remit for course development and quality assurance, and for reporting on these areas.

1.2

in the process which is external to KIC. In those colleges where there is no JAB the review

procedures. The team took the view that this was a good example of changes to procedures resulting from effective self-evaluation.

Annual monitoring

1.21 KIC has effective arrangements in place for the annual monitoring of modules and programmes. Such procedures had been in place for some time previously, with annual reports being produced for the information of KIC and university management. These procedures were further strengthened from the academic year 2011-12 with the establishment of programme committees. Programme leaders are provided by the local academic support team with detailed progression and completion data at both module and course level, together with student satisfaction survey results. In some cases, there is also

Periodic

1.30 Definitions of, and procedures for, dealing with academic misconduct are set out in the Academic Standards and Quality Manual (except at KICB, where validated courses follow procedures of validating universities). A part of the KIC range of outcomes is to help students to fully understand the expectations of academic culture in the UK. The students met indicated they had been effectively advised on what constitutes plagiarism, on the importance of avoiding it and the consequences if they did not.

1.31 The review team read assessment regulations, external examiners' reports and the minutes of assessment boards. It discussed assessment strategies, including marking policy, with college staff and questioned students regarding the feedback received on

aligned to both the SCQF and NQF. All programmes have accompanying programme specifications, which refer as appropriate to subject benchmark statements and include defined learning outcomes. There was good evidence of the mapping of relevant aspects of local college quality assurance procedures against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), particularly with regard to student-facing policies.

1.36 There is close consultation between staff at the individual colleges and staff at partner universities in the course of the development and annual review of programmes. This work aims to ensure that content, level and standards of the programmes are

University of Glasgow. A second project is using initial qualifications and progression and completion data to investigate correlation between the level of input qualifications from different countries and the level achieved on the KIC programme.

1.47 The review team was able to examine the use of data in programme monitoring reports, and for some programmes it was shown evidence of the consideration of progression data, including reports from the Transition Project. The team considers that the analysis of data relating to the progression and performance of KIC students within the partner universities provides a key indicator for the quality and academic standards of the KIC programmes, and it would therefore strongly encourage KIC and its partner institutions to continue to develop the management and the consideration of this information. Overall, the team found that KIC recognises the importance of statistical information, is seeking to strengthen this aspect of its management of academic standards, and uses the information sets currently available to it in an effective manner.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers through embedded college provision.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 KIC has a range of processes for monitoring the quality of learning opportunities, including in particular the annual monitoring and review cycle, which carries out a comprehensive review of the programme delivery and reports on progression and completion figures. Consideration of student feedback on the quality of teaching is included in annual reports and is also used by college-level senior management in staff performance appraisal. The generally very positive outcomes from student feedback surveys were reflected in discussions with students met by the review team, who reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of learning provided in the colleges. KIC colleges also use staff feedback on modules, elicited regularly through formal module feedback questionnaires. External examiners are invited to comment on the quality as well as the academic standards of student work. The annual college report provides an overview of the quality of learning opportunities and this report is seen by senior managers at KIC as well as by the partner university; it includes considerable detail about matters related to student support.
This higher level management is supported by the compilation of quality-related information carried out by CLIQ and presented to APQC. Further evaluation is carried out regularly by the JABs (or equivalent) with the universities. Evidence for successful learning in these programmes is also provided persuasively by the students' successful transition into university prog E elion ypr(si)5(s 9-7.62 Tm[')]TJ(a)13(g)-8(emen)12(t)6(ng)]TJET E12.82 Tm[ca( )12(t)-4(f

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issues involved in teaching

2.26 Naturally, the quality of the individual learning resources will vary according to the nature of the programmes and the provision of the host university. The review team noted that, where necessary, special arrangements were made to meet the needs of students on specific programmes. Thus, KIC had negotiated the necessary agreement determining that students progressing to Cranfield University through Kaplan International College London could use the nearby laboratories of City University. Teaching staff in the colleges also benefited from agreements for access to resources and commented positively about the constructive relationship with their partner university and about their ability to consult library and electronic resources provided through the partnership agreement. Overall, the review team concluded that KIC, through its careful arrangements for programme approval, partnership agreement, and ongoing evaluation, had the means to ensure that the learning resources available to colleges were of the appropriate standard.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider

How effective a

4 Action plan

Kaplan International Colleges action plan relating to the Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight scheme

		Planning and Quality Committee by August 2012		Committee		2012-13 academic year
• the independent dimension in the management of academic standards provided by KIC's appointment of external examiners (paragraph 1.38)	Feed back to Kaplan International Colleges senior college-based staff on the independent dimension in the management of standards provided by external examiners as being as commended in the review, while raising awareness that the ways in which Kaplan International Colleges uses					

	collaboration with Kaplan International Colleges hosts and partners	end August 2012)				
• the work of KIC's University Placement Service (paragraph 2.15)	Awareness-raising campaign in pathways and language colleges regarding the work of the University Placement Service, to include statistics on numbers of students placed and success stories	Campaign to be rolled out from September 2013 in order to have an impact upon students completing in April 2013	Head of University Placement Service working with University Placement Service coordinators (also working with Director of Sales and Recruitment)	Greater awareness of the University Placement Service across colleges, as evidenced through an increased uptake of students	Director of Colleges	Report on the impact of the campaign to be produced by the Head of University Placement Service, received by College Executive Management Board
	Continued strategic selection of a number of partner universities to accept Kaplan International Colleges Award through the University Placement Service: target of number and appropriate institutions to be agreed	By end of October 2013	Head of University Placement Service	Increase in the number of target institutions that will accept the Kaplan International Colleges Award	Director of Colleges	Interim report on the number of institutions to be received by College Executive Management Board by December 2012; final report on numbers of partner institutions to accept Kaplan International Colleges Award through University

institutions, including the work of its Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ)

	end August 2012)	staff as part of staff induction in September 2012	
Materials to be made available for staff to display examples of staff development they have undertaken, for displaying in staff areas		Kaplan International Colleges Human Resources Director, Europe and Asia Pacific	Increased awareness of new and existing staff with regard to the range and availability of staff development opportunities available

dimension of external assurance for the pre-master's programme offered at Kaplan International College, Bournemouth in accordance with KIC's revised Academic Standards and Quality Manual (paragraph 1.39) • ensure that there is provision in all programmes for an external scrutiny of	College Bournemouth to find and appoint external examiner(s) as appropriate to the subjects under scrutiny for the pre-master's programme for 2012-13	examiner(s) to be appointed so that s/he may have oversight of the work of students completing programmes in August 2013	Studies and Head of Pathways	examiner(s) in post and reports produced by deadline	Student Learning, Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality	feed into quality assurance procedures Review the effectiveness of the support provided by the external examiner(s)

colleges		Quality	
Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality to support colleges currently without suitable level of externality, as identified in the Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight report, to work with external examiners and/or colleagues at host universities to devise processes to secure this externality within their own quality assurance procedures	By end of term 3 2012-13 to ensure process for external scrutiny of exam questions and summative assignments is in place for 2013-14 academic year	Quality Officer, Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality	All colleges to be able to evidence that there is an opportunity for external scrutiny of questions and summative assessments,

external examiners that it has appointed (paragraph 1.43)	at colleges for the involvement of external examiners appointed

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight:

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