



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

### Liverpool International College (LIC)

#### 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) Liverpool International College (LIC) is making commendable 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 Liverpool International College (LIC) was established by Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd (Kaplan) (branded as Kaplan International Partnerships) in 2007 in partnership with the University of Liverpool (the University). In 2017-18, LIC enrolled 800 students (data as of 28 February 2018). LIC has appointed two Transition Posts to work with the University to enhance further the transition from the College. Kaplan has recently extended its partnership with the University for a further 15 years, and is currently developing a new building adjacent to the University campus, with a planned opening in 2019. Following discussion with the University, LIC developed a progression route into Architecture via the Foundation Certificate in Business, Law and Social Sciences, approved by Kaplan for enrolment to the university in September 2018. LIC has worked with the University since 2007, and the recent signing of the new partnership agreement confirms the strong relationship.

#### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 This monitoring visit follows the 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges). This review made no recommendations but noted six areas of good practice: the close working relationship with its university partner, especially regarding programme development monitoring and review; the personalised approach to staff induction and development; the high quality academic and pastoral support for students; the proactive approach to identifying student needs; the systematic approach to students' personalised learning; and the proactive and inclusive approach to the engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement. The review team found that LIC has continued to make progress and enhance its operations in each of these areas.

4 LIC has developed, maintained, reviewed and enhanced a detailed College action plan which incorporates the points from the 2016 review and includes summary progress information on other actions initiated either by LIC or by Kaplan centrally. The action plan is reviewed at the monthly meetings of LIC's senior management team (SMT) and submitted on a quarterly basis.

The Action Plan is reviewed and fed into the LIC Executive Management Board (EMB) for consideration and submitted to the Kaplan Director of Colleges. LIC's action plan is based around seven key themes which reflect its ongoing and new priorities: the personalising of programmes to meet a student's needs; the student voice; externality; technology enhanced learning; support for staff; feedback on students' work; and learning analytics. Each of these is divided into a range of specific actions, indicating whether the action is 'complete', 'ongoing' or 'yet to start', with a targeted completion date and an evaluation of the expected impact of the outcome. Included in the Action Plan is the review of all LIC programmes in partnership with the University, as part of the overarching Kaplan product review, under the direction of the College Academic Director and CLIQ.

5 In relation to the actions identified by LIC, the roles of University Link Tutors have been clarified and strengthened through agreement with the Joint Academic Board (JAB), with Link Tutors and LIC staff meeting collectively throughout the year and individually more frequently on relevant programme matters. Link Tutors provide guest lectures for LIC students, and arrange for them to visit University departments and to attend lectures there. The partners arrange bespoke events on wide-ranging themes. For example, the University's Business School organised a multicultural workshop and its Music Department offered opportunities for LIC students to use the facilities with technician support. LIC continues to support staff through mutually supportive peer observation sessions, annual review meetings, and in aiming to meet professional development preferences and opportunities. LIC students commented favourably on the high quality of the support they received from Tutors and Student Services staff. All students have named Personal Tutors with meetings calendared fortnightly with the tutors who receive information on student attendance. LIC staff take the monitoring of attendance seriously and adopt an escalating strategy of warnings and meetings with the intention of identifying and resolving problems at an early stage, although some students interpreted the arrangements as more punitive than developmental. Students appreciated the support they received from the Student Support Hub, citing positive assistance with learning, study and health issues. LIC staff attend the University's annual learning and teaching conference and are able to join, without cost, relevant Postgraduate Certificate courses at the University, three members of staff are currently enrolled on this course. In addition two staff were recently supported in their achievement of HEA fellowships.

6 Kaplan operates a central admissions procedure to which LIC adheres. A number of students enquire directly to the University or are referred to LIC by the University. The content and design of promotional and marketing information, as well as pre-departure and pre-arrival materials, whether online or in hard copy form, is the responsibility of Kaplan HQ. LIC provides local contextual information on its programmes and the broader environment and, with the University, supplies details for the LIC-specific Prospectus. LIC students whom the review team met commented on the high quality, appropriateness and reliability of Kaplan's promotional materials, both online and in print, particularly those that related directly and exclusively to LIC. Students welcomed the detailed and comprehensive induction week at LIC, particularly the opportunity to learn more about the University programmes from Link Tutors and meeting LIC alumni.

7 Annual programme monitoring is undertaken by LIC, which follows prescribed Kaplan procedures and use Kaplan templates for the annual programme reports (APRs) and for the Annual College Report. APRs are usually completed by the Programme Leader, in conjunction with the Programme Committee. Final approval of the APRs is given by the LIC SMT. It is then received by the JAB, external examiners and to the Kaplan Centre for Learning, Innovation and Quality (CLIQ). SMT also compiles the Annual College Report, which is submitted to the Kaplan

Director of Colleges. As well as involvement in Programme Committees, students contribute to annual quality monitoring by submitting individual module and overall student experience questionnaires. Students also participate in staff-student consultative committees and receive feedback from these. Similarly, staff have the opportunity to feedback to Heads of Programmes on their own modules. The review team found that LIC adheres to the Annual Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting procedures as prescribed by Kaplan.

8 Overall, 92 per cent of students starting at LIC completed their programmes in 2016-17, with 81 per cent of those students receiving an unconditional offer from the University. As a precursor to discussions between University subject Link Tutors and LIC staff, the University prepared a detailed time series analysis of the performance of progressing students from LIC, and also compared degree classifications compared with the performance of non-LIC International students at the University.

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

9 LIC's use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) is highly effective. LIC follows the Kaplan Quality Assurance Framework and the linked Academic Standards and Quality Manual (ASQM) which are mapped and reviewed annually by CLIQ against the Quality Code, and are under the authority of the Kaplan Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC). LIC also works closely with the University, whose own programmes reflect the Quality Code. New programmes, and those currently under revision through Product Review, are considered in detail by Link Tutors and at the JAB before submission to the Kaplan SMT. The main elements of LIC's action plan are linked to related Chapters of the Quality Code. In particular, LIC has recently referenced relevant Chapters of the Quality Code against its assessment practices, and mentors discuss relevant Chapters of the Quality Code with newly appointed staff. LIC uses the Quality Code in particular to inform its arrangements for student support and student representation. It makes additional use of the Chapter B7 of the Quality Code in adopting the criteria for nominating external examiners to the University for formal approval by Kaplan.

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

10 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.

11 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Sarah James, QAA Officer, and Professor Peter Bush, QAA Reviewer, on 11 May 2018.

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