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

# Glasgow International College

**June 2016**

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# About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Glasgow International College. The review took place on 20 and 21 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

Mrs Alison Jones
Professor Graham Romp.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Glasgow International College

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about Glasgow International College

## About Glasgow International College

Glasgow International College (the College) was established in 2007. It is an embedded college within the Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd (KIC) pathways framework, in a partnership with the University of Glasgow. Students achieving the agreed requirements proceed directly to a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the U

# Explanation of the findings about Glasgow International College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

# 1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the provider

**Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:**

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

## 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

1.6 Ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of KIC programmes lies centrally 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. KIC academic policies and procedures concerning the award of credit and qualifications are outlined in detail within its Quality Assurance Framework and ASQM.

1.7 The Joint Academic Management Board (JAMB) is the senior academic advisory board for the partnership, having oversight of the assurance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The JAMB has representatives from both the University of Glasgow and the College. There is also a Collegiate Board of Studies (CBoS), which similarly has membership from both the College and the University, and where more detailed consideration of academic issues are considered. At the time of the review there were ongoing discussions with the University about the need to have both the JAMB and the CBoS. The daily operational management of academic standards is the responsibility of the College Director, the Academic Director and individual programme teams. Programme Committees operate for all programmes within the College and include student representation.

1.8 The review team considered that the design of the procedures to govern academic frameworks and regulations would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.9 The review team scrutinised the College processes and their effectiveness through consideration of the documented quality assurance procedures, formal agreements with the University, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports and programme specifications. The team also met543.19 Tm[1.7)]TJETqQramme

### Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

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

**Findings**

1.12 The College is required to maintain definitive programme and module specifications using standard templates. These templates require the level of each programme; intended learning outcomes; programme structure; and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to be specified. These specifications need to be formally approved and updated when changes are agreed by the APQC. Module Handbooks are developed at the College to be issued to students and must be consistent with these definitive documents. Once approved the programme specifications are stored centrally by KIC. The JAMB is responsible for ensuring that the articulation agreements with the University of Glasgow are formally approved and that an accurate and up-to-date record of entry and progression requirements is kept. These are maintained centrally on KIC's Higher Education Course Management database. The design of these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided in documented quality assurance procedures, programme specifications, module specifications, student handbooks and meetings with staff and students.

1.14 The programme and module specifications viewed by the review team contained the definitive information as required by KIC. These had been formally approved in line with KIC requirements and updated when changes had been formally approved. The approved documentation was used by staff within the College to inform the delivery and assessment of programmes, and students were issued with Module Handbooks that were consistent with formally approved documentation.

1.15 The College fully implements KIC's requirements to ensure the maintenance of definitive records for all programmes of study and for individual student records. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**
**Level of risk: Low**

### 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.

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

**Findings**

1.16 The College follows KIC's processes for the design and approval of modules, programmes and new pathways as outlined in the ASQM. KIC and College governance committees share responsibility for the design and approval of new products and programmes as outlined in the ASQM and the Quality Assurance Framework.

1.17 The design of the process for programme approval would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.18 The review team considered a range of documentation pertaining to programme approval, including relevant quality assurance processes, programme and module specifications, and committee minutes. The team also met staff responsible for the oversight and operation of the processes within the College, and representatives from the University of Glasgow.

1.19 In adhering to the requirements of the KIC Quality Assurance Framework, including the Qualifications Framework, KIC colleges make rigorous and systematic use of external benchmarks and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Norther Ireland* in the design and approval of new programmes. The College's Programme Committees, CBoS and JAMB undertake full consideration of all aspects of learning opportunities to be provided to students as part of the design and approval stages.

1.20 There are effective processes in place for the approval of taught programmes that enable the College to ensure academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK standard for the qualification, and are in accordance with KIC's academic frameworks and regulations. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**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**

1.21 The 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 KIC's aims and principles of assessment, and supports the KIC UK Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework.

1.22 Grade descriptors are used by the College to define success and the 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 College SMT. It is then received by the CBoS, the external examiner and the CLIQ. The APRs inform the Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes (ASQP) report, which is considered by the APQC.

1.23 The College is effectively supported in the assessment process by the CLIQ, with supplementary written guidance such as the KIC Assessment Development Guide and the Guidelines for Establishing Alternative Assessment Arrangements for Disabled Students. Support is also provided by the CLIQ through targeted training for College staff that includes developing assessment in subject areas and standardisation of marking for English language.

1.24 The design of the processes at the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.25 The review team considered a range of documentation, including programme committee minutes, APR reports, programme and module specifications, and external examiner reports. The review team met staff who were involved in programme approval, setting and marking of assessments, and in producing APRs. The review team also met students to hear about their experience of the assessment process.

