Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) of Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd

June 2016

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Glossary **48**

1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards by the provider

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree -Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.12 Ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of KIC programmes lies with its Senior Management Team (SMT). KIC's senior academic body is the Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC) which has devolved responsibility for the governance of academic standards and quality. The APQC is responsible for the setting and monitoring of academic policies and academic standards, including the governance of the KIC quality assurance framework, the approval of new programmes and modules, major changes to existing programmes and modules, the approval of academic regulations, and the receipt of reports and surveys relating to academic standards and quality.

1.13 KIC academic policies and procedures concerning the award of credit and qualifications are outlined in detail within its Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and Academic Standards and Quality Manual (ASQM). Responsibility for implementing these rests with the colleges, with support provided by KIC Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ).

1.14 The ASQM sets out in more detail the series of policies and procedures, aligned with the QAF, which colleges need to adhere to in order to ensure academic standards and quality.

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

are rigorously scrutinised through the approval process and become the definitive record of the programme stored and shared via KI Connect.

1.37 Evidence scrutinised by the review team confirms that the KIC approval processes provide a rigorous and consistent check that programmes meet or exceed the UK threshold academic standards.

1.38 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is low because KIC implements rigorous processes for the approval of taught programmes to ensure that academic standards are appropriately set.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment
both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes - Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.39 KIC's programme and module learning outcomes are agreed as part of a formal approval process which ensures that KIC awards reference the appropriate standards and benchmarks as set out in the Qualifications Framework . The KIC Quality Assurance Framework provides clear guidance to College staff when devising and updating programme and module learning outcomes .

1.40 The Academic Standard and Quality Manual (ASQM) sets out KIC's assessment principles including the responsibility of College level Programme Committees for ensuring that an effective assessment strategy is in place for all programmes that meet the KIC aims and principles of assessment and supports the Kaplan International UK Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework. Grade descriptors are used to define success and extent to which learning outcomes are met. Programme Committees ensure that assessments are designed and considered in the overall context of the programme and module learning outcomes and include an appropriate volume and balance of assessment methods. The Annual Programme Report (APR) is completed by the Programme Leader, in conjunction with the Programme Committee before final approval is given by the Senior College Management Team. It is then received by the Collegiate Board of Studies, the External Examiner and CLIQ. The APRs inform the Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes (ASQP) Report which is considered by KIC ASQC.

1.41 The KIC external examiner report template requires commentary on the appropriateness of the learning outcomes to the level of the award and the appropriateness of the assessment to the programme and module outcomes. Assessment Boards confirm students' marks and whether they have met the University progression requirements and those for the KIC Award.

1.42 Colleges are effectively supported in the assessment process by CLIQ with supplementary written guidance such as the KIC Assessment Development Guide and the Guidelines for Establishing Alternative Assessment Arrangements for Disabled Students .

1.43 The review team found that the design of the processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.44 The review team considered a range of documentation including programme committee minutes, APR reports, programme and module specifications and external examiner reports.

1.45 The review team met staff who were involved in providing support for programme approval, setting and marking of assessments, and in producing annual programme reports.

1.46 The review team found that KIC has a clear process for defining and setting learning outcomes on programme approval and for transferring those outcomes into assessment tasks and criteria. This process takes into account UK threshold standards and the standards set by KIC and its partner universities. The process is well embedded and reasonably understood by staff and students. External input into the enhancement of learning outcomes, and the assessment process was clearly embedded within the College processes.

1.47 Programme specifications seen by the review team all included appropriate learning outcomes. APR reports and minutes of Programme Committees and APQC undertook effective consideration of the equivalency of assessment methods and consistency of marking standards. External examiner reports noted that there was a good range of assessment methods used on many programmes and confirmed that Assessment Boards operate securely and effectively. There was no evidence of any significant concerns within the external examiner reports regarding standards that had not been addressed.

1.48 KIC staff advised that support for College staff is provided by CLIQ through targeted training that includes developing assessments in subject areas and standardisation of

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes - Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.50 KIC has devolved responsibility to Colleges for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure threshold standards are met as outlined in the Quality Assurance Framework. .

1.51 Colleges undertake ongoing monitoring and review activities as well as annual review and periodic programme review (PPR). Using the standard KIC template, Programme Leaders have responsibility for completing the Annual Programme Report (APR), in conjunction with the Programme Committee focusing upon performance and data analysis, and highlighting good practice for wider dissemination and an action plan for resolving issues identified by the Programme Committee. Joint Academic Boards are responsible for considering APRs and reporting back to the College.

1.52 CLIQ produces an Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes Report (ASQP) which summarises academic performance of all KIC Colleges for monitoring by APQC. Good practice is elicited for dissemination across Colleges, identifying areas of quality enhancement to be addressed at cross-college level.

