



## Educational Oversight for Embedded Colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd, April-May 2018

### 1 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 Colleges UK Ltd (Kaplan) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd (Kaplan), branded as Kaplan International Pathways, is part of Kaplan Inc., a private provider of education. Kaplan was established in 2005 with the aim of developing a network of international Colleges providing entry and exit points for international students wishing to enter UK higher education. At the time of the June 2016 review, Kaplan had embedded college partnerships with international colleges at the University of Brighton, Bournemouth University, the University of Glasgow, the University of Liverpool, Nottingham Trent University, and the University of the West of England, Bristol. Kaplan International College London (KICL) provides pathways with several universities, namely the University of Birmingham, University of Westminster, Aston University, City University London, Cranfield University, University of York, and in January 2018, KICL added a partnership with the University of Liverpool in London. Since the 2016 Review, Kaplan has set up an embedded college in partnership with the University of Nottingham. Kaplan has also signed a new embedded college partnership agreement with the University of Essex, with the international embedded college on the Essex campus due to open in September 2018.

3 This 2018 round of monitoring visits included Kaplan Headquarters (Kaplan HQ), University of Brighton International College (UBIC) and Liverpool International College (LIC), all of which were reviewed in 2016, and Nottingham Trent International College (NTIC), which underwent Review in 2015. Glasgow International College (GIC) and KICL were exempt from monitoring visits in 2018 having made commendable progress at their 2017 monitoring visits. The focus of this report is the outcome of the monitoring visit to the Kaplan HQ in London in April 2018; linked reports cover the monitoring visits in May 2018 to UBIC, LIC and NTIC.

4 Kaplan's overall student number headcount has increased by 7.2 per cent between February 2017 and February 2018 from 3,918 to 4,201. The percentage change in registered students varies across the Kaplan colleges. There have been no changes to senior staff at Kaplan HQ from those who were involved in the 2016 review. Two new College Directors have been appointed at NTIC and UBIC.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 This monitoring visit follows the 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) of Kaplan HQ. This review identified four areas of good practice, namely the personal advice and guidance to applicants and the training of Admissions staff; the quality of published pre-arrival information and the rigorous processes for managing student-facing information across the College network; the Kaplan-led staff development opportunities; and the systematic identification and promotion across the Colleges of opportunities to improve the quality of student learning. The 2016 review made two recommendations, namely the formalising of governance arrangements between KICL and the Universities of Birmingham and York for the effective oversight of academic standards and student learning opportunities; and ensuring that students received written confirmation that complaints and appeals procedures have been completed with a statement of recourse options open to the student.

6 The report of the 2017 monitoring visit to KICL noted that appropriate governance arrangements had been effected. Separate Joint Management Boards had been established with KICL and Aston University and with the University of Birmingham, and a Pathway Management Board was overseeing the relationship between KICL and the University of York. Kaplan and KICL have continued to monitor these arrangements and KICL, as part of its 2017-18 annual report to Kaplan, presented dates for all the KICL meetings with all of its university partners, including the date for the first Joint Academic Board in March 2018 with the University of Liverpool in London. The review team concludes that this recommendation has been fully met.

7 In relation to the recommendation of the 2016 review to ensure that students received written confirmation that complaints and appeals procedures have been completed with a statement of recourse options open to the student, Kaplan HQ provided information to the review team on appeals and complaints, including on the detailed separate complaints and appeals procedures and the range of actions taken by individual Colleges and, if necessary, by the Director of Colleges. The review team was shown sample sign-off letters from a College Director. Kaplan's senior management team (SMT) receives quarterly reports of both informal and formal complaints from individual Colleges separately and in aggregate. Kaplan is not a qualifying member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and, therefore, could not cite the OIA as a further recourse for students in its completion letter. Senior staff explained to the review team that it would have membership of OIA once its formal registration process with the OfS has been completed. Kaplan will then be in a position to refer to the role of the OIA in its completion letter as a final recourse for students who felt their complaint had not been handled satisfactorily by Kaplan.

8 Kaplan HQ did not submit an action plan on its central operations to support its Annual Monitoring Return submission, nor was one referred to by staff during the visit. Although not demonstrated through a Kaplan HQ action plan, senior staff at Kaplan HQ reported that Kaplan SMT identifies common themes for cross-College working and also initiates key developments. Examples cited of common themes emerging from the College Action Plans included student complaints and technology enhanced learning. Examples cited of key development priorities included the extension of the 'Digitisation of Assessment' programme; and the 'Product Review', an ongoing project due to be completed in autumn 2019, undertaken by all Colleges and involving their University partners, to ensure that all Kaplan programmes are continuing to meet market demand, a priority confirmed by the Colleges visited subsequently by the review team. Kaplan SMT regularly reviews College action plans, which are prepared with input from their University partners, and also receives the College annual reports which include information on student numbers and progression data, a review of programmes, a review of student support services, marketing and recruitment, estates and facilities, and financial matters.