1.26 Students confirmed that they received helpful information on their learning outcomes and assessment requirements from tutors. Feedback on assessment was helpful and timely, although students advised it was not always within the ten working days turnaround timescale. They were aware that the College operates a sliding scale of penalties for late submission and how to apply for extenuating/mitigating circumstances.

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

**Expectation: Met**
**Level of risk: Low**

**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-***

**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

1.35 The College follows the KIC Quality Assurance Framework, which sets out the requirements for the appointment of external examiners to each award-bearing programme, or cognate group of programmes, in line with University of Glasgow procedures. In addition, an external examiner is appointed by KIC to the credit-bearing Languages for Study module operating across the network of Colleges. The College also draws upon the expertise and support from the University to ensure that the programmes remain aligned with their progression routes and exploit opportunities to enhance students' learning experience.

1.36 Feedback from external examiners is used to inform the APRs produced by Programme Leaders, at College level, and the overarching institutional level ASQP report. PPR also draws upon the feedback provided through external examiner reports.

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

1.38 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing external examiner reports, APRs, the PPR report and Programme Committee minutes, and in meeting staff and students.

1.39 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.

1.40 The College external report seen by the review team was completed in full, noting strengths and raising any concerns. The report dealt appropriately and robustly with matters relating to standards, with examples of recommendations being followed up by the College through the APR and Programme Committees. Students confirmed awareness of the external examiner process and advised that the external examiner reports were considered at Programme Committees.

1.41 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and tg43.49 Tm[(w)15(as r)-6(0 0 1 41snd)]T

# 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

## Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes

### Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*

### Findings

2.1 The College adheres to KIC defined procedures for undertaking programme design and approval, which follow the clear stages outlined in Chapter 2 of the ASQM. The College has devolved responsibility for the design and development of programmes and modules, with support from the CLIQ and other KIC internal teams as required.

2.2 KIC provides a standard set of documentation requirements to the College for the approval process that include programme and module specifications using a standard template. Once initial planning approval has been granted by the New Product Development and Approval Group (NPDAG) and Business Approval Group for Programme Developments (BAGPD) the College has responsibility for maintaining the proposal documentation throughout the approval process, ensuring that it is updated to reflect any required amendments as appropriate.

2.3 A Programme Committee is convened by the College for each programme delivered, which includes student representation, and reports to the College SMT.

2.4 The design of the arrangements in place for programme approval at the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures, and documentation relating to programme design, development and approval, and through meetings with staff and students. The review team scrutinised programme and module specifications, and minutes of Programme Committees, the JAMB, NPDAG, BAGPD and APQC.

2.6 The review team found that the College is provided with detailed guidance on the development, approval and amendment of programmes and modules through support from the CLIQ and the ASQM. The development of new programmes and pathways draws explicitly upon the Quality Code and external frameworks, which is reflected within programme specifications.

2.7 College staff demonstrated a sound understanding of the programme approval process, outlining their involvement in the programme approval process, including new developments for consideration under KIC processes. University of Glasgow representatives confirmed the CBoS and JAMB as the formal committees for discussing and approving new and amended programmes to ensure subject content is appropriate to enable progression to the University. The review team was advised that the JAMB is currently under review to ensure there is greater distinction with the role undertaken by the CBoS.

2.8 Informal links and good working relationships have also been established between University Subject Moderators and College staff that support the development of new programmes at the College, as well as staff development opportunities, such as University staff contribution at College staff away days.

2.9 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education***

## Findings

2.10 Student recruitment and admission into the College is managed centrally by KIC, where admissions staff work to a detailed procedural manual. Admission requirements are determined centrally by KIC, taking into consideration the learning gain required by students in order to achieve the progression threshold onto the relevant University of Glasgow programme. However, for the foundation certificate programmes these entry requirements are considered and approved by the University to ensure that they are appropriate. Applicants are also invited to disclose special educational needs at the application stage so that reasonable adjustments at the College, and subsequently at the University, can be made if necessary.

2.11 The detailed admissions manual, along with the training and support provided to relevant staff and agents, would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team explored KIC's approach to the recruitment, selection and admission of students by viewing documentation, including the admissions manual, prospectuses, offer letters and pre-arrival information provided in hard copy and online. In addition, the review team met staff and students at the College.

2.12 Staff at the College were clear on the admission processes, and students were very positive about the admissions process, valuing the pre-arrival information and support provided to inform decision-making and aid transition into the UK and the College. If accepted onto a College programme, students are sent a detailed offer letter that confirms the nature of the offer made and the requirements needed to progress to their preferred University programme.

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

**Expectation: Met**
**Level of risk: Low**

2.21

## Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

### Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

### Findings

2.22 All students at the College are required to meet regularly with a personal tutor, who is able to provide personal and academic support beyond that offered within classes. The Student Services Team at the College provides additional personal support, advice and guidance, and acts as a point of referral for students who require more specialist support.

