

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

Kaplan International College London

June 2016

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- 1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered
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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 Kaplan International College London. The review took place on 29 and 30 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

Mrs Alison Jones
Professor Graham Romp.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Kaplan International College London

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Kaplan International College London.

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of Kaplan International Colleges Ltd UK **meets** UK expectations.

The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Kaplan International College London.

The high quality pastoral and academic support that enables students to achieve success (Expectation

Explanation of the findings about Kaplan International College London

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

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:

positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications

ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications

naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications

awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.1 The College offers foundation certificate and pre-master's programmes that guarantee students who meet specific progression requirements progress on to a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University of Birmingham, Cranfield University, City University London, the University of Westminster or the University of York. The College also offers a Multi-Progression Pathway foundation certificate that is designed to prepare students for level 4 entry on to undergraduate programmes and students are supported to apply to a UK university of their choice through UCAS. The College also offers a Pre-Doctorate programme that helps students prepare to undertake a PhD programme at a UK university. Successful students from this programme are then guaranteed an interview at a partner university for a place on a PhD programme.

1.2 The foundation certificate programme is aligned to level 3 of the RQF and KIC's own Qualifications Framework. The pre-master's programmes and the Pre-Doctorate programmes are designed to support students to progress to postgraduate programmes and are aligned with level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

1.3 Programmes are developed in line with standard KIC procedures as outlined in the Academic Standards and Quality Manual (ASQM) that would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documentation relating to threshold academic standards, including College programme and module specifications, transcripts and award

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 (QAF) and the ASQM. The policies, procedures and reporting lines in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.7 The review team scrutinised the College

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualifica

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

1.15 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.

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

1.17 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.

1.18 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 Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ) and the ASQM. The developments of new programmes and pathways draws explicitly upon the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and external frameworks and are reflected within programme specifications. Staff at the College demonstrated clear understanding of the programme approval process, outlining the new pre-doctorate programme which had been a KIC-led initiative developed closely with staff from the London College and KIC as well as CLIQ and partner universities to ensure appropriate underpinning for progression.

1.19 There are effective processes in place for the approval of taught programmes, which 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 academic frameworks and regulations. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.20 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 Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework.

1.21 Grade descriptors are used by Colleges 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 SMT. It is then received by the JAB, the External Examiner and the CLIQ. The APRs inform the Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes (ASQP) Report which is considered by APQC.

1.22 The College is 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. Support is also provided by CLIQ through targeted training for College staff that includes developing assessment in subject areas and standardisation of marking for English language.

1.23 The review team considered that the design of the processes for securing an outcomes-based approach to academic awards would enable the Expectation to be met.

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

1.25 Students confirmed that module information is provided at the start of each module in a module handbook and VLE which sets out learning requirements of the module. They found the guidance provided by the College on assessment processes, particularly academic misconduct, is very useful which would be beneficial when they progress to their University studies. Feedback on assessment was timely and helpful, with reason for the mark and how to improve, although the review team noted that students experienced variation on the feedback they received on exam performance between different subjects.

1.26 KIC processes for the assessment of learning outcomes are appropriately communicated and applied at the College. 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-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.27 The College has devolved responsibility for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure threshold standards are met as outlined in the Quality Assurance Framework.

1.28 The College undertakes 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 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. JABs operated with its partner universities are responsible for considering APRs and reporting back to the College.

1.29 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

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*

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

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

1.43 All Expectations in this area are met. The associated level of risk is low, except in one case where the risk is moderate, reflecting weaknesses in the operation of part of the embedded College'

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 AQSM. The College

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

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

2.20 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 provide additional personal support, advice and guidance, and act as a point of referral for students who require more specialist support.

2.21 The provision of a range of different processes designed to support student development and achievement would enable 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 consideration of a range of documentation including the College Action Plan, committee minutes, and student handbooks.

2.22 Students at the College highly valued the pastoral and academic support provided to them by

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 enhancements to their educational experience. The College Promise (student charter) demonstrates the range of opportunities available to students to engage in their learning.

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior

regards assessment. They were clear about their learning outcomes and assessment requirements, with helpful feedback received within 10 working days. The review team noted the proactive response by KIC to include more relevant assessment topics in response to student feedback regarding the relevance of Study Skills module 3, to their particular subject.

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

2.53 College Programme Committees monitor and review programmes on an ongoing and annual basis. The APR allow 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 CLIQ with development of the action plan.

2.54 The JAB ensures that the host University requirements are met through monitoring and review of programmes.

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

2.56 Colleges undergo PPR every five years and the outcomes are considered by APQC and JAB. The College's PPRR 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.

2.57 The review team considered that the design of the arrangements in place for programme monitoring and review allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58 The evidence considered by the review team confirms that the monitoring and review processes for College programmes are rigorously and consistently applied to maintain standards and enhance learning opportunities. The College makes effective use of external reference points and draws upon external expertise from external examiners

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 Complaints

Findings

2.60 The College adheres to KIC policies and procedures relating to academic appeals and complaints, including those against admission decisions as specified in the ASQM. This would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.61 The review team examined programme handbooks issued to students and met staff and students to evaluate their effectiveness.

2.62

2.62 The appeals and complaints policies and procedures are communicated to students in the Programme Handbooks, Student Handbooks and on the VLE. Staff and students were aware of the relevant complaints and appeal processes, and there was a clear emphasis at the College on seeking to resolve issues as soon as possible. Students at the College were

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

3.7 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings

4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

Findings

4.1 The College action plan records recommendations arising from APRs to enable effective evaluation and impact of progress made.

4.2 The CEMB meets normally every 6 weeks to discuss operational matters relating to quality improvements, with an action plan to monitor progress. CEMB reviews College Action Plans and provides an effective forum for sharing of good practice between KIC central staff and staff within the College which leads to enhancements.

4.3 College Enhancement Forums at the College successfully enable student representatives to share feedback they have collated from student groups on various aspects of quality assurance and enhancement relating to their programmes. For example, in response to student feedback, the College has simplified enrolment onto module pages on the VLE to enrol students automatically onto the correct modules, allowing them to access materials more quickly and easily than previously.

4.4 The review team was also advised of the development of K2, an online tutorial management system. The online portal was rolled out to all students in 2013-14, providing information to students and tutors on performance, with positive feedback about the support arrangements. During meetings with College staff, the team heard evidence that K2 plays a key role in enabling students to participate more widely in their learning experiences. Since its inception, the College has developed the portal further by providing student timetables for view by both students and staff, and enabling the staff calendar to be automatically populated with lessons and tutorials with accessibility to all teaching staff in the college. Live performance data is available including progression requirements for each student profile for tutors to view, together with the students' IELTS language scores. K2 provides the College with an effective mechanism for monitoring student attendance and performance which is discussed with individual students during tutorials.

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 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, that informs the enhancement of digital literacy skills of both staff and students.

5.2 The Learning and Teaching Coordinator at the College actively supports staff in the use of blended learning to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. A range of support material is available on a dedicated blended learning page on the VLE and staff are offered regular training opportunities. 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. To share good practice and drive blended learning innovations at college level KIC has established a Blended Learning Working Group. Staff at the College found KIC-level events and resources to enhance digital literacy useful and gave examples of how they have enhanced their blended learning provision. The Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund (LTIF) 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.

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

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Operational definition

Quality Code