



Educational Oversight for Embedded Colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd, April-May 2019

Kaplan International College London

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Kaplan International College London (KIC London) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2017 annual monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The student number capacity of the premises has recently been extended from 700 to over 1000 students. This was a response to the significant growth in student numbers noted at the time of the 2017 annual monitoring visit, when the premises were operating at 85% of capacity and the College was therefore seeking to add space. There has been a further moderate increase (8%) in student numbers between 2018 and 2019, from 859 to 926. There have been no significant changes to staffing, and the College continues to offer progression pathways in partnership with a number of universities.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 KIC London is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. All elements of the action plan have either been completed or are being actively progressed to successful completion, achieving significant enhancement of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 5-7). The academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the provision are being maintained (paragraphs 10-14). The College demonstrates highly-effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) (paragraph 16). Information produced by the College for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy (paragraph 8).

4 The last monitoring visit to KIC London, in June 2017, found that the College was making commendable progress in implementing the action plan following the previous year's Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges), having completed the recommendation concerning governance arrangements and continued to build on the three areas of good practice relating to high-quality pastoral and academic support, the proactive approach to identifying student needs and the use of management information to track individual students. Kaplan strategic themes, progression data and student feedback are used effectively to inform action planning, as clearly evidenced in the current college action plan. All elements of the plan have either been completed or are being actively progressed to successful completion, achieving significant enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

5 Since the 2017 monitoring visit, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has been reviewed and revised to support curriculum developments for the outcomes of the Product Review. The strategy focuses on pedagogy, blended learning and student engagement. Effective implementation is supported by an extensive annual programme of weekly staff development which has included sessions on differentiated, flipped, active and interactive learning, learning outside the classroom, embedding skills and language into subject modules, teaching critical thinking, digitised assessment, e-assessment platforms, and motivating and engaging students. The College's Digital Assessment Co-ordinator assists staff in the development of digitised assessments. The new and innovative approaches to teaching and assessment practice have been embraced enthusiastically by college staff who particularly value the opening up of teaching spaces in the recent extension of teaching accommodation, providing an excellent environment for active and interactive learning. Similarly, students spoke very positively about the opportunities for group work, discussion and interaction in classes.

6 The College had identified from data analysis, the need to improve progression rates to one of its university partners, the lower performance of the relevant cohorts being attributed largely to the need for students to increase their English Language skills to meet high requirements. Additional English classes were established, with skills-differentiated groups to provide targeted support. A strategy introduced to permit students with stronger English language skills to complete the exit English test early and withdraw from English classes to concentrate on other areas has allowed tutors to focus support on the students most needing help. Students are also offered informal opportunities to practise their English, such as the conversation club. Where formative assessment reveals weaknesses in subject areas, students can access extra classes. Although designed primarily for the particular benefit of students most needing extra support, this additional support is available to all and some additional classes are compulsory. More generally, college systems ensure rigorous student attendance monitoring and follow-up. Interim student results confirm the effectiveness of these measures.

7 Responding to student feedback, the College has extended topic choices in Skills for Study modules to provide closer alignment with subject areas and future degree studies. Assessment criteria have been aligned more closely with language for study criteria, to help with language development. Students who have already progressed to partner universities confirmed to the monitoring team that their pathway programmes had prepared them well for transition to university study. The recent development and approval of a new Foundation Certificate for Art and Design for student progression to the University of Westminster extends the choices open to applicants and demonstrates the College's continuing activity in the development of its programme portfolio.

8 Processes for recruitment, selection and admissions are managed by the central Kaplan team. Prospective KIC London students have access, via the Kaplan and college websites, to extensive information about the programmes, the wide range of progression degrees, entry requirements, terms and conditions, and the application process. Links signpost the generic Kaplan International Pathways Guide, college-specific prospectus and partner university websites. Clear Kaplan and college processes are in place for producing, checking and signing off externally-published information, including sign-off by the respective university partners. Students confirmed that published information is accessible and accurate. Most of the students had used agents and all who had done so were very satisfied with their services. Student ambassadors described their contribution to promotional videos and blogs and their role in welcoming new students to the College. Entry requirements are determined by the College, in agreement with partner universities, and reviewed every two years. Assessment against any additional entry requirements, such as interviews and portfolios, is handled by the Kaplan admissions team. Where an applicant declares any disability or support requirements, the issue is referred to the College, which may request

more information of evidence before confirming what support can be offered. Where the central London location is not ideal for an applicant, an alternative college within the Kaplan network may be offered. Borderline and non-standard applications may be approved by the central admissions team if they are within tolerance bands agreed with the relevant university, or a decision may need to be sought from the university. Robust, clearly documented central processes ensure that students have sufficient English language competence and, where applicable, the additional support necessary to complete their programme. Offer letters are for the Kaplan programme and chosen progression degree, signed by college and university admissions staff. Clear Kaplan and college processes are in place for producing, checking and signing off externally-published information, including sign-off by the respective university partners. Kaplan has appropriate procedures in place for dealing with cases where pathway or degree programmes are closed before enrolment and for programme closures following admission.