2.23 The provision of a range a different processes designed to support student development and achievement would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team investigated the effectiveness of these processes at the College through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff, and students, and through consideration of a range of documentation, including the College action plan, committee minutes, and student handbooks.

2.24 The Colleges offer a range of extracurricular activities such as all pre-arrival activities, induction and welcome events, personal tutor meetings and social activities. The College also makes use of a voluntary student mentor scheme to aid transition whereby students that have progressed to the University of Glasgow mentor College students. The College has in place, and regularly evaluates, extensive processes that support high quality learning opportunities.

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

**Expectation: Met**
**Level of risk: Low**

## Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

### Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

### Findings

2.26 College staff and students are encouraged to engage in discussions to bring about enhancement of the educational experience. The College Staff-Student Charter demonstrates the range of opportunities available to students to engage in their learning.

2.27 Chapter 9 of the ASQM sets out clear guidance to the College regarding the requirement for the principles and purpose of student feedback as an essential component in evaluating the quality of student learning opportunities, and to inform ongoing improvements. The College decides on how best to elicit formal student feedback that reflects the nature of its student body, ensuring that the outcomes are then reflected within the annual and periodic reporting processes.

2.28 The design of the arrangements in place for student engagement at the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.29 The review team tested the nature of student engagement by examining evidence of the different mechanisms in place. This was followed up by meetings with both staff and students in the College to clarify the extent to which these mechanisms are widespread and operating effectively.

2.30 Student representatives are recruited on a voluntary basis and, following the recent periodic review, the review team noted that training previously provided by the University of Glasgow will now be undertaken by the College in liaison with sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland). Student representatives confirmed that they were members of Programme Committees and sit on Student Forums.

2.31 The College initiated a voluntary mentoring scheme that enables alumni at the University to mentor College students undertaking the foundation certificate to help support

2.41 College staff confirmed that there are effective formal assessment and moderation processes in operation at the College, including standardisation meetings and double marking. Module Coordinators are responsible for managing the processes, including taking an overview of the spread of marks and sampling to review feedback provided to students. University of Glasgow Subject Moderators review assessment briefs and attend assessments boards on behalf of the University, supporting the role of the external examiner. In response to a recommendation arising out of the 2016 Academic Review, the team was advised that further consideration is being given to clarify the relative roles of Subject Moderators and external examiners.

2.42 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, because the College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment.

**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

2.49 College Programme Committees monitor and review programmes on an ongoing and annual basis. The APR allows the College to ensure that the learning opportunities remain appropriate, drawing upon feedback from students, staff and external examiners. Recommendations arising from APRs are recorded within the College action plan. College action plans are reviewed by the College on a regular basis and support is provided by the CLIQ with development of its action plan.

2.50 The CBoS and JAMB ensure that the University of Glasgow requirements are met through monitoring and review of programmes.

2.51 The College APRs inform the development of the ASQP report, providing the APQC with opportunity to conduct systematic review of appropriateness of learning opportunities across all KIC programmes.

2.52 Colleges undergo PPR every five years and the outcomes are considered by the APQC and JAMB. The College's PPR report follows a standard template and includes action plans for further enhancements identified as an outcome of the process. The Programme Committee is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations are followed up appropriately and reported to the College's SMT.

2.53 The design of the arrangements in place for programme monitoring and review would enable the E

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code,** ***Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Cand sede,***

# 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

## Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

### Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

### Findings

3.1 Public information is managed centrally by KIC. There are clear processes in place that require that published material is formally signed off by the College Director, the Managing Director or the Director of Colleges at

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

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

3.8 Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area. KIC has comprehensive processes for managing its public information and operates robust procedures to ensure their effective implementation at college level. The College contributes effectively to the production of information and there is a close working relationship with

Higher Educatior

# 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

## Findings

5.1 KIC has developed both a Blended Learning Strategy 2013-17 and a Learning and Teaching Framework that outline key principles relating to embedding technology into learning and teaching. The College has used these documents to inform the development of its own action plan and enhance the digital literacy skills of its staff and students. College staff have been consulted on development of a local strategy on blended learning.

5.2 As specified within its action plan, the College has sought to embed blended learning into the planning and delivery of the curriculum. The blended learning champion at the College has organised training sessions to enhance staff skills and awareness of digital literacy. Staff and students at the College were able to identify various ways in which IT is used to support learning and teaching.

5.3 Central resources have been provided to support blended learning and digital literacy across the colleges, including two dedicated Learning Technologists within the CLIQ, who support colleges with digital initiatives. The College plans to establish a staff working group in 2016-17 to further develop digital literacy skills within the curriculum. The Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund has also been used to resource local digital literacy and blended learning innovations undertaken within the College, and it is acknowledged that there is further work to do to enhance staff and student knowledge and skills related to digital literacy.

containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**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.

**Technology enhanced or enabled learning** (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

**Threshold academic standard**
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

**Virtual learning environment** (VLE)
An intranet or password-