1.53 PPR takes place every five years and draws upon APRs and other monitoring outcomes to enable Colleges to take a holistic view of its provision, ensuring programmes remain valid and fit

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes - Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.60 The KIC Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) sets out the requirements for external examiners to be appointed by Colleges to each award bearing programme, or cognate group of programmes in line with University level agreed procedures. In addition, an external examiner is appointed by KIC to the credit bearing Languages for Study module operating across the network of Colleges. There are varied levels of involvement by university partners within the appointment process, whereby some universities approve the appointment and others act as a critical friend. Approval is undertaken through the Joint Academic Board where required.

1.61 Feedback from external examiners is used to inform the Annual Programme Reports (APRs) produced by Programme Leaders at College level and the overarching institutional level Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes (ASQP) report. Periodic Programme Review also draws upon the feedback provided through external examiner reports.

1.62 The arrangements for using external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.63 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing external examiner reports, APRs, Programme Committee minutes and in discussions with staff. The review team found evidence that consideration of external examiner reports was reflected in APRs and Programme Committee minutes, together with the responses to external examiners and the summary provided to students.

1.64 Written external reports seen by the review team were completed in full, noting strengths and raising any concerns. The reports deal appropriately and robustly with matters relating to standards, with examples of recommendations being followed up by the Colleges. There is oversight of externality provided with annual report of the Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes Report (ASQP) that includes a summary of feedback and key points arising from external examiners reports from each College.

1.65 A standard KIC pro forma requests all external examiners to comment on comparability of academic standards of KIC programmes to those of a similar level at other institutions.

1.66 The review team were advised by KIC Senior Managers as to the current challenges of involving external reviewers within the academic review stages of programme development due to commercial confidentiality. They confirmed that the views of external examiners are currently sought to inform new programme developments and major modifications, as well as the views of academic staff at the host University. KIC is investigating ways in which external reviewers may be involved in the design stages of programme development with a view to implementing this by the end of 2016.

1.67 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low because appropriate rules, policies and processes are in place and are appropriately communicated and applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards by the provider: Summary of findings

1.68 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.69 All Expectations in this area are met. They are all low risk except in one case which is moderate and reflects a weakness in the implementation of the provider's governance arrangements at college level.

1.70 KIC ensures that its awards are aligned against relevant external reference points and establishes appropriate learning outcomes and volume of study for its programmes. There are comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of qualifications and credit, and effective oversight of academic standards with its established partner universities.

1.71 There is one recommendation in this area, which is to strengthen governance arrangements with two university partners where there are more recent articulation agreements. There appropriate arrangements in place for providing, using and maintaining

addition, the review team met staff and students at provider and college levels and considered progression data associated with each of the reviewed colleges.

2.26 The documentation examined by the review team demonstrated that KIC has clear procedures in relation to the recruitment, selection and admission of students to their programmes of study. These procedures are made clear to staff and potential students and embedded within a clearly defined organisational structure.

2.27

KIC students. At the time of the review, colleges were at different stages of producing and implementing their own context-specific Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and this is area for further development and oversight by the provider.

2.40 Colleges typically provide a highly personalised approach to learning and teaching with each student allocated a personal tutor that they are required to meet with on a regular basis.

support providers, such as Student Services, to ensure that students with specific personal or pastoral support needs are identified and appropriate support provided.

2.53 The provider closely monitors and evaluates data relating to student performance and progression and has effective processes for reviewing and approving resources to support high quality learning opportunities.

2.54 The provider operates centralised processes that support services for students and has mechanisms to ensure colleges effectively evaluate and enhance students' academic, personal and professional development. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

2.63 As part of KIC Year of Service, CEMB has also established a Parent Event and Parent Ambassador discussion board to enhance engagement with parents, particularly of those students who are under 18 years of age when they join the college.

2.64 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is low because the KIC takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Findings

2.65 APQC is responsible for ensuring academic standards are set and maintained and CLIQ provides KIC support and guidance to colleges for effective operation of assessment processes. KIC QAF, ASQM, Grade Descriptors, KI UK Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework, module and programme specifications, and the KIC Assessment Development Guide are cited as the policies, regulations and procedures that underpin academic standards alongside external reference points (RQF, FHEQ, SCQF and CEFR).

2.66 Members of college staff with responsibility for producing assessment undergo review for competence in line with the KIC assessment

Panel considers applications for RPL, provided on a standard KIC template, and reports outcomes to APQC.

2.72 The process for Exceptional Extenuating Circumstances (EECs) is defined in the ASQM and are dealt with in colleges by an EECs Panel convened prior to the Board and which approves or rejects the formal request. The EECs Panel then submits the approved requests with a recommendation for action to the Assessment Board which makes the final decision.