9 The college pre-arrival guide (which includes useful and practical information on next steps, arrangements on arrival, welcome week activities, the programmes and college contacts) reminds students to bring with them to enrolment all original qualifications certificates, with certified translations as appropriate. College staff receive pre-printed forms indicating entry qualifications and are trained to carry out the relevant checks. Students found the pre-entry information to be helpful and comprehensive, valued the extensive information they received during welcome week and appreciated the opportunity to meet partner university representatives at the freshers' fair. Applicants can access an online feedback, complaints and appeals facility, and there is a clear process for handling and responding to complaints and appeals. Students said that they had provided feedback on the admissions process, which had worked smoothly and efficiently.

10 The Kaplan Academic Standards and Quality Manual (ASQM) sets out the definitive framework for assessment, including the assessment regulations, and the Assessment Development Guide details Kaplan requirements and processes. Assessment and feedback strategies and programme learning outcomes are set out in the College's programme specifications, and module specifications specify module learning outcomes, assessment methods and weightings. For each assignment, students have clear, documented information on assessed learning outcomes and marking criteria, which is reiterated in class.

11 The centrally-produced 'student-facing' assessment regulations are included in programme handbooks on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students confirmed that they understand the rules on pass marks, grading and resits. Assessment briefs, model answers and marking schemes are designed, produced and peer-reviewed by subject tutors to ensure appropriate content and format in line with Kaplan requirements, and submitted to external examiners for approval before being issued to students. Following module-level standardisation meetings, tutors undertake marking using college-specific, fully documented grade descriptors. External examiners confirm that they are provided with all relevant information and documentation, that standards are maintained at the appropriate level, and that assessment processes operate effectively.

12 Sample final assessment board minutes viewed by the team, record external examiner attendance and external examiners confirm that boards operate effectively. Formal minuting could be more extensive and detailed. External examiners scrutinise sample assessed work when they attend for the boards and their written reports comment on the work, the marking and the tutor feedback. The monitoring team was told that external examiners may on occasions complete their scrutiny of student work after the assessment board has taken place and in these circumstances, if necessary, an extraordinary board would be convened to confirm any revised student results.

13 Students are happy with the quality and timeliness of feedback on their work, which is provided in writing, in class and (on request) in one-to-one tutorials. The College implements Kaplan processes to deter, detect and penalise academic misconduct. Staff use electronic software, check assessed work for unusual writing style or different language ability, and are vigilant in examinations, to identify suspected plagiarism and detect cheating. The outcomes of alleged academic misconduct cases considered by the academic misconduct panel under formal processes are submitted to the assessment board for consideration and decision. KIC London students have ready access to the Kaplan user-friendly student guide to academic misconduct on the VLE. Information is also provided through student induction, academic skills modules and tutorials. Students confirmed that they receive extensive guidance on academic misconduct and how to avoid it.

14 KIC London practices to secure fairness and equity in assessment for students with disabilities reflect Kaplan's supportive approach to students with special needs. In each case, the student concerned is actively involved in the decision-making process, ensuring both a clear understanding of the nature of the need and the selection of the most appropriate arrangements. Final decisions on exceptional extenuating circumstances submissions rest with the assessment board. The College offers recognition of prior learning to students for English language in accordance with the Kaplan criteria and processes.

15 In 2016-17 and 2017-18, 89% of students successfully completed their KIC London programme, an increase on 2015-16 when the rate was 84%. In 2017-18, 90% of students who successfully completed their Kaplan programme met the requirements to progress to their first choice of university, compared to 84% in 2016-17.

The provider's use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

16 Kaplan standards and quality policies and processes, which are informed by the precepts of the Quality Code and regularly updated, are implemented effectively by the College. Programmes are aligned with the relevant qualifications' frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements, including the CEFR for English, and assessment processes are designed and operate to ensure that academic standards are maintained in line with external reference points. College ongoing action planning is informed by, and explicitly mapped to, sections of the Quality Code.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's and its embedded colleges' continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider and its embedded colleges of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, and Dr Sylvia Hargreaves, QAA Reviewer, on 1 May 2019.

QAA2413d - R10451 - Jul 19

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