9 Kaplan HQ manages student recruitment and admissions centrally, and all Colleges work closely with the central Admissions and Marketing departments on recruitment and admissions. The Admissions department oversees potential students from the point of enquiry, through application, to arrival, supporting potential students via the website, telephone or web chat. Potential students are also supported overseas by a network of agents and Kaplan overseas marketing teams. The Admissions department checks applicants' qualifications, educational background, compliance with UK Home Office regulations, and evidence of meeting the English language requirements. Admissions may offer conditional acceptance subject to an applicant meeting these before joining the course. Students may apply to a number of Kaplan Colleges and receive guidance on the most appropriate programmes through the Admissions department. While many students enquire or apply directly to partner universities and/or one of the international colleges, the formal applications, their consideration and responses are the responsibility of the central Kaplan Admissions Department. Some potential students who may have non-standard entry qualifications or who require a portfolio of work to be reviewed, for example, may be referred by Admissions to a College and/or the partner University for a decision. Admissions staff receive a 3-month induction programme, training, regular updates and access to a fully comprehensive and detailed Admissions Manual to ensure they are aware of any changes to programme and non-academic arrangements across the partnerships. Kaplan HQ also has overall responsibility for marketing and promotional materials, involving integral production processes with dedicated software that enables Colleges to provide local contextual information on their programmes and the broader environment and, with their partner Universities, supply details for the College-specific Prospectuses, and then to check content accuracy. Kaplan uses enhanced videos and webinars in addition to detailed and regularly updated web-based information which signposts applicants to chat, print and phone contacts. It also manages a pre-arrival section on the website, and general cross-network information to applicants and prospective students.

10 Annual programme monitoring is undertaken by the Kaplan Colleges who follow prescribed Kaplan policies and procedures and use Kaplan templates for the annual programme reports (APRs) and for the College's Annual Report. The APR template includes sections on key changes; programme specifications; cross-Kaplan themes; quality assurance and enhancement activities; feedback from students and external advisors; student success: achievement, challenges and progress; student performance at the partner University; and an action plan for the following year, identifying desirable and advisable recommendations and noting points of good practice. They incorporate the views of Programme Committees (which include students in their membership), student feedback through module questionnaires, and end of programme student experience surveys, the staff module questionnaires and external examiner comments. In outline, the APRs are usually completed by the Programme Leader, in conjunction with the Programme Committee. The Programme Committee is ordinarily chaired by the Programme Leader, meet on a termly basis and include trained student representatives, and help inform the APRs. Final approval for the APRs is given by College senior management team (SMT). It is then received by the College Joint Academic Board (JAB), external examiners and is submitted to Kaplan Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ). The APRs form a key part of the analysis by CLIQ in its preparation of the annual Academic Standards and Quality of Programmes (ASQP) report, a report on all Kaplan programmes considered by Kaplan SMT. The College SMTs also compile the College's Annual Report, which is submitted to the Kaplan Director of Colleges. The Annual College Report incorporates information on all College activities, including student numbers, progression data, an overview of programmes, and a review of student support services, marketing and recruitment, estates and facilities, and financial matters. They incorporate the views of Programme Committees (which includes students in their membership), student feedback through module questionnaires and end of programme student experience surveys, the staff module questionnaires and external examiner comments. As well as involvement in Programme Committees, students

contribute to annual quality monitoring by submitting individual module and overall student experience questionnaires which are considered by teaching staff and the College SMTs. Students also participate in staff-student consultative committees and receive feedback from these, and can expect to receive individual feedback to complaints. Similarly, staff have the opportunity to feedback to academic managers on their own modules.

11 In 2014-15, 85 per cent of Kaplan students completed their programmes, with 86 per cent of those receiving unconditional offers from the partner universities; these figures rose in 2016-17 to 90 per cent and 88 per cent respectively. Individual colleges report on student progress through their annual returns and discuss student performance with their University partners who compile data to demonstrate student success in their degree programmes. Kaplan has is working to agree with partner universities that in future all student data returns will be harmonised though their presentation on a CLIQ-designed report template to facilitate greater conformity of data sets leading to more effective comparative analyses of student performance at individual Colleges.

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

12 Kaplan updates annually its Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and Academic Standards and Quality Manual, which were originally mapped and are reviewed annually against the UK Quality Code for higher Education (Quality Code) by CLIQ. All Kaplan programmes are mapped against relevant sections of the Quality Code during the approval and review processes, initially through partner consideration at local joint College/University meetings and then formally by the Kaplan Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC). Key elements of the College action plans are referenced against the Quality Code. The review team learned during their visits to individual Kaplan Colleges of local practices being developed with the assistance of the Quality Code, particularly regarding student support and the engagement of students in quality assurance arrangements.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Sarah James, QAA Officer, and Professor Peter Bush, QAA Reviewer, on 30 April 2018.

**QAA2168a - R10011 - Aug 18**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)