2.73 Programme and Module Handbooks provide information to students on assessment, for example, the Exceptional and Extenuating Circumstances procedure.

2.74 Oversight of the assessment process within the College is the responsibility of the Programme Committee which ensures that effective programme assessment strategies are in place. The Programme Committee also approves minor changes to summative module assessments before they are introduced.

2.75 Ongoing monitoring of assessment results is managed through Programme Committees which take action to enhance the processes through module and programme review and in response to feedback from external examiners and students.

2.76 The college holds an Assessment Board each term, which includes the attendance by the external examiner once a year, where decisions are made on progression and conferment of KIC awards. Information on the responsibilities of the Assessment Board is provided within the ASQM, together with standard templates for agendas and minutes to record decisions.

2.77 Interim student progression meetings are held to monitor student progress and identify any support needs. Outcomes may be identified either for individual students or groups, for example, additional support has been provided for those students who do not achieve the threshold in pre-sessional English along with a dedicated member of staff to help then integrate into the academic programme.

2.78 Assessment Board decisions are communicated to students after the Boards in line with agreed timescales set in the academic calendar. Students are issued with their tr

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misconduct . Individual feedback is provided to students on assessment through tutorials which students found beneficial in helping them to improve for the next assessment and enhancing their skills. Students access module information through the VLE and are able to submit assessments electronically and receive feedback which helps to prepare them for transition to the University.

2.84 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The associated level of risk is low because the KIC operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. These processes enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.85 Chapter six

Programme Committee minutes, Annual Programme Reports and APQC minutes that included appropriate oversight of the external examiner process.

2.93 The review team scrutinised a range of external examiner reports which were clear and informative and reasonably detailed, showing appropriate consideration of relevant issues. The reports provided positive feedback with some issues raised for further enhancements by the Programme Committee.

2.94 KIC has responded to the advisable recommendation made in the previous QAA review report regarding external scrutiny of summative assessments before they are used, which has now been reflected in the responsibilities of external examiners outlined in the ASQM and External Examiner Handbook. With respect to the desirable recommendation for KIC to consider fuller use of external examiners, the review team was advised that external examiner feedback and good practice was highlighted and shared across Colleges through APQC and ASQP.

2.95 The summary of feedback from external examiners within the ASQP Report is thorough with detailed coverage of issues identified within each college. The report highlights good practice, for example, the quality of learning and teaching which was linked to successful progression. In addition, the report highlights recommendations to be followed up such as improving the tracking of KIC students at partner universities. KIC accepts that there have been issues with obtaining data from partner universities which is being addressed, with better data now provided and formal requirements included in the written agreements with the universities.

2.96 The review team saw evidence of external examiners' comments being identified and followed up through responses by colleges within the report template and through the Annual Programme Reports and College Action Plans. External examiners is a standing item on the agenda of APQC that provides effective KIC oversight of the process.

2.97 The review team was advised by students that they were clear about the role of external examiners and that the recommendations were discussed at Programme Committees. There was evidence of issues arising from external examiner reports being discussed at Programme Committees.

2.98 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low because the provider has appropriate policies and processes in place which are appropriately communicated and applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.99 APQC is the senior KIC committee responsible for monitoring and academic review of programmes and modules. Outcomes of monitoring and review are actioned at both provider and college levels. The Quality Assurance Framework sets out the processes by which monitoring and review is undertaken on an annual and periodic basis.

2.100 The Programme Committee monitors and reviews programmes on an ongoing and annual basis. The Annual Programme Report (APR) allows the College to ensure that the learning opportunities to remain appropriate, drawing upon feedback from students, staff and external examiners.

opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

3.8 KIC has rigorous processes for collating, checking and approval of public information. This includes review and appropriate sign off at provider, college and partner institutions. These process are rigorously and systematically monitored and KIC undertakes various audits to check that its public information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Staff were able to clearly explain how these processes are implemented and students valued the high quality and accurate information provided to them. The rigorous and systematic processes for managing student-facing information across the college network and university partners which ensures it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy is **good practice**.

3.9 The progression route management information is maintained in a bespoke KIC system called Higher Education Course Management (HECM). As and when progression

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.12 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.13 Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

3.14 The review team identifies significant good practice in the approach taken by KIC to managing the quality of information about learning opportunities. In particular, the quality of published pre-arrival information that enables students to make well informed decisions about their choice of programmes systematic, and rigorous and systematic processes for managing student-facing information across the college network and university partners.

3.15 In view of the significant good practice in this judgement area, and as there are no recommendations or affirmations, the review team concludes that the quality of the information provided about learning opportunities is **commended**.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 24-27 of the Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) handbook

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.(]TJETBThe)3(2s.)6( )-4(

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Colleges, often operating as part of a network, that are embedded on or near the campuses

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.