

# Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Kaplan International Colleges, May 2013

## Annex 7: Sheffield International College

### Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Sheffield International College (SIC) has made commendable progress following the July 2012 [Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight](#).

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 SIC has seen a growth in student numbers, and has also increased the number of its permanent teaching staff, with plans for the introduction of additional senior academic roles. No new programmes have been approved at this College since the 2012 report. A Periodic Review of SIC's provision was carried out by the University of Sheffield (the University) in 2012.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 In relation to the good practice identified at SIC by the last review, there is evidence of further progress, consolidation and dissemination. The College continues to make effective use of its external examiners, especially in the scrutiny of assignments and examination questions prior to them being issued to students. The way in which SIC uses its external examiners has been disseminated to other Kaplan International College (KIC) colleges via a central Best Practice Day held in January 2013. To further enhance the scrutiny of entry standards on university programmes and the linked curriculum development at the College, there are plans to establish a Joint Operations Group between the University and SIC.

4 Students remain extremely positive about the quality of pastoral and academic support provided by the College and about their access to learning facilities, including those provided by the University. Students found pre-joining information, whether from agents or from the website, to be accurate. Experience on the course had equalled or exceeded their expectations. At the time of the monitoring visit, SIC was in the process of reviewing its service level agreements with the University to ensure these remain current and fit for purpose. The College's Learning Outside the Curriculum (LOTC) programme remains prominent and is much appreciated by students, and has been further enhanced with the appointment of a dedicated coordinator. Students value the opportunity to receive a range of progression offers to different programmes at the University, as well as the benefits of the clearing process operated by SIC in conjunction with the University. These progression opportunities are in addition to those provided by the KIC University Placement Service, which helps students apply to other universities if they are unable to progress to their preferred progression route.

5 The College has made progress on the two desirable recommendations addressed in its action plan. Clarity regarding ultimate responsibility for academic standards has been communicated to staff. It will be helpful to distinguish even more precisely between

responsibility for the standards of awards, and responsibility relating to the standards of entry onto University programmes.

6 SIC has revised its policy and procedures so as to allow students to obtain individual feedback on their examination performance. Since January 2013, a statement has been published on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and added to student handbooks to inform students that they have the right to see their marked examination script for academic subjects. The College has also implemented a process to facilitate this feedback mechanism. Not all students were aware of this revised policy, and it was acknowledged that further work is needed to communicate this effectively. The College will keep the processes under review so as to provide students the best opportunity to improve their performance in subsequent assessments.

7 There is good evidence of ongoing awareness and engagement of SIC staff with the KIC's Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ). During the monitoring visit, evidence was seen regarding the implementation of the KIC Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy at college level. In particular, SIC has developed the College VLE further and so extended its provision of blended learning to enhance the student learning experience.

#### **Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

8 SIC adheres to the KIC Academic Standards and Quality Manual, which has been mapped against sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) by CLIQ. While the Expectations of the Quality Code are embedded and effectively integrated into SIC processes, senior management at SIC acknowledged that work is ongoing to raise awareness across all teaching and support staff.

9 KIC awards are all mapped against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements are used appropriately to inform the development of pathways and modules. Since the 2012 review, SIC has undergone Periodic Review by the University, where a particular and commendable focus was in the redesign and mapping of its overall assessment strategy against *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code.

#### **Section 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 Dr P Findlay (QAA Officer) and Professor G Romp (Reviewer) on 9 May 2013.